Express the Music has sparked students’ creativity and ignited their imaginations since the program was established by the St. Louis Symphony Volunteer Association (SVA) in 1998. This year, in its 23rd season, Express the Music provided students in grades 6-12 the opportunity to discover the first movement of Rimsky-Korsakov’s Scheherazade and respond with poetry and prose influenced by the music. 2,004 students from 42 Missouri and Illinois schools participated, resulting in the submission of 476 works of poetry and prose.

Poetry and prose entries were reviewed separately using a multi-judge blind process: no school or student identifiers appeared on the documents seen by the judges. Volunteers from the SVA served as preliminary judges, reviewing entries according to standard rubrics in prose and poetry. 21 finalists from the Junior Division (grades 6-8) and 26 finalists from the Senior Division (grades 9-12) were advanced to the next round. Two panels of experts, one in poetry and another in prose, judged the finalists’ compositions on creativity and excellence in writing in response to this year’s musical selection. Their scores determined the First, Second, and Third Place winners in each division. Finalists were celebrated at the Express the Music Awards at Powell Hall on Sunday, March 15, 2020, during a St. Louis Symphony Youth Orchestra performance. The Junior and Senior Division winners’ compositions are also published online at slso.org/express.

In 2002, Express the Music was awarded the Sally B. Parker Gold Ribbon Award for Education from the Volunteer Council of the League of American Orchestras. This cross-curricular writing competition has made the rich, diverse wonders of orchestral music accessible to tens of thousands of students. The St. Louis Symphony Orchestra provides educational programming, like Express the Music, for teachers and students as part of a long-standing commitment to supporting music in our schools and the educators doing this important work. Together we can inspire students to get involved and stay involved in music.

Congratulations to all the finalists whose compositions are included in this book. May you always keep music in your life!
Symphony Volunteer Association

Phyllis Traub  
President  
Symphony Volunteer Association

Kent McNeil  
Vice President, Education  
Symphony Volunteer Association

Glenna Schindler  
Chair, Express the Music

Liz Halpin  
Vice Chair, Express the Music

Laura Dwyer  
Associate Director, SLSO Volunteer Programs

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Diane Ashburner  Margaret Lahrmann  Jim Schindler  
Becky Brown  Karen Levine  Kathryn Snodgrass  
Cathleen Callahan  Meghan Mathison  Linda Solla
Cathy Converse  Virginia McDonald  Jamie Spencer
   Bev Cox  Jane McNeil  Barbara Sprick
Sara Fabick  Kent McNeil  Joseph Thorn
Terry Gates  Virginia Mulanax  Phyllis Traub
Liz Halpin  Mary Parks  Karen Trinkle
Cheryl Havlin  Janet Preston  Sharon Voss
Beth Herreid  LaVerne Riebold  Cecelia Webber
Paula Hertel  Jean Saunders  Marcia Whitson
Norman Hertel  Glenna Schindler  Bill Whitson

Founded in 1923, the Symphony Volunteer Association supports the SLSO through philanthropic projects and educational programs.

Get involved! Visit slso.org/volunteer
Acknowledgments

Our Sponsor  We wish to express sincere gratitude to the Employees Community Fund of Boeing St. Louis (ECF) for continued sponsorship of Express the Music. The ECF of The Boeing Company is a unique employee-giving program that allows employees to support the needs of their local communities.

Our Inspiration  Founded in 1880, the SLSO is the second oldest professional orchestra in the country. Week after week, year after year, the symphony’s dedicated musicians embody excellence in their delivery of beautiful music, award-winning recordings, and educational programs throughout the St. Louis community. Our sincere gratitude goes out to the musicians of the SLSO; your music inspires us.

Our Teachers  A great teacher goes beyond the classroom to integrate area resources that give his or her students opportunities to discover and grow. For 23 years, the teachers of Express the Music have done just that and more. They inspire their students, through great orchestral music, to tap into their imaginations and discover where the music and their creativity will take them. We appreciate our inspiring teachers.

Teachers who have participated in Express the Music for at least five years are noted in this year’s list of Participating Schools and Teachers. Over the years, these teachers have introduced thousands of students to orchestral music as a source of inspiration for creating more musical lives.

Our Preliminary Judges  There are many well-read, experienced members of the Symphony Volunteer Association who give unselfishly of their time for Express the Music. A special note of gratitude goes to the volunteers who read and scored all the entries to select this year’s finalists.

Becky Brown  Yvonne Greenwood  Jean Light  Wendy Ruiz-Ralston  Cecilia Webber
Cathleen Callahan  Rose Ingraham  Sherrie Lillie  Jean Saunders  Bill Whitson
Bev Cox  Liz Halpin  Jane McNeil  Linda Solla  Marcia Whitson
Liz Deighton  Paula Hertel  Ginger Mulanax  Jamie Spencer  Debra Woodworth
Jim Greenwood  Norman Hertel  Mary Parks  Maggie Stanley  Gail Youngman

Our Final Judges  Contributing both their time and their expertise, two panels of accomplished writers judged the finalists’ entries in the prose and poetry divisions. The compositions were assessed on creativity and writing excellence in response to the musical selection, with these scores determining the winners. These judges provided invaluable service to Express the Music 2020. Thank you for sharing your keen insights, experience, and expertise.

Prose composition judges:

Cathy Beck  is a former middle school English Language Arts teacher and college-level instructor of adolescent literature, a teacher consultant for the Gateway Writing Project, and a guest lecturer in Dublin, Ireland in the areas of writing and teacher leadership.

David Rush  is a nationally produced award-winning playwright recently retired as chair of the Playwriting Program at Southern Illinois University.
Diane Scollay served as the director of the Gateway Writing Project (GWP) at the University of Missouri-St. Louis from 1998-2010. GWP, a National Writing Project (NWP) site, offers courses and professional development in the teaching of writing to elementary, secondary, and college teachers. She continued as the GWP associate director until 2014. During her career as GWP director/associate director, she developed, presented, coordinated, promoted and evaluated GWP programing. During her 29-year career in the Ferguson-Florissant School District, she was a high school English teacher, elementary reading specialist, and district professional development specialist. She was also director of the Ferguson-Florissant Writers Project, a nationally disseminated, federally funded program. Diane remains involved in activities that support education.

Poetry composition judges:

Carolyn Lesser, artist, poet, designer, inspirational speaker, and educator, is the author of award-winning nonfiction natural science picture books for children, inspired by her passion for planet Earth. Written in poetic form, using rich, lyrical, inventive language, Carolyn pulls her readers into biomes of the world to celebrate the wonder of nature. Some of her titles are: *The Goodnight Circle*, *What a Wonderful Day to Be a Cow*, *Storm on the Desert*, *Dig Hole Soft Mole*, and *Spots*. *Great Polar Bear*, appearing in bookstores in April 2018, marked her debut as an illustrator. She is currently working on a book of creative nonfiction for adults.

Kim Lozano teaches creative writing for the St. Louis Writers Workshop and St. Louis Oasis. Her writing has been published or is forthcoming in many publications including *Poetry Daily*, *The Iowa Review*, *North American Review*, *Third Coast*, and *American Life in Poetry*, published by former U.S. Poet Laureate Ted Kooser.

Dr. Mary Pat Henehan is a nurse, educator, marriage and family therapist, and author. She has written two books: *Integrating Spirit and Psyche: Using Woman’s Narratives in Psychotherapy*, and *Nature Speaks*, a book of poetry. She has enjoyed writing poetry since college. She also facilitates a weekly writing group to encourage and enable writers to get feedback on their work. She leads a grief support group at the Catholic Student Center on Washington University’s Campus. She uses poetry as interventions with clients in her practice, Counseling and Educational Associates, Inc. She has taught therapy classes at Washington University, Saint Louis University, Aquinas Institute, and Webster University. She also held positions as Director of Public Health Nursing for the City of St. Louis, Vice President of De Paul Health Center, and Assistant Professor of Public Health at SLU.
Participating Schools and Teachers

Junior Division

Academy of the Sacred Heart School St. Charles, MO Catherine Whiter
Ascension School Chesterfield, MO Stephanie Gummersheimer*
Bernard Middle School St. Louis, MO Erin Gaubatz
Christ Community Lutheran School St. Louis, MO Bethany Albers
Classical Academy de Lafayette O’Fallon, MO Jacquelynne McClelland
Fortitude School Alton, IL Christy Schaper
Giant City School Carbondale, IL Debra Henson
Grandview R-II Middle School Hillsboro, MO Sarah Falcher
Grant Middle School Fairview Heights, IL Christi Thompson
Highland Middle School Highland, IL Erin Smith
Holy Trinity School Fairview Heights, IL Natalie Schultz
Lasalle Springs Middle School Wildwood, MO Julie Adams
Lasalle Springs Middle School Wildwood, MO Brenda Georg
Lincoln Middle School Edwardsville, IL Lori Kitrel
Love Homeschool St. Louis, MO Cynthia Hoxsey
Most Sacred Heart School Eureka, MO Calana Love
Parkway Central Middle School Eureka, MO Jeanie Harper
Sacred Heart School Chesterfield, MO Lindsey Katz
Saul Mirowitz Jewish Community Creve Coeur, MO Alysha Black
Middle School St. Louis, MO Karie Preston*
St. Ambrose Catholic School Godfrey, IL Rachel Warfel*
St. John’s Lutheran School Mattoon, IL Rachel Wilschetz-Hartman
St. Mary School Brussels, IL Mary Donald*
St. Peter School Kirkwood, MO Sallie duMaine
St. Simon the Apostle Catholic School St. Louis, MO Hannah Rettig
Ste. Genevieve du Bois School St. Louis, MO Michelle Howard**
Truman Middle School St. Louis, MO Tammy Walker
Twin Oaks Christian School Ballwin, MO Danielle Thurm
Villa Duchesne and Oak Hill School St. Louis, MO Debra Baker
Wydown Middle School Clayton, MO Erin Baker
Wydown Middle School Clayton, MO Jani Murray
Zion Lutheran School St. Charles, MO

*Teacher who has participated in Express the Music five years or more.
**Teacher who has participated in Express the Music ten years or more.
# Senior Division

<table>
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<th>School Name</th>
<th>City</th>
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<th>Teacher Name</th>
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<td>Elizabeth Yee*</td>
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*Teacher who has participated in Express the Music five years or more.
**Teacher who has participated in Express the Music ten years or more.
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<td>Hannah Moon</td>
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<td>Julia DeWeese</td>
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<tr>
<td>Evan Batten</td>
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<td>Mili Garcia</td>
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### Poetry Winners

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<td>Claire Fodge</td>
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<td>Vivian Wang</td>
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### Poetry Finalists

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<td>Katelyn Berger</td>
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<td>Grace Wallace</td>
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## Senior Division

### Prose Winners

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<td>Marian Fonseca, Villa Duchesne and Oak Hill School</td>
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### Prose Finalists

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<th>Greta Donnelly, Villa Duchesne and Oak Hill School</th>
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### Poetry Winners

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<td>Zoe DeYoung, Parkway West High School</td>
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### Poetry Finalists

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<th>Garner Hostnik, Villa Duchesne and Oak Hill School</th>
<th>Samson Kieffer, Parkway South High School</th>
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<th>Calan Richardson, Eureka High School</th>
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The essays, poems and stories in this book have been printed without edits as they were submitted to the writing competition Express the Music 2020.
Migrant

Lightning slashed through the sky, illuminating a canopy of trees. From the depths of the branches, a bird snapped awake. Her pitch-black feathers rustled as she leaped from her home. She fled from the forest, her sweeping tail enveloped in the night. The storm soon became a receding echo.

Warmth hit her eyes, waking her. Overhead, the bird saw the sun shimmer, bathing a field of grass in gold. Iridescent dewdrops lined the thin plants. Everything seemed so calm, yet eeriness snaked through the air.

The bird shuddered as her memories came back to her. During the night she had collapsed, lost in the torrential rain. She started to drift away from the field.

She had to get home.

The bird glided through the land, flying until a breathtaking meadow sprawled before her. Flowers bloomed as she zoomed past, bursting with life. Her golden talons skimmed across a pristine brook, the droplets leaping into the air.

From the meadow, a mountain rose, its sharp peaks penetrating the sky. The bird shot up. Freedom coursed through her wings as she dove and spiraled through the peaks.

Soon, the sky became a canvas of reds and golds. The bird glided towards a nearby shrub as the stars began to twinkle faintly. Relaxed, she looked at the beauty around her...
She flinched, alarmed. Behind, the wisps of a storm were twirling towards her.

Once again, she fled, gliding through the magnificent mountain. Lightning struck the sky as the clouds danced around her. She flew into the night until the clouds suddenly dispersed. The bird's wings drooped with unbearable fatigue. As soon as she tried to calm herself, more clouds emerged. They started to grow, while thunder boomed in the distance. The bird desperately glanced at the storm, and through the woven clouds, light pierced the sky. Concentrating, she flapped her wings and burst through the darkness.

