

# BULGARIAN CREATIVE WRITING COMPETITION



2023

## TABLE OF CONTENTS

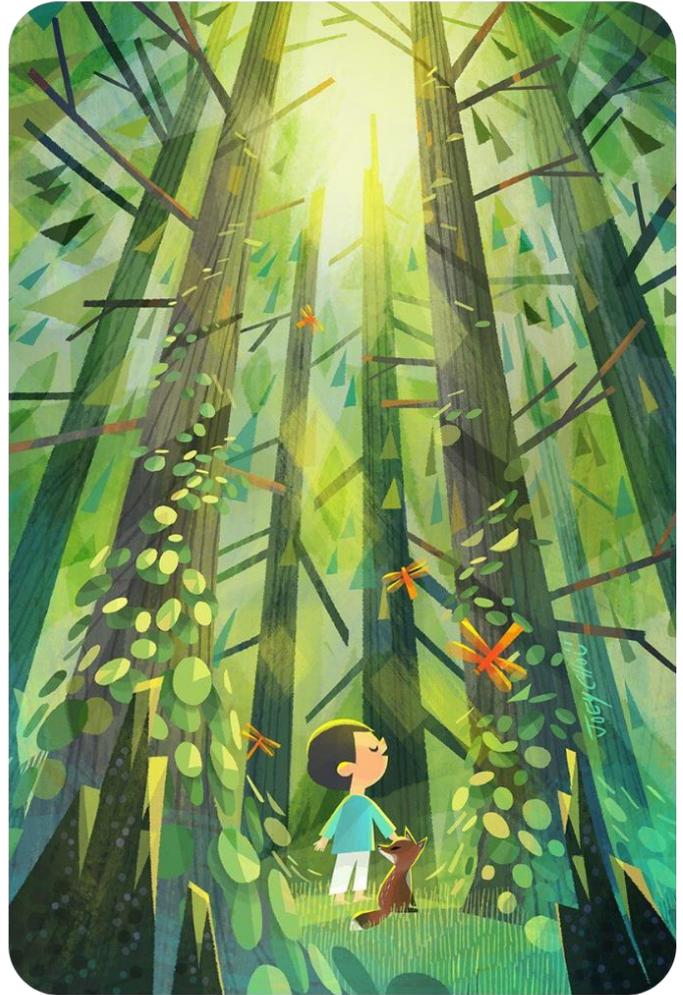
The Concert of the Happy Forest.....	3
6 <sup>th</sup> grade, 1 <sup>st</sup> place, Adrian Georgiev, ESPA School, Sofia .....	3
The Adventures of an Ostrich Feather.....	4
6 <sup>th</sup> grade, 2 <sup>nd</sup> place, Tsvetelina Krumova, St. Kliment Ohridski Math and Science High School, Montana.....	4
Can You Keep a Secret?.....	5
6 <sup>th</sup> grade, 2 <sup>nd</sup> place, Wadaan Hameed, TME Regents Park Campus, Islamabad .....	5
The Concert of the Happy Forest.....	7
6 <sup>th</sup> grade, 3 <sup>rd</sup> place, Nikola Nikolov, Paisii Hilendarski High School of Mathematics, Sofia .....	7
The Boy Who Could Speak to Birds.....	8
7 <sup>th</sup> grade, 1 <sup>st</sup> place, Boryana Bozhanova, 43 <sup>rd</sup> Hristo Smirnenski Secondary School, Sofia .....	8
Suddenly, the Clouds Turned Green.....	10
7 <sup>th</sup> grade, 2 <sup>nd</sup> place, Roan Gochev, Baba Tonka Mathematics High School, Ruse.....	10
The Boy Who Could Speak to Birds.....	11
7 <sup>th</sup> grade, 3 <sup>rd</sup> place, Boris Geshev, Ivan Vazov 31 <sup>st</sup> School for Foreign Languages and Mathematics, Sofia.....	11
In Love with a Statue .....	13
8 <sup>th</sup> grade, 1 <sup>st</sup> place, Bozhidar Tamanov, Peyo Yavorov High School, Petrich.....	13
Is There a Pilot on the Plane?.....	15
8 <sup>th</sup> grade, 2 <sup>nd</sup> place, Alina Boyanova, First Private Mathematic High School, Sofia .....	15
In Love with a Statue .....	16
8 <sup>th</sup> grade, 3 <sup>rd</sup> place, Yong Park, Acad. Boyan Petkanchin High school, Haskovo .....	16
Are You Coming Too? .....	17
9 <sup>th</sup> grade, 1 <sup>st</sup> place, Marina Kotarova, 91 <sup>st</sup> German Language High School, Sofia .....	17
She Looked Around Quickly to See if Anything Had Been Taken .....	19
9 <sup>th</sup> grade, 2 <sup>nd</sup> place, Vesela Marinova, Plovdiv Language High School, Plovdiv .....	19
Are You Coming Too? .....	21
9 <sup>th</sup> grade, 3 <sup>rd</sup> place, Lachezar Toparov, Yane Sandanski High School, Sandanski.....	21
Don't Cry Because It's Over. Smile Because it Happened.....	23
10 <sup>th</sup> grade, 1 <sup>st</sup> place, Nadezhda Zlatareva, Plovdiv Language High School, Plovdiv .....	23
Dance Without Me .....	25
10 <sup>th</sup> grade, 2 <sup>nd</sup> place, Neda Hristova, Uwekind International School, Sofia .....	25

