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**Level II Semifinalist**

***Letter to Gerald Manly Hopkins and his poem, “The Leaden Echo and The Golden Echo”***

Dear Mr. Gerald Manly Hopkins:

I remember walking home from school one day, quickly as always, with head down and my hair blowing in the wind. I didn't even notice that breeze teasing the strands of my blond hair; a whisper, trying to get my ear and tell me what I was missing. All I cared about was getting home to do my homework—maybe dance—and fall into bed exhausted. The stereotypical day of Jane Farrell. “Oh,” I thought, “maybe my mom will call me over for a chat about what happened at school, or my grades. Perhaps she would talk to me about how I needed to work on math or how I'm not going to be prepared for high school.” And those are the things that would run through my head, day and night, like a tornado, whirling bits of information around in a storm of dust and junk. Other ideas: things that have been distracting my brain from the truth. Then, one day, after the run-of-the-mill walk home from school, and no notice of the world I found grey around me, I discovered my sister in her room lying on her belly with her legs twirling up in the air while reading something that belonged to one of her binders full of poetry she saved from the days she had her favorite teacher, Mr. Brown. Mr. Brown was one of those special teachers that every other teacher wants to be. He changed my sister's and my brother's perspectives on life, and although I never had the pleasure of being in his class, he was the stem of the flower that led the roots—you and your writing—which changed my life, too. Those poems she read are now my favorites because of the truth that radiates from them and how they inspire me. They are, “The Leaden Echo and The Golden Echo.”

To stumble upon your poems was one of the best things that happened to me. Now I walk home from school aware of the birds and the bees, the grass, the flowers and the wind. I never miss anything. I have taken the key found within “The Golden Echo” and used it to open up a chest full of color, life and happiness. All the worthless pieces of junk that floated around in my brain have been swept out with the rest of the dust clouds during now what I call my “spring cleaning.” While reading the poems, the words printed in black ink turned to gold and trickled down to my heart, opening my eyes to the world I was missing.

I compare “The Leaden Echo” to winter. Winter is cold, the land is barren and trees are bare, bone dry and seem dead. All the birds and animals are tucked away in their own place and, when it snows, all is white. Not so many people can see beauty in all that. But, it is present, as beauty always is, to those who recognize it.

White often resembles purity. Since snow is white and pure, most people recognize the beauty of winter in its pure, white, sparkling snow. Then, when human existence is shown upon it—via a path of footprints—purity is contaminated. The beauty disappears, undone by our own devices. And we must wait for Nature to grace us with new snow and give us another chance to recapture our innocence. “Back beauty, keep it, beauty, beauty, beauty...from vanishing away.” I have not always appreciated the beauty in Nature. I remember I used to boil water and pour the hot liquid all over the snow; anything to make it melt and rid myself of winter. We need beauty or else our lives would be bland and hard to live. Without it we see the worst side of life after youth, only age's evils. We would see decaying easier and get older, thinking only of the growing digits instead of the pleasure that can come with older age, such as grandchildren and wisdom. That's when my favorite part of “The Leaden Echo” comes to mind:

Be beginning: since, no, nothing can be done  
To keep at bay  
Age and age's evils, hoar hair,  
Ruck and wrinkle, dropping, dying, death's worst, winding sheets, tombs and  
Worms, and tumbling to decay

It all speaks to me of death and getting older. Then "The Golden Echo" comes forth: Spring. Everyone rejoice and thanks God. "Give beauty back, beauty, beauty, beauty, back to God, beauty's self and beauty's giver." With beauty regained and noticed we choose to live a happy life, and we can make the most of the gifts and talents brought to light by it and grow into what we were meant to be. All this I have been taught by you.

The second I stopped reading those two poems was the second I resolved to make the best of what I have learned, and use my talents the way they were meant to be used, not disregarding beauty but feeding it with what I can add. And that's exactly what I have done since that day. I enjoy everything in my life. I get good grades, not because I study excessively, but because of my love for learning. While talking to my mother about these poems I also learned that my great-grandmother was quite a poet!

I am often reading other poetry with my sister-which cultivates my brain and improves my writing. I hope that one day I might follow in your footsteps and use my writings and experiences to inspire others as well as teach them all I have learned from you, I shall always be looking forward to the beauty and wisdom that my future years will bring.

Sincerely,

**Jane Farrell**