



Mystical And Made of Glass

A COLLECTION OF POEMS WRITTEN BY THE YOUTH
IN THE ADOLESCENT PROGRAM AT VANDERBILT
PSYCHIATRIC HOSPITAL

Mystical and Made of Glass

**Poems from the Adolescents
of the Vanderbilt Psychiatric Hospital**

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This project is a collaboration between Southern Word and Vanderbilt Psychiatric Hospital. Southern Word is a local non-profit that offers creative education solutions for youth literacy and social-emotional development. All rights to work included here belong to the authors who have given permission for this publication. This chapbook is made possible through the support of the Metro Arts: Nashville Office of Arts + Culture, Tennessee Arts Commission, and National Endowment for the Arts.

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The poems and prose pieces included here were written by young people in the Adolescent Program at Vanderbilt Psychiatric Hospital in Nashville, TN, between August 2017 and June 2018. While in residence, youth between the ages of 13 and 18 attended weekly writing workshops facilitated by Southern Word. Stays in the program were typically brief, often only providing one workshop experience per youth. Some teens, however, were able to attend multiple during their stay. The ninety-minute workshops provided writing prompts, discussions, performance exercises, and open spaces for self-expression. Participants were offered the opportunity to submit work for this anthology (with a guardian's permission) that would be published under a pseudonym. Editing for space, readability, confidentiality, and illegible handwriting was sometimes necessary for inclusion.

Southern Word believes that through words, all youth can claim the power to determine their future. We are absolutely committed to providing young people, especially from underserved (and under-heard) communities, the opportunity to develop and publicly present their voices. We ask you to join us in celebrating the brave and often misunderstood youth of this anthology - their stories, struggles, hopes and healing. They all challenge the stigmas that surround mental health diagnoses, including the seeking of services and support.

For more information, referral, or crisis intervention assistance from Vanderbilt Psychiatric Hospital for children, adolescents and adults, please call (615) 320-7770 or visit www.vanderbilthealth.com.

To learn more about Southern Word programs or events, or to make a tax-deductible contribution to support the work, please contact us at info@southernword.org or visit www.southernword.org.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

ODE TO MY CHILDHOOD by Alan	1
UNKNOWN by Boss Player	2
BEGAN TO HEAL by Flower Child	3
PANDORA'S BOX by LMM	4
WHEN YOU HEAR THE WORD DYKE by Sea	5
FOR P. by Charlie R.	6
I'M GONNA DO ME by G.S.	7
HAVING AUTISM by Rosetta Jones	8
RIDE OR DIE by Lashai	9
A MILLION PLACES by Mattziel	10
HIM by Rose	11
FRUSTRATION by Alan	12
BISEXUAL FEMINIST by Anonymous	13
THE MS KID by Anonymous	14
UNTITLED by Anonymous	15
ANSWER ME by Anonymous	16
PSYCH HOSPITAL by Catvalentine 59	17
ODE TO MY DEPRESSION by Charlie R.	18
MISSING YOU by Aesthetics	19
PREACHER'S DAUGHTER by Preacher's Daughter	20
SCARED by Blossom	21
LIAR, LIAR by Charlie R.	22
HAIR by Catvalentine 59	23
UNTITLED by Jamal Jamal	24
ATONEMENT by Alan	25
BULLIED by Mattziel	26
ODE TO MY SEXUALITY by Finley Grae	27
BELIEVE IT by Alan	28
THE REFLECTION by Echo	29
ODE TO MY DEPRESSION by Lili Penn	31
THIS IS ME by Charlie R.	32

ODE TO MY CHILDHOOD

1

Trauma is broken china
the shards of my childhood lie scattered in the dirt
picking them up cuts through skin.
I keep them there because it hurts not to.

Today, my brain runs through thought after thought
voices of those who say, "I deserve it,"
as if my frilly purple dress had a say in the matter.
The voices of those who whisper, "It's not that bad,"
as if the bruises on my arms were papercuts.

And today, I fight back.

I fight back with my love of sun blonde hair and ocean blue eyes
with the strength I've gained from wading through tears
I shout to the heavens, "Thank you!"
Thank you for showing me what pain is
so I could understand the effect of kindness
and eventually,

cracked china is mended with gold.
Not only will I be whole again,
I will be better than ever before.