Go Wild for a While .....	27
10 <sup>th</sup> grade, 3 <sup>rd</sup> place, Elitsa Aneva, 91 <sup>st</sup> German Language High School, Sofia.....	27
Go Wild for a While .....	29
Special Mention Award, 10 <sup>th</sup> grade, Niya Pehlivanova, Peyo Yavorov Language High School, Silistra.....	29
Memoirs of an Old Wig.....	30
11 <sup>th</sup> grade, 1 <sup>st</sup> place, Asen Avramov, Prof. Dr. Assen Zlatarov Language High School, Haskovo.....	30
Chaos is a Friend of Mine .....	33
11 <sup>th</sup> grade, 2 <sup>nd</sup> place, Liana Bebina, Geo Milev English Language High School, Ruse .....	33
Chaos is a Friend of Mine .....	35
11 <sup>th</sup> grade, 3 <sup>rd</sup> place, Mihaela Mihailova, Yordan Radichkov Foreign Languages High School, Vidin	35
Chaos is a Friend of Mine .....	37
Special Mention Award, 11 <sup>th</sup> grade, Selin Myumyun, Thomas Jefferson Second English Language High School, Sofia .....	37
“Just Say It” You Silently Reminded Yourself.....	38
12 <sup>th</sup> grade, 1 <sup>st</sup> place, Jeren Aпти, Petko Slaveikov Secondary School, Kardzhali .....	38
We’re Just Tiny Freckles on the Cheek of the Universe.....	39
12 <sup>th</sup> grade, 2 <sup>nd</sup> place, Silvia Srebrevа, Acad. Kiril Popov High School of Mathematics, Plovdiv.....	39
We’re Just Tiny Freckles on the Cheek of the Universe.....	41
12 <sup>th</sup> grade, 3 <sup>rd</sup> place, Alexandra Stoyanova, Bertolt Brecht School for Foreign Languages, Pazardzhik .....	41

# The Concert of the Happy Forest

6<sup>th</sup> grade, 1<sup>st</sup> place, Adrian Georgiev, ESPA School, Sofia

I hear some music far away  
I've been hearing it all day  
It isn't pop or rock  
It doesn't give out any shock  
Everyone is in a good mood  
Not a single person has been rude  
Here are the sounds that I can hear  
From the happy forest, which is near  
It first started of from a little tweet  
Tweet, tweet tweet tweet tweet  
It sounded very neat  
Followed by a river splish  
Splish, splash, splish, splash  
another sound followed as quick as a flash  
A woodpecker pecking on a tree  
Clickity clack clickity clack  
The first few sounds impressed me  
A squirrel sprinted from twig to twig  
Crack crunch crack crunch  
A mole then started to dig  
He took a worm and another  
Wiggle pop wiggle pop  
Then joined his brother  
BOOM! ROOOOAR!!!  
Oh no! It's a bear  
He seems to care  
They were too loud  
That natural crowd  
Here he comes!  
But wait! Are those drums!  
The music will complete  
Not without old fish Pete  
Ooooh ah ooh ah ah  
It seems like Pete wants to sing