Her eyes widened, she was soaring over a forest of clouds, the hidden sun casting its rays over the storm. Her heart leaping, she reached the edge of the clouds and plummeted towards the earth.

She landed with a thump. Her heart sank as she saw her forest, her home, in ruins. Leaves scattered the floor, while burnt branches slumped on the charred dirt. Swerving around, she stared at the receding storm.

Finding hope in herself, she floated into the night sky.
Dancing in the Sky

A thundering waterfall crashes into the unsuspecting pool lying still beneath the mighty river. From there, the water surges forward before dwindling into a gentle rhythm, slowly winding through the trees. A wren swoops down and follows the stream, twisting and turning with intricate grace. He breaks away and climbs into the sky to dance among the stars, tiny glints of light, hope among a broken world. Clouds fill the sky, and raindrops begin to fall one by one, slowly cascading down to Earth with a purpose.

The wren flies quicker, evading the imminent threat of a storm. A plain of grass stretches out in front of him, reaching out as far as the eye can see. A sense of calm washes over the surface of the Earth as the grass ripples in the wind whipping eagerly through the air and stormy clouds drift leisurely across the darkening sky. As sinister as this all may seem, the wren feels serenity coming over him.

Thunder resonates in the distance, and the wren takes to the sky once again. A herd of deer is loping across the plain, and the wren flies alongside them. Joy consumes him, and leaves no space for any other feeling. The sun peaks over the horizon, emitting a harsh ray of light. The wren flies with passion. His very life seems to depend on the way he dances. He twirls and spins, being one with the wind that flows across the sky with ease. The sun shines into this realm, and the sounds of morning are singing through the air. Cheerful birds twittering, a fox yapping, and wind rustling the tree branches. Has all of this always been this way, the wren ponders, or have I just been too blind to truly see all of this until now? He decides that if the answer really mattered, that he would question the wonders of nature, but right now, he should simply enjoy the spirited life humming around him. He surveys the terrain around him one last time, with its bright blue sky, raindrops dripping from trees from the storm that had passed over, sunlight streaming down from the sky. It is only then that he glides down to settle into his nest. Home.
The Raven, the Robin, and the Hawk

There it stood, black as midnight, face as fierce as fire. Unmoving, and unblinking. It stood there, watching. Watching with eyes that never blink. It watched closely, silently, fiercely. Watching and waiting on its prey.

Its prey sat. Unaware and oblivious. Picking at thin twigs again and again. Unaware and oblivious at how repetitive its actions were. Picking up a twig to move to the side. Picking it up again to move it back to its original spot, and yet it did not seem to mind the repetitiveness that dragged on throughout the day, but of course, it had to be kept busy, for it had to sit and wait. Sitting on the eggs that would bear its children, who would one day sit and protect their own eggs. And the cycle continues, again, and again. Repeating until the end of time.

It still stood there, blacker than charcoal, and fiercer than a dragon. Still and silent. Its gaze fixated on its prey. And on what its prey was sitting on top of. Its pride and joy. Eggs. Bluer than the sky. Speckled like stars in the night. Food.

The prey gave one more glance at its surroundings, and deciding it was safe, took off. Dusty brown feathers unfurled, catching the wind, and raising the small body higher and higher into the air.

This was the moment. The predator swooped down, opening large, dark wings. The wind carried the raven through the air and down through the trees. Eyes locked on its target, determination burning like a fire in its heart.

Out of the pink evening sky, a large hawkish flash of brown and red shot down at the smaller, yet still large black bird. The two bodies tumbled to the ground, thrashing about wildly. Clawing. Scratching. Blood spilt and flew through the air, staining the leaves that decorated the treetops.
The two collectively fell roughly to the ground, halting to a stop at the roots of a large oak. One of the combatants was left breathing. The other was not.

Meanwhile, the song of the robin could be heard somewhere, off in the distance, past the hills. It sang its sweet tune, so that others may hear it. And as it sang, the winner of that night’s fracas began to feast on its meal.
The mountain ahead, the cold wind, the snow, and the natural world are all that surrounds him. A young boy of only eighteen treks through the bitter cold, the icy wind stinging his numb face and tugging at his clothing. He takes one shaky step after another, licking his cracked lips. A forceful gust bends back the evergreen trees around the boy, making him falter as if defeated. Then, all was quiet. Hands grab at the snow and the boy, after a few moments, finally stands and looks up to the sky, hopeful yet incomplete as if he is searching for something. The dull gray clouds hang over the white expanse on which the boy travels. Determined and unsatisfied, the boy walks. Though all seemed suspended and silent, he knew nature to be fickle as the waves in the sea or as a leaf caught in the wind. The boy had taken only a few more steps before the wind picked up once more. It came softly at first, as if it was only a summer's breeze. But grew in intensity with every effortful step. He fights. For every yard. For every inch. Because each time he puts another footprint in the snow, the closer he comes to finding something that he has lost, a curious indecipherable thing he cannot grasp though he knows he wants it. Then, through the snow drifts, the boy sees the base of the immense mountain.

He climbs the wet, snow-covered granite. Further and further he goes. The boy climbs with all his strength and what little hope he has left within him. But when looking down, it seemed as if he had gotten only three feet from the bottom. He becomes dejected and, as if feeding off his sadness, the wind whips harder against his back. Louder and louder the howl of the wind becomes. The boy climbs still, and with more haste. Though the climb begins to take a toll on him, he climbs faster. And faster. Until all is silent. For he had reached the top. Angry, the wind. pushes down on the boy like a hand pushing down on a deflating balloon. The boy crumples. Then, his eyes open. And he looks up at the now blue sky. And he finds himself within the most unexpected of places.
Telegram From the 47 Regiment

I was cooking lunch when I heard a knock on the door. “Is he back? Is he really back?” I straightened out my brown hair and purple sundress, took a deep breath and opened the door, “Mrs Jones…” said the mailman “Yes, that’s me,” I replied breathless as my heart raced and pounded in my chest. He tooled off his hat in solitude “I have a telegram from the 47 Regiment.” “Why that’s Charles’s! What has happened to him?” He tenderly held my shaking hand. “I’m sorry”, he said and with that he walked away. I urgently opened the yellow envelope and read:

“Mrs. Jones,

We regret to inform you that your husband, Charles B. Jones, has been captured along with the rest of his squadron. We wish you the best.”

So many questions flooded my mind. I didn’t know what to do, what to feel. I cried. All I did was cry. I closed the red door leading to our house, just as our future together was now shut. I walked to our bedroom and got my faded pink diary that has been collecting dust. I opened it and remembered.

3 Months Earlier

“Today I married my best friend and soulmate. I could never be happier than I was today.”

2 Months Earlier

“Today Charles and I moved into our forever home where we hope to start a family.”

1 Month Earlier

“Today Charles got drafted, nothing will express how much I’ll worry or how much I’ll miss him. We’ll have to make the most of the two days we have left together Possibly forever…”
30 days ago

“Today Charles left me. With one kiss on the cheek and one on my belly, he kissed me and our baby goodbye.”

Today

“I write the words I can’t bear to say. I just found out that Charles is now held captive. Now our baby may never get a chance to know his father.”

I closed the journal and let out a shaky breath. What am I going to do?

7 Months later

Labor pains are nothing compared to the pain of not waking up next to my husband every day.

The hospital door opened and heavy footsteps walked toward the bed. A familiar voice spoke;

“Betty?”
The Cherry Blossom Tree

The quiet whispers of the wind awoke the young girl on a cold, crisp, fall morning. She could hear the laughter of the fellow children. As she spent her day as she normally would, she could hear the marching of soldiers. She thought nothing of it and went on. After doing all her work for the day she went to her special place.

She walked to the small pasture outside of the village and on a small hill. At the cherry blossom tree you could spend hours just feeling peaceful. The tree gave an immense amount of peace for reasons that are unknown. Even with the girl’s father gone to the war and her and mother struggling without him, the girl still felt peace. She sat for hours until it was time for bed. Everybody in the small village said goodnight and she went to sleep, thinking of her peaceful tree.

The girl awoke to the screams of her mother and many others. She ran outside to see her village ablaze. The soldiers of the opposite territory had lit the village on fire. The sound of the fire hopping and crackling from roof top to roof top echoed in her head. Despite all the screaming and yelling she could still feel the peace of the tree.

With that thought, she ran to her tree. The flames were within inches of her beloved tree. She sank to her knees in agony. Her tree was all that her father had left her. As the blossoms fell she saw the memories of her father - when father and mother had planted the tree, when life was so simple. Now her simple life had been set ablaze. As the sun slowly set and the noises faded, she realized her beautiful tree had burned to ashes.
Home

The girl throws the broom down - frustrated. She cannot possibly sweep all the leaves from the driveway. The oak tree in the front yard has millions of leaves that just keep falling. On top of that, her family’s house sits behind a forest. This is not where she wants to be. The endless clanging of pots in the kitchen scare away the animals. To calm herself, she runs into the forest.

The forest is her happy place. All of the animals and critters that hide underneath the bushes are like her - alone. She knows, they too want a friend. Sometimes, the girl is their friend. She coaxes them out of their hiding places to feed them underneath a big spruce tree. Today, the animals come to her as she sits playing her flute. The sounds make her sleepy.

As the animals cuddle with her, she notices a humongous, glowing beech tree. She walks towards it, then runs. As it grows closer, animals jump from the bushes to run with her. Their coats are all white. Rabbits, deer, and foxes join her. Finally, she reaches the base of the tree.

Purple and yellow lights dance around the tree’s great branches. As if someone is controlling her, she reaches out her hand to trace an outline on the tree with her finger. A door appears. She steps through the door and sees a staircase. Climbing, she disappears, and is transported to a magical land.

All the colors of the rainbow float around her. Tall trees surround a big purple flower. She touches it and shrinks down to the size of a fairy. Spotting a tall mushroom, she discovers a door and pushes it open. The house is empty except for chairs, a table, and a bed.

Suddenly, she sees a giant ant and screams! She realizes the ant is just a part of nature and that she is a tiny fairy. The ant scurries away, but not before picking up a leaf. She sees fellow fairies giggle and exchange acorns. They look friendly.
This is a place that welcomes her. She can make new friends and do as she please here. This is home.

However, real home still awaits her. All the animals have scurried away and she remains sitting underneath the spruce tree. In the distance, she hears a clattering of pots and pans. She needs to be... somewhere.
"I have to get out of this!" I kept whispering to myself as a fierce wind blew against me. Suddenly, I heard a boom. There was a big fire starting as other trees crashed to the ground. I turned to see a dry tree branch. I perched and shook the water off my wings. I waited in silence for a bit, and then saw the sun starting to peek through the clouds.

In the distance, I saw something that looked like a cottage and a well. I flew off the branch. As I got closer, I could smell a pie. I perched on the well and looked into the window, where a beautiful girl danced with some other animals. She danced to a door and opened it, dancing outside with all the animals following her. When she got over to the well, she stopped.

"Hello there!" Her voice was sweet.

"Hello," I sang.

"You have such a sweet chirp! Would you like to join us?" she asked.

She picked some berries and went inside, all of us following her. We danced in the small house and ate pie until dusk; then we left. I went to a tree next to the cottage and slept. When I woke up in the morning the house was lifeless but the door was open. One of the foxes ran out the door and called for us.

"The witch has returned!" she yelled.

"What witch?" I asked. Everyone gasped.

"You really don’t know?" she asked. I shook my head; she continued. "Some time ago, the evil witch of Achonoa took the princess, and we had to fight to get her back. Now the witch has come again!"

"We have to save her!" I yelled. I lead the journey.

We marched across the forest until we came to a big tower. We stopped at the entrance, but then heard a thud behind us. We turned to see the evil witch.

"You will never get her!" she cackled. We charged, scratching and roaring. She tried a couple spells, but she finally retreated, "I will come back!" she yelled as she ran away. We climbed the staircase up to the princess.

"Thank you," she cried.

We rushed down the staircase, and walked back through the forest to the house. We had a celebration with pie and fruit. We then went on with our lives, protecting the princess and living in peace.
Her delicate feet, wet with the dew from the grass, dampened the dirt below her as the two met. The trees from the mysterious forest swayed around her in rhythm with her steps as she took in the smells of the flowers and the leaves. Nothing was loud. Everything was calm, the opposite of anything ever known to Avel.

Looking behind her, Avel saw her home, a barren house deprived of happiness. She knew that feeling. Anger lingered around the edges and in the crevices as a result of her father’s out of control temper. She did not belong in that house, but her heart was conflicted.