~ALAN

UNKNOWN

2

I am from seashell-filled
lamps and the copper kitchen.

I am from a beach.

I am from the smell of hickory
and oak trees.

I am from salmon,
mashed potatoes and broccoli.

I am from a caring mom.

I am from *I love you* and
Apologize now!

I am from an old hickory stump.

I am from a lit screen
with a character in mid-air
on pause.

I am from all kinds of music –
3 guitars and amps
on a rock on the floor.

I am from long overdue
paved roads.

I am from equivalence
of gender and race.

~BOSS PLAYER

BEGAN TO HEAL

3

Never interested in life,
been treated like trash.
Cut myself off from the world,
then got professional help.
Met soulmate-
I began to heal.

Uninterested child,
treated poorly –
isolated myself.
Got help.
Met soulmate.
Began healing.

Uninterested, poor.
Got help –
soulmate, healing.

Soulmate, healing.

Soulmate.

~FLOWER CHILD

PANDORA'S BOX

4

I am mythological
Santa Claus, Big Foot –
it's all the same.

I am the hope in the bottom of Pandora's Box.
The world will drop against my cold embrace.

Use light feet in a moon walk,
life's pressure is too much so we dab poison in our eyes.

The innocence of a Chuckie Doll,
the tranquility of a tattered teddy bear,
I'm on hot water, hot wheels
searching for home.

It's a never-ending test:

Hawaii, Tokyo
even Zootopia is better than the now.

My education is my value
and my heart
and my love are not factors.

My value is my rank.

No money,
no meaning.

That's how it is in life.

So I will strive for the yin in the yang
and embrace the reckless so that one day
the world will see hope
in Pandora's Box.

~ L M M

WHEN YOU HEAR THE WORD DYKE

5

After Marvin Tate

you think of gay bars, lesbian bars
bars of drunken stupor.
You think of back alleys bikers,
crazy bull dykes.

You think of women turning men away
turning their wives and girlfriends gay.
You think of roughed up girls
who "just need a good man."

What you do not see is those women
happy
sad
smart
dumb
and in love

protecting each other.

Those bull dyke bikers and their girlfriends
riding together
hand in hand.

FOR P.

6

Some people say you are toxic, but I know you are holy water.

Some people say you are not enough for me, but you make my heart whole.

Some people say you will hurt me, but you heal me.

When I look at you I see your hair, as beautiful as an orange sunset.

I look further down to your smile, how it lights up the room.

My eyes see your hands and I remember how they intertwine with mine like tree vines.

I put my head down on your chest to hear your heart beat match the bass of our love song that somehow sings everything I see in you.

This is an ode to my love.

~CHARLIE R.

I'M GONNA DO ME

7

I am not who
you think I am.
I am the sunshine that has been
to hell and back, I keep the sunflowers
alive with my tears like rain.
Trust that people will be loyal,
and get my sense of humor.
Just like Perry Jackson, imagine
that! A world where Harry Potter
is real and Pooh isn't just
a dream. So I'm gonna go
out c-walkin'
listening to my fight song.
If you choose to twerk
or dab
do as you please,
but I'm gonna do me.

~ G . S .

HAVING AUTISM

8

Having autism and trying to explain something is like trying to solve the world's most challenging algebra problem.

Having autism in the eyes of public is like a black and white photograph: plain and simple to see, but it's not like that at all.

Having autism and reading in a public space is like trying to write a story while listening to loud music, and having strangers approach you all at the same time.

Having autism can be as stressful as being stuck in traffic or trying to start up a dead car battery.

Having autism can feel like being in a crowded room while feeling isolated all at once.

Having autism also means dealing with meltdowns – fight or flight – which can happen anywhere at any time.

Having autism means people stare at you like you're weird or crazy.

Having autism can mean struggling for independence more than your peers because it's the least funded disability in America. It's like you are common but not common enough.

Having autism can be like living a horror movie but no one can see the demonic beings that you have to race all by yourself, and you can't seem to defeat them no matter how hard you try.

Having autism can mean that a small milestone to a stranger is a giant victory for you: like winning a Grammy or the Gold Medal at the Olympics. Like being 12 years old and finally learning to tie your shoe.

I have autism, and this is only half of what I go through.