He is a vocal king  
The town folk have heard the song  
And decided to play ping pong  
Ping Pong Ping Pong  
The forest concert is finally done  
It's time for everyone to have some fun  
The forest gives out lots of joy  
Every girl with every boy  
Will dance around tonight



# The Adventures of an Ostrich Feather

6<sup>th</sup> grade, 2<sup>nd</sup> place, Tsvetelina Krumova, St. Kliment Ohridski Math and Science High School, Montana

One windy day an ostrich was peacefully walking around until an African boy and his two friends started chasing him around. The ostrich was scared for his life. He thought that they would murder him, cook him and eat him but instead they did something worse! They all got on his back and started riding him. "This is such a bad behavior! I'm not a horse!" the ostrich said to himself. He wasn't having fun at all but the African boys were. Because the bird was running in a circle and trying to shake the boys off his back, he made them feel like they were on one of those big rollercoasters that they have at fairs in rich towns. While he was doing that a beautiful red and pink feather fell of his body. At that same moment the wind blew the feather away. It took it to the town, around the street and then to the small airport. There it somehow ended up in a plane and you can never guess who was in it... The one and only Princess Elizabeth and Prince Charles! They were on a business trip to Africa and now they were on their way back to England.

After a five hour flight the feather found itself in 'Heathrow Airport'. How in the world did it travel all the way to London? With the princess and the prince? Well, nobody knows and nobody ever will! As Elizabeth was walking out of the plane, she saw the feather laying on the floor. She picked it up and said to her husband "Charles, look! It's beautiful. Do you think it would look good on a hat?". "I don't know." Said the tired prince. He didn't feel like saying much because he was tired after the long flight. The princess put it in her bag and walked out of the plane. She and Charles got in a black car that took them to Buckingham Palace.

When they walked in Elizabeth walked over to the phone, dialed a number and put it to her ear. It was her stylist. "Hello! I found this beautiful feather one our trip to Africa. It's red and pink and I think that it would look great on a hat." she said. "Interesting! How about I come over and give it a look. I will sew it on something right away!" her stylist said. "I'll be waiting!" Elizabeth simply said.

In less than an hour the princess' stylist arrived. He brought with him a peach-colored skirt, coat and hat. When Elizabeth showed him the feather he gasped. The stylist took the feather and sewed it on the hat right away.

The next day the princess had a very important day. She was going to lunch with her sister Princess Margaret. In the morning she woke up got ready and got dressed. When she went out there were a lot of paparazzi waiting for her and soon, she was all over the newspapers. Her ostrich feather hat even made it to the cover of British Vogue magazine and it has been called one of the most famous hats of all time ever since.



## Can You Keep a Secret?

6<sup>th</sup> grade, 2<sup>nd</sup> place, Wadaan Hameed, TME Regents Park Campus, Islamabad

My name is Ray, Ray Blue. I was born in a poor village. My parents were adventurers who frequently got guests and gifts. My mother's name is Bella Blue while my father's name is Leon Blue. By the age of 3, I was strong, smart and overall a perfect child.

I travelled with my mother to the capital of The Wiron Kingdom, which is where we lived. While in the carriage me and my mother discussed what magical ability I would get. Since she was a water mage, we thought I would get something like ice or water. In this world there were two types of people, the ones with magic, and the ones with either swordsmanship skills or none at all. My father was a knight.

We reached the capital called Dormo, where we went to the Dormo Magical Academy. The city was huge, glorious and looked very expensive. It was like nothing I had seen before. The academy itself was the most gorgeous building in the place. But we went to a building to the side which wasn't as expensive or impressive. We waited there for about half an hour with other kids. Each time somebody came back they were in tears, sobbing loudly. "Ray Blue? Is Ray Blue here?" said the assistant.