These realizations repelled Avel, enough to send her fleeing into the compelling unexplored forests.

Avel pranced in her step as she watched a crisp orange leaf float down to her. The leaves seemed to be calling to her, and she answered - with her feet. The leaf then glimmered in the open sun, floating with elegance but with power, calling to the thicket.

Eerie tensions gathered and Avel felt exhilarated. She was lifted by controlling forces, understanding and empathetic forces. Her pace accelerated, going almost as fast as one of the leaves themselves which tore through every path.

Avel flew in the pure air, with sudden memories of her old home seeping into her mind. Her emotions flooded her fingertips and weightless toes. It was as if all of the leaves knew how she felt, and they gathered the feelings of all living souls and dispersed them. Avel no longer felt her feet attached to the ground. She took the form of her emotions and was airy. It was the wind who was controlling her now. She was one of them. What were they? Just leaves?

Unknown creatures glanced knowingly at the array of leaves and colors before them. Another soul had been added to the collection. Avel’s name called into the woodlands.
May 3, 1943

It is 1943, three months ago Father went to fight in the war and I have missed him awfully. Life without him is just so tedious. He is scheduled to return in two weeks.

May 10, 1943

He will return in one weeks. This past week has felt like it has been years. I cannot bear the boredom. Father always entertained me. He was always wearing a smile. When I woke up, he attempted making breakfast; however, it as always burnt. I would laugh and ask him, “Do I have to show you how to make breakfast again?” with a giggle.

May 15, 1943

I have heard the news. There were many gruesome injuries and deaths in Father’s troop. There is not a list of names of the soldiers that have perished. I am so worried. What if he is one of the people that passed away? What if he was injured so badly that he does not remember me? Even worse, if he does not come back, I will be left parentless. I must go, the paper just arrived.

May 16, 1943

There is no news. It seems that nobody else cares about what happened. I know that there are other people out there who do care. Others whose loved ones went into battle, but where are they? Why does it feel like I am the only person who cares?

What if he did not survive? What would I do if he did not come back. I must not think about these things. I must think positively.

I just read the paper. There still is no list of names. This is very worrisome. They say that you will just have to find out if your loved one survived when they come home. I cannot believe this.
May 17, 1943

I am so nervous yet so excited. Today will either be very exciting, or very horrible.

One more hour until I find out.

I hear the door open.

I hear somebody say in a dark, sorrowful voice, “I am so very sorry.” My heart breaks.

No more breakfast giggles, no more warm hugs and laughter. He is gone forever. “I am so sorry that you will have to eat my horrible breakfast for the rest of your life.” Father has returned! He wraps me up in a big warm hug. “Please don’t ever leave me again.”
December 14, 1955. 10:30AM

It all happened too fast. I was playing Monopoly with my grandpa, and suddenly the radio flashes on. I hear the abrupt voice reporting, "Everyone, go to a safe place NOW! It's coming! An E---". The radio shuts off. Suddenly, I feel as if someone is shaking my house. I remember being dragged under a table as I hear the horrific screams of my mother. My three-year-old brother is upstairs, by himself. I feel as if the whole world could hear the insisting sounds of our valuables crashing to our wooden floor. CRASH! CLATTER! BURST! My brother is shrieking and sobbing! BANG! I always liked that T.V.

10:35AM

Abruptly, in the corner of my eye, I see my father begin to stand up, rushing to save my brother. I listen to my mother's prayers as she repeats, "please. please God. please." Subsequently, I feel my grandpa's arms wrapping around me, almost making me feel safe. But I'm not. I want to cry, but I'm paralyzed with fear. My father has reached the first step. I can almost feel his shaking from here. Step by step. Cry by cry.

10:41AM

Eventually, my father reaches the top step, and I perceive the most horrific scream you could ever hear. It was from my brother. Then silence. It stopped. It felt as if the world had paused. Unexpectedly, I hear the footsteps as my father comes down with my brother. We jump up quickly, and share the biggest, longest hug in the world. But something doesn't seem right about Johnny.
11:47AM

I mention this to my parents, and we decide we should head to the hospital. The drive feels very long, as my brother just stares into space.

12:13PM

Finally, we arrive and sit anxiously in the examining room. It feels like hours have gone by. Dr. Martin comes back and says he has tragic news. Johnny was hit on the head. My heart drops. I feel the tears slowly flow out of my eyes, and they don’t stop for a long time as my brother just stands there like a statue.

January 6, 1956. 3:30PM

A little over two weeks later, Johnny comes back from the hospital. When Johnny comes home, I run over and squeeze him so tightly! Suddenly, the radio flashes on. “EMERGENCY! Go to a safe place NOW!
Claire Varble

The Girl With No Family

In a field far away from any city or neighborhood, was a mansion. It seemed like a haunted house where people would disappear without a trace. It was usually very quiet. The mansion belonged to a girl. The girl had no family. They had all mysteriously disappeared the night they left the mansion on vacation, so the girl was usually lonely. This girl went by the name of Lavender.

One night, when the moon could barely be seen behind the clouds, Lavender’s sobbing could be heard throughout the mansion. She mourned her family that hadn’t come back for years. She stared at her family photo all night until she couldn’t help but cry. At first, she loved having the mansion to herself, but now that they hadn’t come back all she felt was loneliness.

That night, while Lavender hid under her blankets and sobbed, a familiar voice was heard in the hallway next to her bedroom. Curious, she pushed the blankets aside and got up from the bed. Stepping out into the hallway, the voices were faint, but slowly became louder and louder until finally a small, silver human figure raced past her. It was her little sister. The ghost didn’t even acknowledge her as it ran past her, giggling as her mother’s silver figure followed from behind.

Lavender followed the ghosts, finding more and more of her dead family members around the house. Still, none of them looked at her, except for one ghost - her grandmother.
Her grandmother looked young and well, not sick like when she was alive. She walked over to Lavender and smiled. "Don’t forget," she whispered to her, looking her in the eye, "Your family is always with you."

Lavender, unable to speak, nodded and stepped away. She watched as the silvery figures started dissolving into thin air. She reached out to her grandmother’s figure in hope that she wouldn’t leave. Unfortunately, her silhouette soon disappeared, leaving only her golden locket for Lavender to pick up. When she opened the locket and looked inside, she found a larger family portrait, showing all of her uncles, aunts, cousins, grandparents, even pets. Looking out of a nearby window at the swampy landscape surrounding the dark blue mansion, she smiled and put the locket on. The wind howled as she turned away from the window to head back upstairs.
Logan Wagener

Legends

The man sprinted as far as his legs could carry him. He tripped and fell flat on the ground. Hearing horses’ hooves, he tried to rise, but the hilt of a sword slammed into his head, and he slid into unconsciousness.

The armies of Viktor Scourge marched across the countryside, ravaging villages like lions, enslaving any survivors. They had two rules: serve Viktor Scourge, and destroy all. As they entered their fourth village that day, a young man attempted to break free of his chains. He’d barely moved before a flaming arrow sprouted from his neck, killing him instantaneously.

In a nearby village, a young, well-built man named Andrew moved through his fields reaping grain, a task which he lamented every day. He heard horses entering the village, so he went to the gate of his manor and looked out. Riding the first horse on the road was none other than Gideon Maximus, warrior legend. “Is there anyone brave enough to stand against Scourge and join the army?” Gideon boomed. Andrew’s smile lit up the manor, and he sprinted out to volunteer his service to the man he admired most.

Weeks later, once the recruits were trained, the armies of Gideon Maximus and Viktor Scourge met at the ruins of one of the villages Scourge’s army had annihilated. A clash began. Andrew rushed the front lines, his sword a wave of death. He heard slashing swords and spun around to see Gideon and Viktor battling. Fury blazed in Viktor’s eyes, and it seemed to scorch the battlefield. As the two swords met, Viktor
drew a small knife from his belt and stabbed Gideon in the gut. Gideon’s eyes widened, and he fell down, dead. Andrew roared with rage that seemed to slay everyone on the battlefield. He leapt at Viktor, threw him to the ground… and broke his neck, a task that brought no joy. Seeing their leader dead, Scourge’s army went into full retreat, fleeing back toward their own lands.

Many years later, back on the farm, Andrew Maximus sat on the steps of his farmhouse. He gazed at the beautiful countryside that he had saved so many years before. He walked back inside and looked at the two memorials. Two tears slipped from his eyes—one for his father… Gideon Maximus, and one for his brother… Viktor Scourge. Walking back outside, he began to reap his fields.
The Spark

Darkness

Mystery

A girl.

But is she the one?

How can he know

Only hope

Hope, peace, longing

Is she doing this on purpose?

Please

Stop my suffering

She comes

She walks over

Is it finally . . .

She walks past

Pain beyond comprehension

Darkness
The feeling of worthlessness

Why not just give up?

Just die here, on the cold, hard floor?

Nothing’s stopping me . . .

She’s coming back

A spark.

All it takes.

A spark.

A spark of hope,

To spark a conversation,

To spark love

A spark is all it takes to light a fire.

Peace

Hope

Elegance

Mystery

All came from darkness

From the girl

From a spark . . .
Battle of the Skies

Deep lazy lapis.
Thick as the oceans current.
Confident.
Unmoving.
Soon, little drops of deep crimson seep through like water color paints.
A burst of vermillion shatters the murky deep, forcing her way through.
Surging.
Pulsing.
A scarlet morn is coming.
Ribbons of peony and gold Josie in mid air like ribbon dancers.
Epic voices of color scream at each other, arguing.
Neither of them willing to give away their position on the horizon.
Though it seems the new day is losing, she brought back up.
An army.
A lilac sky trickles in.
She paints her own way and receding into the distance was the night.
Defeated for now?
Yes. But he will return.
And every morning, I will be here to imagine what this glorious display looks like.
For now, I wait.
Flash me back, let me try and heal

The wind screamed, angry, gray wounds flashing,
coffee brown eyes blinked. She says something,
words garbled, I can’t
quite make it out.
It’s quiet, almost serene.

She warms me like a storm, ebbs like the tide. She sings out, declaring her presence;
I am entranced. I float, music

Pushes me this way and that, bending me to her will.

I bow at her feet
her voice is soft
and like a dove’s powdery feathers,
they lift me. Away

Two seasons, dancing on
the verge; they crash

Running, clumsy, Angry, wet clothes sticking to me like
her love letters.

I hurt, but no one can hear,
Pearly rain pattering on my face like
Glue. I’m blind, but I hear

her voice again, sweeping me away. Consciousness flutters back

and forth, until—

Stop
A garden. Cherry blossoms, like coral pink tears.
They sink down, fading into
Faraway dreams and butterflies
She is there, back; we dance a midsummer’s ballet
wind whistling past us and lifting up
the fruit of the sky. Her eyes are
gold. I flicker

Cloudiness bids goodbye, the mermaids choked
By sailors. I'm alone, with flat, scarred plains. I want to
cry, but if I do I'm afraid I'm going to
burn, empty
and panicked. I can't let go because
she was Real.
I trip but there is no end to the storms,
I try to feel but there is nothing to find, I wish
to evolve.
Her cry echoes, chasing me but I can't
Move, because
She is everywhere.
willows push me along, garlands of silver curling
behind my ears,
Her sounds subside; I can breathe
Once more. But maybe
that was it. Maybe
i am free

My mind takes me back,
Fueled by longing

I plant tulips. She is there.
she pulls me back and we are
suddenly Spanish dancing, I do not
realize. Songbirds accompany us, and
I am filled with a
distant emotion.
I don't know. I conflict,
She screams; I am dropping down again.
My eyes burn.

I do not want to continue. she has me enraptured,
but against my will. I feel only pitiful sorrow,
for myself.

She dances with the devil,
His melodies of despair
Guarding the gates. I cry out a pleading
Lullaby, but
all has already come crashing down. The deep,
anxious rhythm crushes down on
me, and I am lost, thrown

about,

It's quiet, almost serene. I am sorry.

Her voice returns,

But it's not chasing me anymore.

Dark winter wraps around

Us; she is there. There is finally
Willing peace, and we look towards the moon. I glance back
down; her brown eyes are cold and gray
defeated but still
beautiful.
Her hair billows behind
Her like ocean waves, black like
sesame dots. I reach
down,
She is not there anymore.
The Music

All I hear now is the music.

It seems fierce as it captures me and takes me to its place of solitude.

A breeze wraps around me as I am pulled away from reality.

All of a sudden, I see only colored lights and shadows.

The music becomes calmer, more peaceful.

It begs me to dance along with it.

I glide across the floor in an unstoppable movement.

I feel the music inside of me.

It takes control, and my body is no longer my own.

The shadows move around me, as if they are dancing with me.

As the tune turns to a sort of ballroom music, I dance with shadows.

Suddenly the music becomes leery.

My body moves quicker as if it is looking for something.