~ROSETTA JONES

RIDE OR DIE

9

Baby, you know
oh, what I've been going through.
You ask again –
I thought you were my friend.
But I guess I was wrong.
Thought that you would be
by my side
ride or die
so why
would you lie?
You're supposed to be there
for me
when I need you most.
But you didn't pick up
when I called you
on the phone.
I try to sweet talk
without my loudest voice, but
now we're at the same stage
right back where we started, baby.

~LASHAI

A MILLION PLACES

10

Pink, fluffy masses
Gently floating
Ever so slowly
In a million places

A blue, clear ocean
swimming steadily
Rapidly flowing
Glittering in a million places

A great yellow ball
Shining constantly
Dazzling forever
Just brightens a million places

But it's too late
The clouds darken
The ocean no longer clear
The sun exploding in a million places
All because of us

It was inevitable
The beauty collapses
My heart starts pounding
At the thought
A Million Places Dead

~MATTZIEL

HIM

11

I am not who you think I am. I am the person that wakes up to the smell of pancakes and bacon, hoping he will be there. He makes my heart melt like buttered toast when he smiles or says my name.

His love is like a fire starter to my heart, making me heat up by just whispering *I love you*.

The song 'Love' square-dances in my mind remembering all the things we did together.

I see a picture of my dad and remember he's just as protective as a father should be to his daughter. The songs 'Hey Jude' and 'B.E.D.' would make me want to twerk and dab,

but I know I'm not happy enough to do so.

His loyalty betrayed me.

He stabbed me in the heart with his pocket knife called Trust.

~ROSE

FRUSTRATION

12

The feeling of frustration crawls within your flesh, just under your skin

as if there are roaches skittering from the corners of your home, their tiny spindly legs scraping against the hair of your arms – yet you are frozen in places as you lose your mind to the itching of their microscopic claws.

Locked in a square room, water slowly bubbling to the ceiling. As time passes liquid fills your shoes, soaking your clothes. The chilly embrace of the ocean's depths cradling you in a sadistic hug. You frantically slosh around in hopes for an escape, but the small waves of water against your skin is all you have to accompany you.

There's a key to the rusty cellar door of the room you're trapped in, but it's tightly sealed in a metal box. Sweat spreads from your palms as you pull harshly, frantically at its lid. The metal turns warm under your struggle – pressure turning your fingers from peach to an irritated red.

You know it's hopeless, but the feeling of your nails in between the cracks of the container teases your chance of freedom.

That's the point, isn't it? To have something you so desperately need in front of you and being unable to reach it – tantalizingly sweet.

Cruel, isn't it?

~ALAN

BISEXUAL FEMINIST

13

Some people say you are different, but
I know you are unique.
People wish they had
your laid-back personality.
Your feminist ways are
going to change
the world.
Your sexuality
doesn't makes you confused –
all these things make you
you.

~ANONYMOUS

THE MS KID

14

Deep pain in the gut
I am like that
the deep wrenching pain
in your soul.

On rainy days
blow bubbles

blowing all MS and
pain away.

Brussel sprouts
squash, asparagus

never really quite
made me into
the person that I
am.

Owls are interesting

the way they turn
their necks –
pain throws life,
don't trip.
Maybe we all had
love before.
The intimacy
of first kiss

lips moistening
as you taste
your first love.

Living is painless
if you cross your heart
and wait for a rainbow.

~ANONYMOUS

UNTITLED

15

I am not who you think I am
I am more than just a dusty old book.
I am the pain you feel from the glock or
from life itself.
I am alive and live on Earth.
Chilay is what they say when they see me –
am I really that cool?
Can you imagine the smell of pumpkin spice?
I smell like that cause I'm just that nice.
You see?
Or just think of biting into an apple
I am just that satisfying.
I have a bright imagination
I can see beyond my eyes,
like the stars in the sky that is all our fault.
A guy named Benny handed me a Bible and
I loved it.
From that moment on, I believe there is so much more
than pain in life.

~ANONYMOUS

ANSWER ME

16

I feel so gone
I know

It's just so hard to grow

I look fine but
I'm on the line
Asking if anyone's there

Answer me

Answer me!

Don't make me scream
It'll hurt your ears

Believe me

I hear them

~ANONYMOUS

PSYCH HOSPITAL

17

Imagine waking up not in your own bed, waking up in a place where you are supposed to get better.

