

## Battle Song

My heart beats a steady, anticipated rhythm. Every breath is measured, a count closer to the final battle. Fate turns its eyes toward me as the other competitors look on. It is finally my turn. This is a test of fortitude, of dexterity, of creativity. This is a test of wisdom, of balance, of courage. The prize for success is honor and glory; the punishment for failure is shame. We are all majestic warriors, clad in elaborate armor. As individuals, we face the other competitors, united only in our struggle against the ultimate challenger, who now stands on its three legs in the center of the battlefield, its polished dark body gargantuan, intimidating. We are all enemies. In this ephemeral struggle, friends mean nothing.

I hear my name, two short, simple words. Immediately the room seems to close in on me. My heart pounds. Adrenaline courses through my veins.

My name echoes and then fades into the stillness of an anxious audience as they clap respectfully in an attempt to give me courage. It only brings me more fear. My heart beats faster. I bow, and as I straighten up, my eyes find my parents, watching, smiling encouragingly.

*For honor.*

My trembling legs carry me into the center of the battlefield, footsteps echoing, where I meet my foe. I can sense the tension in the expectant crowd: *Will this one rise or fall?*

As the applause dies down, I take my stance, and we analyze each other. I take a few deep, quivering breaths and begin.

*Start easy*, I tell myself, and I do. This isn't too bad. My hands, despite their uncertainty, dance across the patchwork of light and dark, weaving both into an artwork of its own. From only two colors, from only eighty-eight different threads, infinite possibilities arise. This is

potential. And I will carry it to where it needs to be. This is a battle. This is a dance. This is art, and art is my lifeblood.

One wrong step, and it could also be my destruction.

Distraction arises. The thoughts threaten to throw me off course. *No*. I push it away. I have a battle to win. There is only black and white in this accursed world. The only gray comes from elsewhere. From inside. My fury, my courage, my determination. They are one, a swirling chaos of gray fog, distinguishing no sides, channeling their power into light and dark alike. Both are equally important to my task. Our battlecries resonate, but as time wears on, from chaos is born order. They blend into rhythm, blend into melody, blend into song. We are living, breathing poetry. We are a battle song, a conversation between right and left, loud and soft, light and dark.

We are opposites.

But we can still learn to be friends.

A few minutes pass, but it feels like hours. Gradually, the challenger begins to warm up to my presence, though I sense its skepticism. We won't be able to figure everything out right away, but we still place our trust in one another. We support each other, no longer opponents. We weave colors within colors, a rainbow of dreams within black and white. This is our song. We will share it with the world. The patchwork becomes a tapestry, a tale told on organized threads of lilting music and tangled knots of disorderly madness. It is a story, retold thousands of times throughout hundreds of years. But we can make it unique. Two - no, three - spirits now dwell within it: the heart of the creator, and the hearts of the two performers, dancing in union.

The threads of song keep spinning and spinning. The world disappears. The battlefield is our stage, and then it is the universe. I lose myself in the sea of song. My fingers are the only part

of my body left, dashing roundabout with a subtle grace that only children and artists can understand. The spotlights disappear. The crowd is nonexistent. The tension in my chest, the rapid heartbeat, the anxiety in my head...none of that is here now, just my friend and I.

Our song reaches its climax, the final crescendo. *It is almost the end*, I can hear my subconscious screaming. *Let us make it an ending that they will never forget!*

Determined, my hands obey. We spin more colors than ever before, and the universe is a sea of colors, whirling about in a cloud of vivid emotions. It is our love, our persistence, our understanding. And I want to share it with them, in the last moments that we have together, so that they too can feel our world of color. Our world of music. Our world of song.

After all, I might never feel this ecstatic again.

My chest heaves with exhaustion, my body shaking, as the last notes fade into silence.

And then the world is filled with sudden light as the crowd explodes.

The show is over.

Overwhelmed, I look out over the sea of eager faces, cheering and clapping, their eyes filled with light and inspiration. Even the competitors are smiling. My new friend, a Steinway & Sons grand piano, rests beside me, its polished black body shining with mutual pride. Together, we bask in the glory of our shared victory.

In a world of black and white, I have finally found my balance. I have finally found my gray.

Inside, I know that in a way, we all have won.