The shadows move hurriedly like they're trying to escape.

The melody softens and becomes serene.

The whole world feels at peace.

Then, the tune turns wary, like it's trying to warn me.

I look around and see the shadows descending on me,

like a lion hunting a gazelle.

I dance with them, trying to keep them from hurting anyone.

Eventually the beast dissipates, and I am left alone.
I look around, and a soft draft of wind wraps around me,
trying to take me back to where I began.

Why?
Why do I need to go back?
It's so much better here.
Peaceful.
Happy.
Beautiful.
I want to stay here forever.
But I know I can't.
I have to go back.
Back to my own world.
Back to where there is sadness.
Hunger.
Sickness.
Pain.
Death.
I stop trying to fight the breeze.
Here I am again.
Back in this dark place.
Then, tucked away in the back of my mind, comes a thought.
Maybe.
Maybe someday I can help everyone find this place.

Maybe then they would realize what all is wrong with our world.

Maybe then they would start to make changes.

Maybe then the world wouldn't be such a bad place anymore.
A Boat in the Waves

Rustles in the wind,
And nothing to fear,
And everything calm and still in the air.
Then the wind started to crescendo,
And the whirl turned to a blast
As the ship sauntered in the waves,
But did not crash.

But it seemed as though,
Mother nature wanted it so;
For the waves grew colossal,
Still, the vessel did not smash.

There was hope all around,
That the men would bare,
And they started to pray
And ask their sovereign to be there,
And the LORD did answer their pleading prayer;
For the waves shrank timid in fear,
That the LORD was near.
But when the men had lost their guard,
All the evil and distressing thoughts came free
The storm started up again...
The downpour of rain
And all the unwanted pain
And the waves dashed against the schooner
As it pounded into the foaming waves,
And the devil laughed with glee.

But the LORD fought the devil
And in the end, the LORD will always win,
There will always be order after chaos,
And so the ship came to a haven,
Where the men rested
And the boat, unscathed,
waited.
The Mermaid's Journey

I heard the calling,
I needed to escape.
Far.
I had to make the journey.

I dived into the magnificent sea,
My metallic tail glowing in the water like a crystal in sunlight.
My tail glided in the water.
I pushed through with all my strength,
Feeling the smooth liquid against my skin.

My face shined with a smile
As I overlooked the paradise.
Delicate, multicolored fish raced in the sea;
And the ocean creaked a melody,
Wonderous and majestic.

We communicated as one,
Not through words,
But we understood each other.
The minuscule details and fragments of life,
A common unity and harmony;
I closed my eyes and embraced the music of the aqua.

When I opened my eyes
All I could see was a darkened canvas.
I was blind
Vulnerable
Deep
And alone.

My heart started to beat out of my chest,
And my hands began to shake.
My skin as frozen as an ice cube,
A well of salty water filled my eyelids.
How could I have been so stupid?
How could I have swum off the path?
I cried at the top of my lungs,
"Help me!"
But no one came.
I was trapped in a sphere of liquid that could consume me as prey.

Defeat flooded my mind,
Dominating my brain.
Then I felt something
Lurking in the shadows,
Not visible, nor touchable,
But fully there.

I am fully and utterly alive,
The being gave me comfort
As soft as a pillow,
And as gentle as a spirit.
This breath guided me to shore.
Homeward Bound

The sky was pitch black.
The seas were tossing with wrath.
The *Pelican* had been under aqueous attack,
Wood and metal ruins were its aftermath.

Everyone on board had drowned.
Not a living soul you could see.
Except one who on a plank was bound.
He was the young cabin boy, Lee.

Behold! A ship so grand!
The hope was in sight!
Lee swam for the boat, so tanned.
He was in ecstatic delight.

A rescue boat came out to greet him,
To his dismay, they were French.
But he would rather join them
And let his homesickness be quenched.

The ship was headed to America for furs and crops.
From the natives and settlers of the land.
And along the trading ship's many stops
Lee began to admire the place so grand.
Homeward Bound

Though he still missed his English fatherland,
To his new life he began to adjust.
Lee began to know each sailor like the back of his hand,
And he began to earn the captain's trust.

As Lee grew older, he became very wealthy.
He was promoted to a trading ship captain.
But as he grew rich and healthy,
He still was homesick from within.

One day he heard great news;
Some trading ships were headed for his homeland!
He quickly became part of their crews
To see his old, beloved fatherland.

As he left the town's crowded jetty,
He ran towards a small shack.
He was doubtful, he turned away yet he
Knocked on the door, waiting for a reply back.

A woman opened the small wooden door.
She stared, gasped, then she burst into tears
"My son!", she cried. "I thought you were no more!"
Lee had not seen his mother for twenty years.
Homeward Bound

“I missed you for so long!” he cried,
“I wanted to see Father and my sister, too.
I’m sorry you thought I had died.
But I found a better place for all of you.”

He told his family of the American quest
And of his acquired success.
“Come with me, where the poor are blessed,
And are free from tyrants who oppress!”
Grace Wallace

Red stands for many things.
Fury, Blood, Evil, to name a few.

But what would become of a girl
who was said to possess all of these,

It was said that evil was embedded in her bones
That it lived deep in her chest
where her heart should be

She was told this over and over
Called a witch, a demon,
All because of one thing
Tortured day after day because she was different
Because she had
fiery, but strangely clear,
crimson red eyes.

One day the girl had enough
She was finally fed up with the judgement of others
So she ran
Gale ran and ran as fast as her feet could carry her

Through the dense thicket of trees
Knowing if she let her mind wandered she would surely

Trip on a bulging root or run into a hanging branch

She ran for what felt like hours,

Luckily the forest started to lighten up and

Soon after she broke through the line of trees

and into a small clearing

Exhausted Gale collapsed on the ground

Trying to control her ragged breathing

Soon it slowed and she realized how much a mess she was

Her dirty blonde hair had fallen from its tie,

And now hung loosely around her face

Her muddied jeans were slashed from thorns

and her bright shirt was almost black with dust.

She also noticed that her bare, usually tan arms

had turned black and blue from smashing into one tree after the other,

with cuts that now started to burn like fire.
Slowly Gale lifted herself off the ground as she started to look around

She sucked in a tight breath

when she realized she was not alone

Standing but not 10 feet away was a girl her age.

She looked oddly familiar

She had wavy blonde curls and light skin

When Gale looked into her eyes

she almost jumped in surprise,

Because staring back at her was the same thing she had seen all her life,

The thing that separates her from her peers.

The same thing that almost ruined her life.

Staring back at her were her own crimson red eyes

Gale didn't know whether to laugh or cry.

She threw herself at the girl who held her like

A long lost sister, and Gale realized she was finally

Not alone.
Senior Division

The essays, poems and stories in this book have been printed without edits as they were submitted to the writing competition Express the Music 2020.
A Moment Frozen in Time

Wind whistles across the window and howls at the front door. As the conversation begins to dim at the dinner table, the comforting sound of the crackling fire in the next room beckons everyone to come near. One by one, family members leave the meal behind and accept the invitation of the leaping flames by pulling together plush arm chairs, making a circle around their beloved grandfather.

Stillness sweeps across the room as eager, admiring faces gaze upon the old man. His rich voice soars over the blustering wind and the flickering blaze as he begins to pull a tale from the depths of his memory. As with all other anecdotes he tells, the grandfather begins by reminding the children that, through stories, one will never be forgotten. After the simple disclaimer, he closes his eyes, takes a soothing breath, and settles his mind before beginning to weave the tale of his glory days during the war.

As his eyes open, they glance toward the far corner of the room, where an old golden pocket watch, with the time frozen at 8:30 am, gleams in the fire’s light. Yet, this Waltham is not simply a watch. It is a reminder of the moments he experienced and the people he met in his earlier life.

The grandfather asks his youngest grandchild to retrieve the watch for him from its glass case. Stroking it carefully with his hand, he tells of the time it was with him that dreary day on the battlefield. Entering into the moment with a sudden burst of rage, his voice hoarsens as he shouts, “Duck and cover!” loud enough to raise the hairs on his frightened audience’s arms. To them, the phrase is simply part of a story, yet the grandfather has entered into a stage of previous reality, as if in a dream. The old man sees himself running into the far away distance, attempting to dodge the bullets as they whizz by in the early morning light. Left, then right, then left again.
Faster and faster until he plummets to the ground, desperately clutching his hands over his hard-shelled helmet in an attempt to save himself from the fate that so many around him have already succumbed to. As the soldiers beside him moan in agony, he hears the man next to him, no older than nineteen, beg to know the time. The grandfather sees himself reach inside the pocket of his musty green uniform for his watch. After a quick glance, the man covers his head once again and replies “zero eight thirty” before slithering to the other side of the trampled field. The old man suddenly stomps his feet on the wooden floors of the room one at a time, mimicking the giant shout bellowed by the curious young man as a blast, brighter than the roaring fire and louder than the howl of the wind, catapulted him into a sea of chaos.

As the final words trickle from his tongue, the grandfather reenters his present reality, wipes a tear from his eye, and stares at the mesmerized faces in front of him. He shivers, not from the weather outside the house, but from the fright of the nightmare he has just retold. Still gripping the watch in his wrinkled hands, he stares down at its face once more and silently whispers “zero eight thirty” to himself, forever remembering the man who died beside him and the frightful moment frozen in time.
This is fine, she whispers.

The old house rests on top of the hill; the swallows swoop low over the roof to nest in the exposed rafters of the attic; the bricks of the foundation slowly dissolve into the earth, giving way to the hard, burrowing roots of the oak tree that overhangs half the house. It is lucky there is no rain today to drip down through the house, and the clouds that had reared their ugly heads in the morning had been burnt away by a wrathful sun. Instead, the empty windows stare out onto the special oblivion that can only be found in the barren trees of winter.

Upstairs, the old man sleeps, while his daughter sweeps the floor of his room. He does not see, or hear, but she can pretend. Swish, swish, swish, and 1000 twigs rattle their way across a floor worn down by 1000 footsteps. She can remember the way sunlight had once poured through now grimy windows, pooling on floor, soaking her skin. She can remember how the stuffy house had been filled with uncountable aromas, wafting up through the walls from the kitchen: aromas of fresh baked bread, of crackling bacon, of her mother’s perfume. She can remember the way the voice of the old man had once filled the rooms she swept, a mix of music, honey, and thunder. The old man draws in a low, rattling breath.

This is fine, she whispers.

The girl doesn’t look at him. There is no point. As long as he sleeps, it is enough to hear his breaths to know that he is with her.

Outside, the sun is setting, turning the dirty walls of the house pink, bleeding slowly into red, which, in turn, is destined to fade away to blackness. This is the cue for the swallows to pause their singing. A low wind blows out of the west, causing the branches of the empty trees to
rattle—prisoners dragging a cup across the bars of their cell, waiting for release. There are no crickets to sing the world to sleep in midwinter. Most of the birds have abandoned the north for warmer shores. The only sound in the moldering house is the swish of the broom, and a soft, wet gasp from the old man. Then silence.

_This is fine_, she whispers.

The girl pauses her sweeping, and listens. The house which once was full of honey, thunder, and music stands silent. Overhead, pregnant clouds which can be warded off in daylight return, and underground those slow and silent things filling the earth burrow deep for the coming storm. As the last puddles of sunlight harden into shards of darkness, the girl looks over at the thing that was once her father. There is no movement, and she cannot see in the growing darkness whether he is grimacing or smiling. It is not, however, a thing she needs to know.

Instead, the girl walks over to the dresser which crouches in the corner to gather in her worn woolen gloves and coat. She makes her way cautiously down the stairs, subconsciously skipping the step she knows will creak, as if still afraid of disturbing her father. At long last, she stands outside the kitchen door, looking forward towards the veiled darkness of the forest. She has no need for a candle; she knows where she is going; she knows she can finally leave the swallows and the oak tree to follow those lucky birds who know the way to warmer shores.

As she walks away, she whispers, _this is fine._
Triple

Shing. My blade gracefully glides across the thick plate of ice, almost as if I’m floating on the blanket of clouds that quietly drifts above me. Scrape. I leave a small pile of snow near my skate as I twirl past, leading me to the final destination

Come on. You can do this.

The words slip out of my mouth, mixed in with a deep breath that caused my chest to pound. I kick my foot forward and leap into the crisp air that rose from the icy glaze beneath me. Everything has led up to this moment.

* * * * *

A triple axel. My final move to perfect. I launch myself outward, only for the air around me to turn into an icy, spiraling hurricane that whips my entire body around, causing me to fall onto the glass-like rink beneath me. It was almost as if I’m an unsteady book at the top of a tall shelf. Smack.

Two months. That’s all I have left until the most important day of my life.