Imagine going back to school in a week and everyone asking, "Where were you?"

Imagine feeling happy one minute and wanting to die the next.

Imagine not being able to wear certain clothes because you are a threat to your own body.

Imagine only being able to see your family two hours a day.

Imagine feeling like a prisoner, like you're trapped – even the windows are locked up because you may jump out.

Imagine being young in this place.

Imagine yourself being a threat to everyone around you.

Just imagine- because I hope it never happens to you.

ODE TO MY DEPRESSION

18

Some people say you're overbearing
but I know it is compassion
they misinterpret.

Some people say you are too sensitive
but I know you have a bigger heart
than most.

Some people say you're too clingy
but I know you're searching
for a sense of love.

Some people say you don't understand
your emotions. But I know
your mental illness opens doors
that everyone else has locked.

~CHARLIE R.

MISSING YOU

19

I look over at the photo of my dad and

I no longer feel protected.

My loyalty and love for you was so deep

and I protected you from everything

I could. I remember how goofy you dabbled,

the way you twerked and when

we would square dance together.

I listen to "Hey Jude" for hours crying

because all the lies you told me.

You were the fire starter in me until

our love died and the fire faded away.

~AESTHETICS

PREACHER'S DAUGHTER

20

After Marvin Tate

When you hear the words "Preacher's Kid"
you think of Virgin Mary
her son Jesus, The King of Kings,
The Lord of Lords.
You think of the girl
wearing long dresses

trying to stay modest
so nobody talks bad about her,
always doing something to help.
You think of Toby Mack
all of his perfection.

What you can't see is we are not perfect
we all make mistakes, all have struggles
in this world. You don't see our life
situations – at home might be good
might be bad – we all trying
to survive in this crazy world.

The Preacher's kid doesn't have it easy
people are always watching, trying
to find something wrong, trying to ruin
the Preacher Man's reputation
no matter the cost.

~PREACHER'S
DAUGHTER

SCARED

21

Bruised and broken,
lost in the dark
but scared of the light.
Alone and unprotected,
supposedly smart,
violated by the trusted ones.

Broken by trusted.
Scared but smart.
Light makes me
unprotected and alone.

Broken but scared,
light makes alone.

Scared but light.

Scared.

~BLOSSOM

LIAR, LIAR

22

Screaming and fighting
words spewing like lightning
things we couldn't take back.
Yes, you were toxic, that's a fact
but my heart still loves you.
Kissing and hugging
playing video games and feeling
the controller buzzing –
hands intertwined like
the flowers you got me
on Valentine's.
Soon the flowers started to die
as you started to lie
it was no longer the video games
you were playing.
It was me, my heart and brain.
The days got rainier
the nights seemed longer
and my heart grew fonder.
I ached for your touch
but my brain clutched chains
around my heart.
Once I saw you as art
now nothing but a memory
a shadow that passes by.

I wish you wouldn't have lied.

~CHARLIE R.

Why is hair so important to society?
Why is me having curly hair so
different than me having naturally
straight hair? Why is it
when my hair is long you
automatically assume that it is a weave?
Why is it that when we are alone
having curly hair is so scary
then another white person
makes having curly hair okay?
Why, America, why?

To my girls or guys with curly hair
your hair is so beautifully unique!
Your hair is as curly as
a cute baby pig's tail or
an adorable twirled ribbon.
My hair is as beautiful as
any other person's hair.
If you want to color your hair,
go for it! If you want
to cut your hair and someone
calls you gay then they
are the ones that are truly struggling.
It's not you – our curls
are not for you.

UNTITLED

24

You wouldn't believe the way it happened! I was super ashy looking for lotion but decided to eat Lunchables instead. I was Millie Rockin' my way through New York like a boss eating waffles, pizza, and chicken. I had to do anything to look alive. I'd shout to be independent. But I'll never be dorky so congratulate me for my humor.

~JAMAL JAMAL

ATONEMENT

25

The subtle scowls and annoyed expression
is all they seem to see – red hoodies

like glass shards to the touch.
If you touch you get hurt

they all eventually learn.
Behind the sarcastic tongue I seem

to wield bitter thoughts not meant
for speaking. They don't know

the filthy streets, the filthy hands
I was raised with. Fun loving little girl

drowned in tragedy that cut her hair
and hardened her heart.