We stood up and walked into the room. In there we saw an old man wearing black robes. He came up to us and asked us to sit. He then put his hand on my head and his eyes started to glow. I blacked out and saw thunder and lightning. I opened my eyes and I saw the wizard disappointed.

He said I had no magical ability, which I doubted. How dare he say so? I got on the table and walked towards him. "How dare you say that! My mother is a water mage, I should be one too!" For a split second I saw a smile. He then turned into a frown and told us to leave.

When we returned home my father was overjoyed to hear me say I wanted to be a knight. I couldn't be a mage since I had no abilities, I decided to be a knight. I didn't want to be some bystander letting somebody else do all the saving. He gave me a wooden sword and we practiced. If I was to hit him once with the sword during training, I would be ready.

We practiced every day for a year. But I couldn't come close. I needed to get ready for the test that would come in the next year. My father had been called in the frontlines shortly after my 4<sup>th</sup> birthday. We were currently in war with the darkness. The darkness was a sort of plague that infected anybody who came in contact with it. People would usually die after days of suffering but some would resist and the darkness took over their body, this is what we call a true infected.

My father left me a training doll which could go to level 10, but he said not to go above level 1. I trained every day with it and eventually I could defeat level 3. I practiced every day.

So here comes the part about the secret, please tell me you can keep it?

1 year later and the test arrived. I passed easily along with one other kid, it was Jack. My friendly rival, the only other person who knows my secret.

We went into a carriage with a bunch of other kids who came from different towns. Eventually we reached a city called Trono, where I spent the next 10 years of my life. I learnt all the important stuff from reading from controlling Ki, but not practicing, since we weren't allowed.

Ki was the internal energy in humans. While mages harness power from outside, us Knights harness from the inside. It makes us stronger and stuff.

Alright after graduating from the knight school in Trono, we went to Thormo, where we would study to be knights. Here I found out I had lightning magical abilities, which had never been seen before.

Eventually me and my friends found out that the city was overrun by people working for the darkness, in which they brought destruction to Thormo, me and my friends were the only ones powerful enough to stop them.

This is when I revealed my lightning to my friends. I took over the city of Thormo and made it my own. I travelled with Jack and my new friend Lilly where we travelled to the darkness' territory and defeated where we finally end everything.

I returned to my city and lived the rest of my years there in peace, helping the world when they needed me the most. Nobody else knew my secret. But during my battle I got teleported somewhere else where the mysterious man said I would be reborn in another time period without my memories so I can end the darkness once and for all. This is why I need you to keep my secret and pass it down from generation to generation so that one day your descendants can remind me who I am and I can destroy The Darkness. So, Jack, I'm asking you to do this for me.

I have to go now, I'm being reborn, it will only be a second for me, but a thousand years for you. Bye Bye, Old friend.



# The Concert of the Happy Forest

6<sup>th</sup> grade, 3<sup>rd</sup> place, Nikola Nikolov, Paisii Hilendarski High School of Mathematics, Sofia

So, me and my friend decided to explore an old forest somewhere near our hometown. We heard it was a really interesting place. We packed our bags and went there to go hiking.

There weren't a lot of people so it was peaceful. The forest had a lot of beautiful flowers in really bright and interesting colors. They were red, yellow, purple, magenta and orange flowers. We explored this place for a while. About an hour after we felt a weird feeling, but we ignored it and kept going. We eventually stopped for a lunch break near a waterfall.

We noticed that it was strange. Every seven minutes the water became more transparent for about a second and we could see a hole, leading to somewhere dark. Conveniently, there was a trail leading close to the waterfall. I decided to go, but my friend felt that there was something wrong so he wanted to leave. I convinced him to stay because I thought this needed to be explored, since no one knew about this hole. He eventually agreed and after a couple of jumps on some rocks close to the waterfall we made it to the hole, soaked in water.