Two months. Those simple words consumed my mind for days like a blazing fire. I couldn’t stop practicing, even when dawn’s warm, golden welcome flooded through the windows and onto the cool ice. I don’t have much time, but every single part of my body is determined to succeed.

* * * * *

One week remains. Time has rushed by like a speeding bullet piercing through the sky. I still haven’t perfected the jump; my anxiety and frustration dominates my every thought. Every
other move before the axel seems to come as easily as breathing to me, but this one jump could ruin my entire career.

* * *

Today is the day. The day I have looked forward to ever since I was small. I unzip the ice-skating costume from the protective case, and gently trace each intricately placed design, jewel, and stitch. I gaze at the costume, knowing that it will be what I am going to live the biggest moment of my life in. I slip it on delicately. Then suddenly, sweeping over me like a calm breeze, every anxious thought or fear that I felt, drifted away.

“Next Contestant Please!”

I float onto the rink with extreme pride and courage, feeling like the strongest lion in the pack. Then, the music begins.

Shing. My blade gracefully glides across the thick plate of ice, almost as if I’m floating on the blanket of clouds that quietly drifts above me. Scrape. I leave a small pile of snow near my skate as I twirl past, leading me to the final destination of my performance.

I nervously hoist my back foot forward, and up I fly, like a rocket heading for the blazing stars above. My feet twisted like a swirling tornado in a spring storm. Then, suddenly, everything stopped. I keep spinning. Once. Twice. Three times. My body floats down, right back onto the chilling ice that I started on. My skate touches down and I land.

Perfection.
Greta Donnelly

Subconscious Rebellion

Her skin prickled, adjusting to its new environment. Before having the opportunity to assess her blurred surroundings, she noticed that the ground beneath her resembled a cloud, and she feared she would fall through it at any moment. As the details sharpened, her childhood backyard came into focus - a place she hadn't visited in many years. It seemed much smaller now than in her youth. She acknowledged the change, but was indifferent towards it; her mind was struggling to focus on one thing at a time amidst the ambiguity of her circumstances.

Intrigue increasing, she turned in a circle, allowing her eyes to scan the fencing that lined the yard. It was made of the same material as when she was a child, although now the paint was peeling and the wood was rotted. It too seemed smaller than she remembered. Again, however, she felt apathetic towards the change - it was just a fence.

She moved her gaze skyward and inhaled sharply at what she saw, though no sound escaped her lips. How had she not noticed the sky’s looming presence before? The clouds swirled ominously, faster with each passing moment. Watching it made her stomach drop, and she fought back nausea. Her eyes slammed closed, and she covered her ears with her hands, though silence surrounded her. Shapes moved across the back of her eyelids, and she watched their dance in desperate attempts to calm herself.

When she blinked her eyes open, the world was in sharp focus. She could see each individual blade of grass, even the tiny drops of dew on their tips. As she leaned in to inspect them, her mind seemed to catch up with her body.

She realized her subconsciousness.
Nothing in particular had given it away, but she was quite sure once it had occurred to her. Pride flooded through her at the prospect of outwitting her own mind. Rubbing her clammy palms together, she anticipated the exploration of her subconscious. She imagined every possible adventure, each without consequence as she would experience them while in the confines of her own imagination. Yet, strangely, none seemed so compelling as the exploration of her childhood home.

As she turned and began walking in its direction, she noticed how it too appeared to be smaller than she remembered. But, she was dreaming. Shouldn’t she be controlling these things? She tried to will the house into the frame she remembered, but nothing changed. Odd. She tried again. Nothing. Growing increasingly frustrated, she concentrated harder, but the building only seemed to grow smaller. It was as if her own subconscious was rebelling.

On the way in the door, she hit her head, the door frame stooping down to smack her. Though she knew it wasn’t real, she couldn’t help but feel upset- offended even. How dare this house disobey her? She stormed up to her bedroom, sparked by a childish instinct.

Opening the bedroom door, she finally felt a sense of familiarity. The curtains were the same deep purple she remembered, and sat on the little, neatly made bed was her stuffed lion. She stared into the beady black eyes, whose depth seemed infinite. After several moments of an odd sort of fixation with it, a sudden, thundering voice projected all around her: “Get. Out. Of. Your. Head.”

She shrunk. Or the room grew. She couldn’t tell which. The change didn’t last long enough to tell before she awoke in a bed much bigger than she’d ever noticed.
Rachel Granda

The hilt of the knife presses deep into my skin. I smooth down my dress, an attempt to cover the weapon. Rather than complete my task, I find myself taking slow sips of wine. As I swallow I can't help but envision blood flowing down his chest, a deep red. His life draining out of him; his gasps for help.

"You wanted to dance?" a man asks. He reaches for my hand, his words drawing me back into the present. He smiles, his brown hair gleaming in the light.

"Of course," I reply sweetly. I don't want to dance with this man. He is a beautiful man, charming, kind even. Once you get to know him, however, he's a man with a heart of ice; his emotions only an act; his eyes drained of warmth, eyes that only show pain and lust. His body leads me to the ballroom, his hand finding its place intertwined with mine.

His hands grip my waist, a grip too forceful for just dancing. As he guides me through the room, his fingers push deeper and deeper into my skin. His voice stern when he tells me whether or not to turn. I remain smiling, hoping that my act prevails. I stare deep into his eyes, searching for any sign of emotion. He stares back, his eyes an endless black void. He lowers his hands too close to my knife. I push away quickly.

"Did I do something wrong, darling?" he whispers, each word like a dagger piercing through my skin.

"Oh, no I just stumbled over my dress," I lie. He pulls me close, his breath hot on my neck. He whispers into my ear.

"Don't make that mistake again."
He takes my hands and drapes them over his neck. His hands find their place back on my waist. The knife remains pressed against my corset, a constant reminder that I will have to kill him.

The chandelier hangs above us. It glimmers and reflects onto the floor, and lights up the room. Curtains drape over the stained glass windows, yellow and frail. Portraits of kings and queens line the walls, with a space for his face to be added next spring. A door leads to a balcony overlooking the castle. He brings me through it. The moon reflects onto the river, the air cold. Mist gathers around me like a coat, shielding me from his touch. His fingers lift my chin and he kisses me. I feel my dress for the knife; he’s too distracted to notice. The handle is rough, the blade smooth and sharp. I back up gradually and close the door. I hold the knife behind my back as I walk towards him. He runs his fingers through my long black hair. He smirks at me, thinking he’s getting what he wants.

He groans, blood spilling down his chest. His shirt reddens. His eyes grow large. His face drains of color. I hold the knife firmly in my hand, my reflection staring at me through the blade. He reaches towards me, his hand searching for mine. He mumbles for me to come closer; blood sputtering from his mouth. I shake my head, and remove my gaze from his. He shudders and falls to the floor, dead. A pool of blood spreads out from under his body, matching the jewel in the crown he once wore proudly. I kneel beside him and look into his deep black eyes, glossed over and emotionless. His crown sits in silence, waiting to be placed on another’s head.

Come spring, his crown will become mine.
Caroline Potter

Nature is the Painter’s Muse

One cold, star-less night, a boy slipped into the brush, using the shadows to hide him in the moonlight. He did not know why he was running exactly, maybe because of curiosity or needing more fulfillment. Running away motivated him to follow his dream of becoming a famous artist, even though he described himself as a diamond in the rough; raw talent waiting to be discovered.

Although he did not have a plan, he figured that he would walk the well-traveled road that follows the sparkling yet untamed Arno river. Stuffed in a knapsack that was slung over the boy’s back was nothing except some bruised fruits, paints, brushes, and canvases. Beginning his journey in the black of night, he relied on the sandy road and the sound of the rushing Arno River to guide him. Suddenly, a faint rumble of thunder echoed in the distance, followed by a flash of blinding light in the sky. Soon after, the rain came down, forcing him to take shelter underneath the leaves of a grand oak. He finally could not keep his eyes open any longer and fell asleep leaning against the tree to the pitter-patter of rain.

He awoke to the chirping of bluebirds and gazed at a mesmerizing sunrise. Hoping to capture its beauty, he began to paint the brilliant hues of red and orange that graced the sky against beautiful hills of Italy. While the painting dried, his curiosity implored him to explore the hills beyond. As the boy hiked up the hillside, he was taken by the breathtaking sight that greeted his eyes. The rolling hills and the fields of vibrant flowers created a scene that inspired him to paint the stunning landscape. The serenity of the view moved him as he sat down in the lush, green grass to admire the view.
Off in the distance, he could see the outline of a city. He jumped up, collected his paintings, and started off to the city that is full of opportunities. After many long days of walking, he finally came upon the city of Florence, full of busy people with things to do. He felt almost out of place as he was bumped into and shoved as he braved the crowded square. Finally, the boy escaped the hustle and began to wander around town, looking for someone who could make him and his paintings known. He sought a job as an apprentice, or anything that would open doors to the exclusive club of being a well-known artist. After searching for hours without luck, the boy returned to the town square as the street lights flickered on and people returned home.

Feeling lost, he sank into a park bench, regretting ever leaving home. Florence was not like he had expected because without money, food, or place to stay, he had no chance to survive in Florence. On the brink of tears, the homeless boy tugged his paintings out of his bag, sighing as he remembered the now dead dream of being an artist. He propped up the paintings against the bench and hid his head in his knees. Clink, clink. He pecked out and gasped. Two coins dropped into his bag, shiny as a new pin. A man stood before him, smiling, as he said, “These are the most beautiful paintings I have ever seen.” The boy handed the man the painting of his sunrise, unwilling to believe his luck. As the man walked away, the boy smiled hopefully, for this was the beginning of fulfilling his dream.
Katherine Roderick

The Final Turn

A thin layer of white snow clouded over the icy road that day, but it didn’t stop me from leaving my house and walking out to my car. I pumped up the volume waiting for the vibrations of the beat to run through my body, and then started the drive. Immediately, I noticed that the road was not in poor condition. Cars lined the streets almost like ants on a sidewalk, but it didn’t matter to me because my family had pushed me to the brink of madness. I could no longer take the stress of being at home with the obnoxious noise and the irritating presence of people moving throughout the house. So, I kept on driving and I just kept telling myself drive with caution, just be careful this time around. You’ll be fine.

I had never gotten in an accident before, and I had never even been pulled over. My parents would call me a good driver, a responsible driver. I would pick up kids and carpool with my friends, and of course, I had never gotten in any sort of trouble.

Despite the accidents littering the roads, I continued to drive I knew what the risks were. I should have just called my parents right then and there, but instead, I repeated the words that had come through my mind earlier that day. Just drive with caution and be careful. You’ll be fine.

Finally, after I cooled off and took enough time away from home, I felt that it was time for me to finally make the slippery trip back home. As I felt my engine start up again I began to take the final turn into my neighborhood, but all of a sudden my car slipped and flew into the intersection and into the middle of traffic.

I closed my eyes tightly and held my breath, but all at once I opened them to see a blue car coming full speed at me. I heard the screeching sound of the car trying to stop, but I knew what was about to happen. I replayed the message for the fourth time that day. Just drive with
caution and be careful this time around. You’ll be fine. I closed my eyes and waited for the car to plunge into mine. I closed my eyes to try and make the pain go away even before it came.

Finally, then it happened. I heard the car smash and make a horrifying sound. I waited for the pain to ripple through my body but nothing came. When I was ready to open my eyes and see and feel what had become of my body I began to peek, but I saw nothing out of the ordinary. I felt fine, I looked fine, and I seemed fine, but when I turned around I saw what really happened.

There were two cars completely interlocked with each other. There was glass sprinkled across the white covered road and little puddles of blood around the road. I saw what had become of the cars, and what could have become of me. I pictured my house and my annoying loud family that were cozy inside. I had worked so hard to get away from that, but now all I wanted to be was there, so sat there and for a few moments reflecting on where I could’ve been and where I should’ve been, and for the final time, I repeated what I had said to myself all day. You’ll be fine.
The Monster

It was there.

Boiling, blistering, burning. Skin flaky and translucent, or maybe slimy, greasy, and oozing. It lurked beneath the bed, outside the window, in the closet. Everywhere.

Joey knew it was there. This was not a nightmare.

The wind howled outside, and Joey snapped his gaze to the window, scanning the thick curtains. There! Was that a ruffle? Something was hiding under the curtains! Joey slowly slipped out from his bed. His small feet thudded softly against the cold, wood floor. He crept carefully to the window. Holding his breath, he began to gently reach out a hand. Then-

Woosh!

He threw aside the curtain and sprang back violently, so much so that he lost his balance and ended up on the ground. His heart was pounding. But when he looked up, all he saw was a window. The night sky was clear and beautiful, the moon shining blue light into the room. Joey brought himself to his feet and walked back to the window, examining the curtain and the surrounding area.