From light pink dresses to
dusty ash trays, there's a reason

for the hostility in her eyes.
The snarling fangs of her teeth

grate together, not to intimidate
but to soothe,

Because to hurt is to atone
for the sins of a broken child.

~ALAN

BULLIED

26

I'm not in the group.

My mustard hair blows through
the wind as I gain acceptance
that it's just my time.

I was young when I witnessed
a black boy named Aslan's death
and I now know
that it's not unusual.

I watch the other children
do Irish tap-dancing,
and the fire
of the chartreuse star above
blinds me as I lay
against the plum tree.
I, too, fade.

~MATTZIEL

ODE TO MY SEXUALITY

27

Some people say I am sinning, but I know
I am choosing true love. My options
are as open as an ice cream shop
and I'm choosing the best flavor.

Some people say my beliefs make
them feel too uncomfortable
to be my friend, but I know
I am as unbiased as a newborn.

Some people say I am too young
too naïve to know myself like this
but I know I can preach my own
truth with the bravery of a Gryffindor.

Some people say it's unattractive
but I know I don't have to look
a specific way for someone to love me.

Some people want me to follow
their standards but I choose
to find my own love in a world
of false and forced relationships.

~FINLEY GRAE

BELIEVE IT

28

Purple plum pieces litter the countertop.
Dabs of mustard yellow paint stained
my off-white sweatpants.
Soft jazz playing quietly from the apartment
above mine, my hands twitch with delight.

As I sit and compare my art to my peers,
my self-esteem shatters.
I think to myself that it's not unusual
to ponder death, as is the same
with lacking acceptance of your skills.

Perhaps I'll dye my hair chartreuse
once more. In my time of need
the thoughts come in to me
like shadows of black dogs.
Irish whiskey breath tap dancing
with the devils in my head.
I read Harry Potter to replace them,
but they come back again.

But like fires and stars, I still burn bright.
As of land and sea, I am ever so.
Nothing can change that I am a child
of this earth, and I am meant
to be here.

I'll keep reminding myself
until I believe it.
And you believe it.
One day
I'll believe it.

~ALAN

THE REFLECTION

29

She watched as shadows passed
Mystical and made of glass
She may not know the outside world
She hides, such a fragile girl

She looked out the window
And watched the birds fly
She looked at the door
Still terrified

Am I real?
Or am I not?
Am I troubled?
Is she all that I got?

She jumped through the thoughts
All in her head
Over rivers, under trees
Then crawled into bed

When she woke
It started again
The blades started to speak
And the wolves closed in

In this darkness
She saw no hope
Not a light, not a spark
Just an empty rope

Suddenly it all fell

All loneliness and despair
When she saw Life well
It had all decayed

Her smile turned visible
Her eyes became brighter
Her words became louder
Her days became lighter

Tears became a sign of Fear
That no one will stay
She wanted to disappear
Before they faded away

It became a cycle
Of despair and unrest
Leaving her confused
In one giant mess

I'll tell you a secret
One that no one knows
Say that you'll keep it:

She is the person in the mirror that I have watched grow

ODE TO MY DEPRESSION

31

Abnormal.

Insane.

Messed Up.

I am not these things.

I am normal.

I have sanity.

I am not messed up.

They condemn me.

They call me names.

They give me a title.

I am not to be condemned.

My name is not freak.

My title is not "Suicidal Disorder."

Yes,

I am depressed

but I am still human.

I am still normal.

I am still me.

~LILI PENN

THIS IS ME

32

There are blue liquor bottles and
silver beer cans on the counter
and table.

My mother shouting, "Go grab a beer
your life isn't that bad!"

Walking out of this hell hole.

Nothing but fences surrounding
the outside, trash from the neighbor's
old rusty 60's truck.

Willow trees I used to swing on like
Tarzan.

Where is everyone?

I travel 15 minutes to
cigarette smoke, lucky 8 balls and
old peanut shells littering the floor.

Sports on every TV.

Curly black hair and brown work boots
wrinkled skin,
smelling like firewood when my face
is on his chest –

tight hugs.

"Go home."

~CHARLIE R.

