

**First Place, Poetry**  
**Grades 10-12**

***“The Unknown: Silence and Peace,” Noa Ní Aoláin Gross***

Only after the roar can the Quiet exist.

    Hearty laughter can stem solely from the stomach,  
        bubble its way out to encircle the table,  
                and captivate the shining night lights overhead.

    On nights, where the world is explored from a corner.

    The past, once laid to rest, gives way to a new leaf.

Within the pauses, the Quiet begins as a hush.

    Conversations turn to whispered mummers under  
        hastily made forts of pillows and dreams. Kids,  
                palms brushing, curl-up under rustling blankets.

    Tired eyes fail to hold on instead replaced with yawns.

    A last weary breath fading into the silence.

The Quiet gently grows, granting moments of peace.

    A house settles into its foundations, grateful.

        For the stillness which follows allows the floorboards  
                a breath. At last, rest from their unending labor.

        Dust settles into the rugged lines etched on wood.

    The house slowly slips into the deepest slumber.

The Quiet calmly takes hold, filling the empty.

    The faded smell of baked bread curls and spins slowly,  
        shepherded out the window left slightly ajar.

        The scent, once embedded in the home now replaced.

    Silence saturates the space left open. The house,  
    its fabric has changed, a lull at long last settles.

Little remains, the Quiet is practically full.

    Two candles, the final testament, extinguish  
        a waft of smoke their sole remaining mark. The last roar  
                before deafening silence. All-encompassing,  
                unheard, deafening, the silence is completed.

    A sound so rare, it has yet to be heard.

        Quiet.

*Noa Ní Aoláin Gross is in 11<sup>th</sup> grade at St. Paul Academy. Her interests cover a wide range of activities--from competitive debate and writing and photography to working with the Jewish affinity group at her school to develop a cookbook.*