It seemed he was safe. For now, at least.

Content, Joey got back into bed and shut his eyes, waiting for sleep. Just as his breathing grew even and he began to drift off, he heard a creeeek.

His eyes flew open. The familiar sense that he was not alone came over him. He felt it—in the tightening of his chest, in the slight ringing in his ears. Joey’s breathing grew shallower, and he bit his lip, once again peering about the room.

There! What was that? Over by the closet? That shadow?

It was dark, large, and moving. It swayed, ominously, back and forth.
The longer Joey stared at the amorphous figure, the more certain he was that it was something dreadful. Before his eyes, the figure began to shift. It was hunched and horrible. There—that was a shoulder. And that was its face. Joey began to shake. He could imagine its glinting eyes, its thin, ghastly face, its gnarled hands. Its sneering mouth, hiding razor sharp teeth, dripping drool and—

Joey gasped and shot up, reaching blindly for the lamp besides his bed and throwing on the light.

Nothing. It was a coat, swinging idly on the handle of the closet door.

Joey huffed and flung his feet out from under the covers, storming over to the closet and ripping the coat from the handle. He discarded the coat onto the floor and returned to his bed, shutting off the lamp and once again letting sleep take over.

Then there was a rustle. Joey was once again dragged from sleep, his eyes flying open and his muscles stiffening. Remembering his folly from the moment before, he shook his head and forced his eyes closed again, trying to ignore the sound, hoping it had just been his imagination.

But there—there it was again. A rustling, a whispering. Joey felt the blood rush from his face.

*It was coming from under his bed.*

Joey froze, but took a deep breath. He had to do this. He slowly lowered himself from the bed and onto the cold floor. He leaned down, peeking his head under the bed.

Sitting underneath his bed was him. His hair, his face, his eyes. Him.

Joey stared. Then, quietly, he got back into bed and, finally, fell into a deep sleep.
Rachel Singer

No Need to be Afraid

“Night night,” whispers his father.

“Sweet dreams,” murmurs his mother.

They turn to leave, switch off his light, and gently close his door leaving the little boy in the darkness, except for the dim nightlight illuminating his small room. After several minutes, the exhausted boy surrenders all his thoughts and worries, and collapses into a deep sleep.

He first explores the steamy jungle with his favorite stuffed dinosaur in search of new exotic animals that have yet to be discovered. Monkeys swing through the trees overhead as the hot sun peeks through the dense canopy. But as soon as they reach the heart of the rainforest, they are faced with a wide river where many creatures dwell.

He gathers enough wood to build a raft and attempts to sail to the other side, but halfway across the river, he catches a glimpse of something lurking below the surface of the water alongside his raft. It could be crocodiles! Or snakes! Or sharks! The alert boy’s mind sorts through all the frightening things it could be as he frantically paddles his raft towards the riverbed where he knows he will be safe. He propels himself forward as fast as he can, but the creatures are faster. He is about to reach the riverbed…

Panting, the little boy sits straight up. He struggles to see the nightlight through his bleary eyes, and can just make out the yellow orb in the corner, a reminder of safety. Just to be sure, he peers under his pillow and his bed to ensure the monsters are gone, and to his delight, he is safe, and the scary creatures were just in his dreams. Hugging his stuffed dinosaur close, his heavy eyelids close shut.
He and his dinosaur dart out the front door to play in the yard. It's a gorgeous day outside—the sun brightens the sky with joy, the birds sing a whimsical song from the trees, and a soft breeze dances through the air. It's the dinosaur's turn to hide, and after counting to 30, the energized boy skips through the yard, peeking behind trees, looking under rocks, and searching in the bushes. Feeling outsmarted, he returns to the front steps of his house in defeat, but then decides to ask if anyone else had seen him. He first asks the squirrels, who themselves look for fallen acorns in the grass, but they deny having seen a small purple dinosaur wandering through the yard. He next interrogates a rabbit, who ducks back into his burrow to avoid answering. It seems as though all hope is lost. Winning the game no longer matters to the boy, so he calls out his dinosaur's name, but no such luck. His dinosaur does not come back. The boy returns inside deeply saddened at the loss of his best friend.

When the boy awakens for the second time, tears wet his face. He sits up again realizing his dinosaur is missing in real life, and his eyes well up with more tears. Desperately patting the bed around him, he strains to find his friend. He stops to take a deep breath and closes his eyes. When they open, he notices something purple on the carpet. Recognizing what it is, he snatches it off the ground, hugs it tightly and drifts off to sleep once more before the sunlight peers through his window, and there's nothing to be afraid of anymore.
Hunter Walsh

One crisp November morning I woke to five inches of fresh powdery snow. I looked out my window to view a sea of snow covering my yard. I rose and put on my coat and boots to walk to the barn. The birds chirped in the bushes, the squirrels barked in the tall oak trees. The farm seemed like a scene from a movie. When I got in the barn, the horses stood knowing they would be fed. A mouse scurried in the stall and frightened the tall dark brown mare. I calmed her down and then she fed. When the chores were done, I headed towards the woods to take a walk.

The closer I got to the woods, the songs of the birds sounded like the beautiful music of an orchestra. A squirrel hopped through the snow searching for acorns from a tall white oak. The birds chirped throughout the woods. Two turtle doves flew from a blackberry bush. Icicles as long as my legs hung from a long birch tree limb. Clear water dripped from the tips of the ice and splashed onto the frozen ground. A pair of dark red fox squirrels chased each other through the shimmering snow. The leaves rustled and from out of nowhere a cottontail rabbit burst from under a bush and behind it was a grey fox. The chase was on, the rabbit swerved through the trees with the fox on its tail. They ducked under a pile of brush and the rabbit let out a squeal. The chase was over, the fox had won.

I continued my walk through the powdery snow, it crunching with every step I took. The woods looked like a winter wonderland only seen in my dreams. Through the woods two dark brown deer catch my eye. They were does; once they saw me they stared at me motionless trying to figure out what I was. After a few long minutes they trotted through the woods toward the pond. Once I reached the pond, I noticed half of it
was frozen with inch thick ice. On the unfrozen side was a group of mallards dabbling in
the clear water. The Drakes green heads glistened in the sunlight. After they were
finished feasting on the algae in the lake, they took off, quacking as they flew. I
proceeded with my walk heading to a meadow on the east side of the lake. On the trail
to the meadow was a raccoon and two of her kits. They scurried up a tall oak tree and
into a hole at the top. As I reached the meadow, I could not believe what I saw.

Thousands of geese and ducks filled the meadow. Sadly, I scared them all with
my presence. They took off and all met in the sky to form a tornado of birds. The sound
roared like water from a waterfall crashing onto a river. After they were gone, the
meadow was silent, only some small finches stirred in the bushes. I headed back
towards my house. Being in the woods was so peaceful and quiet, I thought to myself
that there is no other place I'd rather be. The sun was starting to set; it was the most
beautiful thing I had ever seen. Reaching my cozy cabin, I walked inside and sat down
at my oak table and thought to myself how lucky I am to live in such an amazing place.
Express the Music: An Immigrant Story

The ship horn sounded loudly, awakening me from the fantastical daydream of the new land that awaited me. My dark hair whipping in the wind, and salty sprays stinging my eyes, I looked out into the horizon. I startled and saw that the large passenger ship that would take me and my family to a new home across the sea had started to glide smoothly through the water, leaving blue-green waves made of glass in its wake. The ship picked up speed and sailed into the glorious orange-pink sunset. I clutched the wrought iron rails, my eyes glued to the setting sun. My family had gone to rest, but the comfort of sleep only called me far after the sun went down and glittering stars littered the navy sky. When the gentle light from the rising golden sun tickled my eyes in the early morning, I expected to see my mother bustling around, broom or cooking utensils in hand, tidying up our small home. I could almost see my little siblings, running around wildly and playing with small wooden toys in our small Italian home. Instead, I saw them sleeping near me, dreaming of the multitude of possibilities life in America had to offer. As the first week passed, my family went through waves of seasickness, and the perfect journey began to feel like a burden to the rest of my family, but my excitement could not be dulled. One night towards the end of the journey, when it seemed my eyes had only closed a moment when churning waves and crackles of lightning awoke me. Fear should have paralyzed me, leaving me frozen in my bed but with a rushing mind, but I found myself on the deck. The boat was whirling
every which way, with waves sloshing over the sides, trying to bring me over the wooden deck with them. I could not look away. Scrambling to the rail, salty rain whipping in my eyes, I could not tear my eyes from the violent seas. I snapped my senses far too late, my clothes already soaked through with rain, and I was the most chilled I had ever been in my life, and had frequent shivers for the next few days. Even as I recovered from my cold, I could not stop thinking about the thrilling events that had transpired and the incredible opportunity awaiting me in New York. I went in and out of sleep, dreaming of the faraway land with its streets paved with gold. When I was finally better, I went for fresh air. To my surprise, almost everyone was out on the worn deck gawking at the horizon. I quickly saw what all the passengers were staring at; the gray skyscrapers that nearly touched the afternoon sun. And of course, the copper Lady Liberty, the friend to the immigrant, her golden torch the open door to the new land that was waiting for us ahead.
Waves, fuerte and unmatched in the summer months,
plow in to the sides of his small fishing boat.
First went the bow, and the propellers shattered next.
Papas boat went down before he had the chance to find his rosary.

“Father of one dead in boating accident off the shore of Monterrico, Guatemala.”

The news put it hastily, no emotion, sin disculpas.
The pain was deep.
Papa took his fishing boat out that night like he did every weekend,
after I got home from school and he kissed me on the head and
told me there was rice in the cooker and beans on the counter.
Just like every Viernes.
Papa, why’d you leave that night?

He learned to fish from his papa, and to the community’s disdain, he taught me.
He called the ocean his mar bonita, his beautiful sea.
I was the only thing he loved more.
Papa, why’d you leave that night?

When he left, the olas, waves, were big.
He knew it was dangerous, but papa sometimes got lost in mar bonita beauty, one thing he passed onto me besides a funeral to plan and rice and beans.

*Papa, why’d you leave that night?*

The water taught love, taught patience.
Through its consistent ebb and flow, it taught me how to be unconditional in all that I did.
I think it taught papa everything he knew about how to be a parent,
besides from his papa, my abuelito.
The crash of a wave was much like my papa’s ferocious love.
It covered everything it touched; refreshed it.
And then the wave would pull back into the earth, ready to do it again and again.
To love, again and again.

*Papa, why’d you leave that night?*

The last time we went to the water together, we went to the shore after my classes.
We walked on the black volcanic sand that burned my toes.
Monteñrico is known for its baby sea turtles,
and every visit we let a new batch into the water
to start their new *adventura*.

*Papa, why’d you leave that night?*

I have decided, this morning, I will go to the water again.
I pack a plastic grocery bag with one of papa's rosaries and a book.

It was a quick travel, one that I had done many times before, though never alone.

One mile down a road with tackle shops on my right and three fruit stands on my left.

A quarter mile down a beaten path shrouded in trees and sand packed down by many travelers.

Suddenly, the trees give way to water.

My heart shatters for the loss of my old life, one where I would walk hand in hand with papa down to the boats.

Past the trees is a hidden corner, behind small tiendas selling souvenirs.

Papa and I's favorite spot.

A hammock lays there, one we often shared when the sand got too hot to sit on.

I lay my grocery bag on the hammock and look down.

My father's face is in that water, and I smile.

He is in the crashing waves that spread over everything they care for.

He is in the innocence of the sea turtle.

He is in the black sand, you find specks of it on you no matter how long it has been since you've seen the beach.

I no longer ask why papa left that night.

He is with his mar bonita, and with each time I walk down to the black sand, crashing waves, I am with papa.
2nd Prize, Senior Division Poetry

Isadora Karathanos

Original Oratory

*Inspired by Scheherazade*

She stands at the front of the room and all eyes turn to her
She wastes no time with pleasantries:
*We need to do something.*
She gets quieter; more precise,
Creating a snare with her words
They flirt, they dance, they sway their hips,
mesmerizing

The pleas and accusations
She is setting us up for something,
She is setting us up to care.
She makes us laugh
effortless, we don't even mean to
But we like her
*We believe her.*

Now she is picking up speed,
Gaining momentum
Her words come out hot,
still smoking from the fire in her chest.
Faster and faster, louder and louder
Until she fills the entire room with her thunder:
*We NEED to DO SOMETHING.*

Self-satisfied, she knows she has us now;
welcoming, friendly,
Her approval feels like home after a long journey
Like sleeping in your own bed at night,
Where she sits beside you and strokes your hair
She kisses your forehead,
Her magical lips leave a mark,
a warning.
You nod in agreement, but discreetly tuck it away
Into the part of your mind that only works in high altitudes.
Of course, she can tell
And this time, it's her eyes that glow
first a spark, an ember,
Then a blaze.