At the end of the passageway, we saw a dark garden, lit up by some flowers and mushrooms. We saw a purple flower and we walked to it. When we got a bit closer, we heard something inside the plant. I ignored it and walked away, but then the plant grew. A lot. It started to talk and me and my friend were extremely confused. The flower introduced itself as Matilda.

Then the place became bright and we could see everything. The other plants came to life and they were holding marvelous instruments, such as a piano, a harp, a violin, a guitar and other instruments. We saw that Matilda was holding a stick and that the plants were arranged in a very specific form. My friend recognized it and he told me they were going to play music. I asked Matilda what were they going to do. She said they were going to play a concert. I asked her what songs are they going to play. She said they were going to play classical music. My friend asked Matilda to whom are the plants going to play to.

She showed me that me and my friend are on a stage surrounded by other flowers. Me and my friend decided to sit some of the chairs. Then the plants on the stage started the concert. The music was slow and beautiful like a swan. Then it was fast and very rhythmic. I only remember that one of the songs was by Vivaldi. The entire experience was amazing and me and my friend were really happy that we saw this with our own eyes. After the concert finished with a grand finale, we were stunned. After that we said our goodbyes to Matilda and went back through where we came in.

Then I heard my friend and he woke me up. Turns out, all of this was a dream. I told my friend about it and he was fascinated. What was weird that I was in the same forest and I could still see the same passageway.



# The Boy Who Could Speak to Birds

7<sup>th</sup> grade, 1<sup>st</sup> place, Boryana Bozhanova, 43<sup>rd</sup> Hristo Smirnenski Secondary School, Sofia

You've all probably heard of Peter Pan, but have you heard the stories of Philip, the bird whisperer? I bet you a golden coin you haven't.

When I was a much younger witch, I knew him. He had always been an odd boy – he went to the woods every day and talked to the birds. He loved them all, but he did have a favorite – a blue mocking jay, Sapphire, as he liked to call it. Philip used to play the flute – and he often ran through the old pine forest, playing his tunes. The birds adored his songs and flew along with him, chirping their own little melodies. Sapphire was always by his side and if you watched closer, you could even say they were communicating. Whenever Philip stopped playing, the birds started singing, as if they were answering him. And then he played again, and the conversation went on and on.

When Philip turned eight, he went missing. The whole village rushed to find him but it was like he had become one with the mist, surrounding the Elven lake. Nobody ever suspected he was safe and sound, hidden deep in my cave. The next summer everybody had forgotten about him and his parents had given up on finding their son. The truth is, the child came in my cave and asked me a favor. He didn't want to spend his life in the village, growing cabbage or beans all year, being trapped in a monotone lifestyle 'till his life is taken by the silver hound of death. Instead, he wished for a house, made of rock, a bed of moss and faun legs, so he could be as fast as his birds. So I granted his wish and let him be.

Did I forget to tell you Philip had a brother? Oh, sorry. I must have been too invested in the other details. Well, it's ironical, but Philip and his brother were as different as chalk and cheese. His brother Jack aspired to be a hunter, and so he also spent his time in the forest, but instead of talking to birds, he shot them. He didn't change in the slightest, even after many years, and one day, when hunting, he saw the strangest thing – a tiny faun, hopping from one stone to another, and a flock of beautiful birds surrounding him.

A loud gasp escaped Jack's lips, and the little creature turned around. The man's face went white as he recognized his brother, as if preserved by time, looking the same as the year he disappeared. Philip started running away, his brother chasing him. But the birds weren't so fast to give up on their friend and protector. They started flapping their wings around Jack, preventing him from running. But the man still managed to track the faun to his cave, and so he went back home. He waited for the sun to set and left for the woods again. The stars were as bright as ever, looking like silver drops splattered on the dark velvet sky. But Jack didn't waste a second gawking at the beauty of nature – his thoughts were all about his brother. Could he be alive and well? Could he have left them on purpose?