She builds a ladder with her words,
She props it up against your side and climbs until she reaches the cavity in your heart
Then she lights you
On fire.
The flames crackle,
a fireplace in the bitter cold
Like hot soup, warming you from within.

She changes gears:
*This is what we need to do:*
She gives us a to-do list.
We know better than to be skeptical,
but just in case
She leads us to the sea
And lets the waves envelop us until it is soaked into our bones
When she knows we've had enough,
her embrace is enough to dry our salted skin
She is suddenly timid,
As if she hadn't just changed our lives.

Her eyes now are just eyes,
Glistening with hope and a touch of distress:
*Please, can we do something?*
And we say yes.
BREAKING NEWS: July 14th, 2020. As of early this morning, a meteor a third of the size of Earth has been seen launching its way toward the planet. Arrival time is unknown, but confirmed to be soon. With this information given to us so abruptly, there's only so much we can do at this point, except hold close the ones we love and take a last look at what we have. This appears to be it. Good luck and may God be with you.

Violets sway lightly in the delicate rain.

They stand content in a field of dewy grass, the night time sky disappearing for the last time, the stars melting with the moon as the water drizzles on the soft, silky petals.

The rain comes to a halt,

and the sun makes its first appearance on the horizon behind the couplet of violets, gifting the morning of its heavenly rays. They cast the field, golden and vibrant.

A breeze moves through, gentle.

It picks up, heavies, and fresh embers fly with the wind, lacing in and out of the pollen.

They travel to the mountains in the distance,

the mountains that slowly crumble, piece by piece,

from top to bottom.

They travel to the ice caps on the side parallel to the field,

the ice caps that melt rapidly,

turning into soupy, boiling hot water.

They travel to the forests where the frizzy squirrels reside in trees.
Where the glass-eyed deer roam quietly through the brush.
Where the hares thump absent-mindedly through the grass,
unaware of what's to come.
The embers float through the leaves and land amongst them on the forest floor,
where the deer curiously sniff them in their unfamiliar burning scent,
unaware of what's to come.
The embers land idly in the trees where they're fueled and fed;
where they fabricate their flames.
The fire grows large,
larger,
and the trees in the forest become bathed in flames.
And the squirrels scurry
And the deer prance away, cornered, with nowhere else to go.
Eventually, the flames stretch to the buildings, the city,
and engulf the towering structures in scorching white light.
And the people are trapped,
and they scream for help,
and there's nowhere else to go.

But the Earth doesn't stop.
It continues to rotate despite the flame-lit rock headed toward it, the bullet shot by God, traveling
closer and closer as it rips through space.
It gets closer.

Closer now,
even closer,
until

... Like a candle in a dark room, the planet ignites. The flames fly bright.

Slowly,

They wilt with the lost souls that used to inhabit it. The Earth’s core exposes like a skeleton.

A butterfly flaps out of the blackness of the universe, staggering, making its own way to that
crushed rock.

It passes through Earth’s sky— a searing white, then gray, then black. Up above, it’s all a mess of
crushed bone and shredded skin.

It floats peacefully over a field of disintegrated violets, buried in a valley of dead people, of

The butterfly lands its dainty legs on a crisp, blackened hand sticking out of the debris, on the

Opening its bright wings, closing them.
And just like that.

Blown past bone, eroded to nothing in a second.

All the proof is diminished in the snap of a finger,

a blink of an eye.

It's all gone.

All of it.
Soldier's Feet

What a somber tune that she would sing,
As she trudged through miles and miles of poppy fields with
skies a complete periwinkle.
Then, the sharp turn of a soldier's foot attracts her attention.
Trumpets fly in the air, rocketing the spirit of the marchers.
She is mesmerized by the aura of that soldier.
The synchronized marching that stayed with her.
The smell of gunpowder right under her nose.
Flutes glide in mystical songs.
Townspeople rejoice in dance.
The smell of wine dissipates the air with such resonance that
the king himself is of drunkenness.
Feeble women feed the men lofts of bread.
But amongst the congregation of drunken men and vowing women that plead
a goodbye kiss from their sons.
She is fixated on the sight of him.
But most definitely his feet.
The feet that march towards a journey less comfortable than hers.
War is a torturous thing,
but she is intrigued.
The silhouette of their tuckered out backs
by their woolen sacks.

Orange skies soon set and the prairie grasses become more significant now.

This is all she has ever known.

But the sounds of cannons is evermore irresistible.

Jumping in the air with joy,

she took down her lustrous hair.

Traipsing along the muddy paths,

she would remember these whereabouts,

but those periwinkle skies were unremarkable.

She urged for a sense of bravery,

like ascending through the tenebrous woods,

With a bow and arrow hid in her saddle,

On a gallant horse.

Feeling free.

Euphoria struck her and with a whimsical touch of magic, she began to fly.

Her wings beneath her small frame.

The view of the whole world.

There was a deathly silence, quiet as the barn owl.

The poppies began to glisten in the moonlight.

Entrapped in a vortex of fiery red,

her wings turned to a dark maroon.

A maroon that was so deep that her eyes turned vivacious.
Flashes of her lifeless homeland disappearing.
Roams of cows grazing by the clear blue lake were gone.
The humpback whales pummeling for the daily catch.
The dogmatic hum of the soldiers against the grass.
Their guns perched high above their golden suits.
Suits that fly high up in the sky.
Grand above the moon.
She wants to fly high too.
High till she is wizened with age.
By the narcotizing soldier's feet.
Marching towards brutal battles with periwinkle skies.
And the her hair flying free in the wind.
Olivia Fedorko

3 Weapons

Waking up beneath her covers
She prepares for a new day,
As of now she feels tranquil
But these feelings soon fade away.

She gets dressed and makes her own food
Eating breakfast alone is something she's used to.
She's pretty happy most of the time,
But she is also a slave of her thoughts.

It's presence is near as she walks into school,
She nervously sweats as she walks down the halls
The bell rings in three minutes, and she has to find a group,
standing alone without talking is what fools do.

It creeps its way onto her tongue
When others are talking,
Her mouth becomes numb.
She wants to talk, but she just can't
It strips away her confidence.

The circle talking glares at her again,
She feels like an outsider,
Who doesn't contribute anything,
She tries so hard to try and chip in.

Her fear of people judging her
Tends to come and go,
She has her close friends that are like her
Though even then she feels alone.

The next day is different,
The sun shines on her face
She decides to change her outlook on life,
And become a social person again.
Marching into school with ten minutes to spare
She goes to every group of people without a care
Words and ideas fly from her tongue,
The thought slave that holds her captive loses this one.

She thinks her anxiety will disappear,
If she talks about things
That other people like to hear,
If she likes, what they do, she wouldn’t be weird.

With winning comes losing
And the girl’s confidence starts to die,
The words on her tongue,
Now came out very dry.

She doesn’t feel satisfied
With the things she says
Although she is talking more,
Her good friend loneliness shows up instead.

She battles herself,
In a war of self doubt
She thinks he overcame it,
But it makes its way back up

Isolation,
Hopelessness,
Despair,
The most dangerous weapons in the air,
Her mind against her is a rare form of fight
Determined and patient, she sees a near end in sight.

Her new therapy sessions help her a lot,
Talking and thinking freely to someone
Helps her come up with the ultimate plot,
To be able to speak without feeling shame.

The strings of the slave,
Started to truly break free,
Once the girl realizes,
Her worth means more than talking randomly.

Her true confidence starts to show,
Marching into school ten minutes early,
She doesn’t see any of her close friends,
Instead of panicking, she proudly stands alone instead.

The girl so invested in fitting in,
Has forgotten about the value,
Of what conversations,
She actually wants to partake in.

Proudly standing alone
Her two new friends arrived,
And they took off down the halls,
Talking about things that they all liked.

Her fight was finally over,
And she was truly happy,
The three dangerous weapons she beat,
Left her with the greatest victory.
The Cost of Knowing

Omniscience burdens the heart and soul
Though, I suppose I should have known that
in the way I know this path promises singing children
while that one whispers of isolation

The knowing manifested as most things do,
a question swirling in the back of an average mind
begging for more than a first person narrative could provide
selfishly wanting just one informed choice

Wearily, I sample one fate
Lazily swirling a finger through the
alluring glisten of blue mist
concealing finite resolution to my mind’s infinity

Singsong laughter and light touch,
days in the sun with carefree abandon
in a world of correct choices that
eclipse the myth of regret
Another!
Let me in on these cosmic secrets,
these temporal strings puppeteering
the mundane life I used to lead
before I fell into the knowing

Why stop at sunlight when the abyss beckons?
The promise of glee holds a dull ring
compared to the unexplored depths of suffering
stories silenced by a universal quest for good

Taste sorrow, sample death
Experience the terrible things that
come along with choosing wrong
or simply rolling these rigged dice

Dive from vision to vision,
soon adjusting to the blue mist
that lost its luster somewhere around
when I view my fourth dog running away
because my son left the door open again
The trill of free will rattles every
single molecule on its preordained path
jolting the now and the then and
ignoring the how and the why and the reason

I know all, but all knows me
cackling as it gifts me an illusion of will
imploring me to choose a card of choice
from a deck selected without me

The clatter exacts its toll after the five hundredth leap
extracting an ache uncharacteristic of someone
possessing the power I've long desired
its unexpected weight a cruel joke

While I stew in this flaw, the cosmos strikes,
catching me off guard for the first time in
a multitude of sprawling realities, yanking me along
a million lifetimes that are somehow all my own

The premonitions show my face, my actions,
but fate, hands clasped over my third eye,
steals the narrative epicenter with force that
no human knowledge, no matter how grand,
can counter in any reality

A lull in the waves as I think
I, too, have lost my glisten
to the being who reads our possibilities as jokes
and found my punchline lackluster

Carelessly, it releases me from Chronos’ prison
back into the safely naive grasp of humanity,
a bubble I’ve missed dearly in
the vicious whirlpool of omniscience
Eye of the Storm

There is a sudden calm.
The air has a feeling of static and moisture.
A dreary silence is hovering over the destroyed vegetation and town.
I look around and as I do my feet crunch on the destroyed tree branches.
I can see buildings knocked over, signs strewn about on the ground.
It looks like a ghost town.
Beyond the broken town, I can suddenly see why it is so calm; why the storm has stopped so suddenly.

I am in the eye of the storm.

Dark clouds surround me on every side, encaging me within the storm.
As I watch, I can see dark objects whipping through the clouds every few seconds, caught by a fierce wind.
Everything else in the storm is obscured.
I need to escape the storm before it hits me again.
But to do so, I must run directly back into it ... and somehow, come out on the side away from the cyclone.
I need to go back into the horror that I had so suddenly escaped.

So... I run.

At a sprint, I enter the film of clouds that conceals the madness of the storm.
Immediately, a strong wind causes my body to lurch sideways,
A large branch whips right pass me, its wet leaves brushing my face as it goes by.
I am already soaked head to toe by the pouring rain that hammers the ground and pelts my body.
My senses are no use in this storm.
I see nothing but moving shapes and darkness.
All I am able to hear is the pounding of rain and the screaming of the wind.
My sense of direction is ruined.
Once again there is only one thing that I can do, and that is to continue running.
As I run, I am forced to move slowly.  
The wind pushes me every direction, forcing me off my course.  
The rain blinds me, constraining my sight even more.  
As I stumble over the choppy ground, leaves hit my body, leaving muddy streaks across my clothing.  
But I continue on.

Fighting my way through the storm, something changes.  
The wind begins to soften.  
I no longer feel as though I am being whipped by the rain  
And the sky is lightening up ahead.  
I am so close to escaping.  
My pace speeds back up to a sprint.  
I am tripping and stumbling over debris but I no longer care.  
I can see the end of the storm  
And I must reach it.
The Falling Snowflake

Snow falls for the first time this year.

Since this is the first snow of the year, all the snowflakes are all new to this.

They all hope to go on the right track to get to their respective areas.

One little snowflake is born from a cloud.

She drops from the sky and is on her way to a little corn field,

Where her brother dropped last year.

Her family has been going to this spot for over a million years.

She is excited to finally experience it herself.

The little snowflake is on her way,

But,

Oh no!

Right as she was about to fall in her spot, a huge gust of wind hit her.

She got caught in this wind gust for a very long time,

She had no idea where she was going, the little snowflake was very frightened.

After a long journey the snowflake had landed in a far away city.

She had never heard of a place like this.

It had tall buildings and lots of things that were rolling very fast around her.

As she was observing all of this, She didn’t realize that a huge wheel was coming right for her.

The wheel was getting so close,
But WHOOOOSHHH another gust of wind came and took her to a safe resting spot;  
In a nearby pot, full of magical colors that sat on very thin petals.  
The little snowflake was in awe.  
She had never seen anything more beautiful than these objects, the color surrounded her.  

Every day that it snows she thinks about  
What she would have seen if she landed on that corn field,  
She would have never experienced sites like these.  
She realizes that when life changes its not always that bad.
i startle
From my slumber
I found a drum
ordered pulse

as my eyes widen and drink
I behold the cosmos
Heaven closes in
on this humble clearing

i search for my quill
To no avail
For it lies with it's wheeled captor
beyond the forest edge

so i instead find my legs beneath me
Feel the rhythm within them
And rise
flight on the summer breeze

comets ring past
Supernovas quake creation
As i am hurled to the moon
and back to soft ground, daisies

from my fervent ballet
Uneasy limbs
I discover a peace
gentle rest

but as i lay my head again to the ground
I discover a new cadence
A symphony of crickets rings true
deep within the woods

i am drawn
Over roots
Through burrows
past streams

my path carries me
Gives pause as I behold a glade
And the wonders within
a storybooks living ink

fauns perform a pan pipe production
Giving bone to the Meliae's melody
Providing pace to the dryads dance
supplying shine to my tired eye

for aeons I gaze
Locked in trance
Sealed in wonder
until the unexpected

a doe
Weak legged
Bleary eyed
stumbles past the treeline

the music stops abruptly
Flashing crimson
Glistening fangs
and I gasp

a small sound no doubt
But enough just the same
All eyes turn
fireflies twinkle in empty sockets

I take flight
Over roots, through burrows, past streams
Trailed by a soft clatter
hooved feet

empty costumes of fur and pelt
Phantoms of musty summer air
Pervaded by a swift decay
and narrow persistence

finally I break thickets edge
And signal a passing trader
Transfer on his cart
I find refuge among the parchment

but as I lie my weary head
To meet the sandman's gaze
I find little comfort in sand dune clouds
and their long forgotten ways

for on their golden horizon
I spy a silhouette
Long ears with goat horns
and a beckoning slender finger

i startle
From my slumber
I found a drum
ordered pulse

a rhythm flows between translucent leaves
And past the forest edge
Around an ancient silhouette
and his shadow gilded friends
Enoch Lai

River-Valley

Hark dawn in mighty splendor!
Creatures awake in all their glory,
Night has fallen; day is climbing,
See the gleaming Sun evershining!

As the grass stretches to the warmth,
Feel the flowers yawning and sprouting,
With droplets of dew flowing down like diamonds,
All beaming with stunning billiancy.

The young are waking too and fro,
As mothers catch and kill their prey,
Shrieks and cries before silence comes,
The dead have gone somewhere far away.

Cries of mourning amidst dreary spirit,
Sadness reeks the plains of grass.
Revival comes to those once asleep--
Those awake don't weep.
Life flows through the lands,
Creatures emerge for the gleaming streams,
The young are joyful; night has fallen
Bask in the sunlight, till day dies
Yet spirit flies too high,
Noon flurries in too soon...
Dancing through the warming meadows;
The world becomes inviting!

Come play! Day is dying;
Roll down those hills of color,
With smells of rainbow stardust.
Before night comes. Before we hide.

Come play! Day will fall,
Hope to live, before night comes;
Hope to enjoy, before day dies;
Use your heart, before night comes live.
The war is fought! The war in the sky!
The sun sets before your eyes,
Blasts of color paint the heavens,
Alas! Darkness thrives.

Dots of light prick the ceiling,
Air whispers without feeling,
Flowers crumble; drooping down,
Night has come all too sound.

Time to rest, remember the day,
Close those eyes, there's always tomorrow,
Sleep my children, sleep too sound,
When sleep breaks, day will be found.
The Broken Soldier

He hefted his broken body
Onto a throne of dependence
For a life of battle, this was his ghastly sentence
And from that fight, a virus, spreading pollution in his head
A yearning, a craving, just one bullet, then...
Dead.

The Phantoms in the Shadows did haunt his very existence
The souls of fallen brothers begged him "Please, no more resistance"
His Counselors and Therapists had failed in consultation
For broken dreams and lying eyes polluted earthly continuation
But he had one wholesome shelter,
One sanctuary of repentance,
A small sturdy cassette tape with a melody of resistance

Its staccatos and fortés crafted a sculpture of a success
A Damsel full of grace in perilous distress
Here comes one dashing hero to fight to slay the beast
That guards the damsel’s prison
On her bones he’d like to feast
An epic battle rages
Each side slashing, stabbing, dodging
An even match for each sides wounds
Seem only to be enlarging
But finally, the valiant hero receives the upper hand
With a final push the beast head falls
There, amongst the sand
A joyous reunion, the maiden to her worried nation
And peace once more across the land
Because of the soldier’s heroic demonstration
And the hero does return
To his humble, peaceful dwelling
And finishes his life with love
The story to his children telling
His headphones in and eyes closed tight, the song comes to its resolution
   And a single tear runs down his cheek for his peaceful absolution
   His soul finally rests easy and soothes his mental wounds
His eyes close slowly, his dreams are filled with summer afternoons
   No more obsessing over his mental degradation
For all wounds heal and mental wounds have found their liberation
Music.
It's Loud here.
Sweat Glistens as people move to a beat.
Makeup smears and melts, I don't like it.
Why would anyone like it?
It's uncomfortable. My headphones provide zero comfort and I look at my ride. I would prefer to call an uber but they would never forgive me.
We have class tomorrow.
I have work tomorrow.
I watch with annoyance as my roommate's bright dyed hair swings around in the middle of the floor.
I believe she sees herself as a colorful bird.
I believe they all see themselves as colorful little peacocks.
She always did like the attention.
I just see vultures.

I'm ready to go, time and I are done playing games. I've waited long enough.
The door is there. So close
Almost there....
I feel her hand grab my wrist.

Crap.
"Oh come on and stay, I have something that will help you loosen UUUuupppp."
She reeked of alcohol.

And drugs.

Great.

"Here! Try it!"
Suddenly eyes were on me, wanting and watching. Like vultures.
Apparently they can all suddenly hear despite their music.

I hate being in the center. I can feel them waiting on edge, seeing if I will join.
Or if I were become their next meal.

Ugly little vultures. I swallowed.

It can't hurt. Only once.
Anything to get out of their nest,
Out of their gaze.

Nothing changed. How annoying this was, at least they had stopped bothering m-

Then it hits.

Ecstasy.

Music!
The sounds surrounds me!
Look at how the light bounces off their skin.
Pure beauty.
Were colors always this way?
Look at how beauty spreads over their face! I love it.
How could anyone not love this? It's magnificent.
I'm spinning to the center as the colorful birds fly around me.
Where did those vultures go?
I watch them fly.
I want to fly too.
I want to be a bird as well.
I'm surrounded by beautiful birds.

Flying
faster
Faster
Faster!
FASTER-

Black

Time
A strange idea. How long do I lay there?
Minutes, Hours?
Days, Weeks?
Months, Years even?

I'm not sure where I am.
I have found it fun to follow the birds.
They are so strange and colorful.

Except when it stops.
I don't like it when it stops.

I'm annoyed.

I know!
More.
More will help me.
How could a little more hurt me?

It doesn't feel magnificent anymore.
That's okay though.
I can afford some more
Just a little more and...

Ecstasy.
Perfection.
Joy.
Bliss.

What is time?
What am I?

I am nothing but another bird.
A colorful, beautiful, Flying Spinning
Faster
Faster
Faster please!
.
.
.

BLACK

Looks like I crashed
I look like such a sad bird
So broken.
It might be nice to stop flying now.

I have class ...
work...

Oh, look.

There they go.

My birds
My colorful
My beautiful ...

Vultures?
No so they were there all along I wonder where they took me

Such thoughts cannot reach me now

How sad I have become.

What a bright vulture I am now How silly I was

I am tired now I think it will be nice to stop flying

I'm tired
Maybe I should... Yes
sleep
To sleep sounds nice.

Funny, looks like it never was only once.
It felt like one
One very long
Very exciting
Very lonely time

I wish I had called the uber.
I wonder what kind of difference it would have had.

I have work

Oh well.

They are gone
I thought the birds would be nicer.

Oh well

Good bye my fellow vultures.

Good
Bye

Good
Bye

Goodnight
Thunder split the sky, sheets of rain folded in upon the small ship.

A flash of light pierced the thick fog, splintering the hull.

The roar of the water grew louder, and the deck sank nearer to the thrashing ocean.

A scream, long and guttural, as the surface of the ship lit up once again.

Flames sprouted from the starboard side, leaking through a charred and splintered hole.

The crew had no choice but to abandon the growing, roaring inferno,

Instead opting to be pulled into the roiling waves, sucked into a dark void.

Emerging from darkness,

I could feel the sun on my face,

I could see it through my closed eyelids.

A wooden floor moved under me.

Quickly recognizing the rhythm of it,

Swaying gently from side to side.

Listening through the wind,

I heard a series of squawks.

Six at a time,

At no consistent pace.

There must be land nearby,

A haven for the birds and I.

I blinked my eyes for the first time, having to pry them open from being sealed shut.
The world was a blur, crusted over in layers of salt and dried pus.

My eyes burned, blinking to try and clear the blurriness and pain, but to no avail.

The fuzzy blue waves mixed with the cloudy blue sky, with one searing white ball above me.

Days passed and nights fell silently,

Except for the lapping of waves.

My stomach grew loud.

My throat was parched.

My vision grew worse.

I could no longer feel the burning pain in my eyes.

The cadenza of squawks sounded once again, this time taunting me from behind.

The birds were free to fly away while I was stuck here, stranded on my splintered raft.

I looked in their direction, trying to catch a glance of where they were going,

But they were lost in my blotchy vision, blending with the endless blue.

The world grew dark once again, the sun fading from my sight.

This night was darker than the last,

And the one before that,

And the one before that.
There was no moon, nor any stars in the sky.

I couldn’t make out the shape of my hands in front of my face.

There was no horizon after the sun disappeared.

I couldn’t make out the shifting waves against the night sky.

There was nothing... just darkness.

I blinked twice... still nothing.

Coming once again to consciousness, I dared not to open my eyes.

Water lapped at my feet, but the ground beneath me no longer moved.

I rolled to the side, daring to investigate.

Off the edge of my prison, I fell into... sand?

I dug my hand in. It was warm and damp and solid.

I was on a beach, no longer on the ocean.

I could search for help now.

I opened my mouth to shout, but only a wheeze of air emerged.

I could feel the sunlight on my skin, the night had passed.

I opened my eyes... still nothing.

I grabbed at my eyes, scratching, tearing, ripping.

Feeling for a sheet that I could just pull away,
So I could see the world once more.

Thick warm liquid streamed down my cheeks,

Filling my nose with a bitter metallic scent.

My ears listened for any sign of help, only to be drowned out by a strong ocean wind.

My voice wailed in anguish, nothing but a faint rasp.

My legs stood in desperation, only to stumble and collapse.

My eyes flickered in denial, nothing but darkness.
Sara Schaible

But Still She Flies

Dark grey clouds wash over the plain,
Promising a chance of rain,
A little bird needs to fly home,
She left her chicks all alone,
She flies above the open skies,
Taking it in with golden eyes,
Soaring, swooping all around,
Never once touching the ground,
Suddenly, rain drops appear,
Filling her with worried fear,
Soon the rain will start to fall,
Curbing flight and heeding all,
Who dare to fly above the grass,
As the rain decides to pass,
Over this bird who’s heading home,
She left her children all alone,
They await their mother, who flies on the wing,
And all the comfort she shall bring,
But now the rain begins to pour,
She cannot wait a moment more,
The rain’s upon her in a gale,
It shall rip ships from their sail,
It has brought our bird down,
Throwing her upon the ground,
Her little chicks shall chirp tonight,
Asking about their mother's flight,
Can she make it home at all,
As the rain begins to fall,
Trees offer shelter for her to dry,
They tell her to go up and fly,
Under their branches she will find shelter,
Against the rain that flies helter-skelter,
She soars away to see her kin,
But then the rain begins again,
She scrapes the ground, but she still flies,
Fighting against the cloudy skies,
The rain threatens to pull her down,
But she will never touch the ground,
She sails high above the clouds,
And sends a cry of joy aloud,
She spots her nest, home to her kin,
She sails home among the din,
Now she lies down to rest,
Sleeping in her happy nest.
Garrett Walker

There be no place like that
Do not try and look
It is the stuff of stories
That's what they say,
But I'd say nay

I will go
To that palace of gold
Full of dancers and their colorful silks

I'll walk those
I'll sail their seas as if they were my own

I'll tame their oceans' mighty storms
I'll grab the wind and

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\begin{align*}
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a new place full of life

But for now

They are stories

That I'll soon make my own