How do I know this? I saw it all in the river, of course. Crystal balls are only used by dark witches, and I am certainly not one. So, I knew I had to protect Philip – I loved the boy and his passion for birds. So I summoned the nature spirits and told them to play in the forest – just for one night. Wait, you don't know what they do with their games? It's like there's a spirit for every tree, every

rock, every small trail. Whenever they change places, the forest changes. Everything is in a different place. This was my only way to trick Jack into getting the wrong spot.

When I had done all of this, I sat at the river again, watching. I saw the hunter walk around the forest, his rifle aimed forward and him ready to shoot. All of a sudden, a silver shadow whirled around him. Could it be the hound? Oh, no. It was too slow for a hound, but even more beautiful. It was a unicorn – and I had not seen one in at least three hundred years. Jack aimed for the enchanting being and pulled the trigger. With that I knew – the man had no soul. Only the ones most possessed by the webs of evil could ever kill a unicorn. So in a few seconds, another silver shadow ran into him. And this time it really was the hound. Tales said it took the lives of unworthy people who don't deserve to live long. In the morning, the spirits had finished their game and Jack's body was found at the end of the forest. There was a black spot under his heart, as if his soul had sunken deep into the ground. I never suspected the spirits game would kill the man, but I never suspected he would shoot the unicorn either. This was the only time I truly regretted being a witch.

...

-Why are you telling me this, Zelda? – the other woman in the prison cell asked.  
A smile graced the witch's face.

-The hound is coming for me.



## Suddenly, the Clouds Turned Green

7<sup>th</sup> grade, 2<sup>nd</sup> place, Roan Gochev, Baba Tonka Mathematics High School, Ruse

Have you ever wondered why it rains? You've probably heard that when clouds get sad, they cry and it rains. That, however, is not true.

Inside every cloud live tiny fluffy creatures. We humans gave them a very unoriginal name – clodds. They, just like us, also pollute their clouds with garbage. Whenever there's too much trash inside a cloud, the clodds pack it up inside raindrops and send them to the ground because there are no trucks to pick it up like we do. In other words, the creatures dump their garbage onto us. But if they don't do that in time, it is unsure what will happen, but it's sure that it won't be good. Are you wondering how I know all of this? That's because I'm a Clouder. Clouders study the clouds and the lives of clodds.

That day started normally. I went to my research lab as usual, but when I left it to go home, something strange happened. Suddenly, the clouds turned green! Out of the blue they were no longer blue!

I couldn't believe my eyes. The people around me began to freak out. This was definitely an emergency!

I quickly went into my lab and grabbed the box on which it said:

### **“FOR EMERGENCIES ONLY”**

After that, I jumped into my hovercraft and levitated to the clouds. I could barely see the little clodds panicking and running around aimlessly.

Then I pulled out a special item from the box – a clodd transformer. Clouders usually have a few of these gadgets, but they can only be used once. I clicked the button and... BAM! – I was a tiny fluffy creature.

All of the clodds inside the green cloud gathered up around me.

“Calm down! I am a professional.”, I said, but I myself was panicking. “Is every clodd here?”

“Actually, where's Moncho?”, suddenly asked one of the creatures.

The clodds looked around at each other, but nobody said a thing. We all went to Moncho's room.

When we looked inside, everything became clear – the whole room was filled with garbage!

“WHAT ARE YOU DOING?”, we all yelled. “Explain yourself!”

“I'm so sorry!”, said in tears Moncho. “I thought we were too cruel by dumping our garbage on all the animals on the ground. That's why I decided to not throw it out like everyone else.”

In the end, we still had to do it. I helped the clodds pack up the trash in raindrops and we threw them out of the cloud.

I thanked Moncho for thinking about us and the animals on the ground, I transformed back into a human and floated down with the hovercraft. A day after the incident the cloud was back to its original color.

“I'm the hero of the clouds!”, I happily thought to myself.

## The Boy Who Could Speak to Birds

7<sup>th</sup> grade, 3<sup>rd</sup> place, Boris Geshev, Ivan Vazov 31<sup>st</sup> School for Foreign Languages and Mathematics, Sofia

Once upon a time, there was a boy named Michael. Now, Michael wasn't any ordinary boy. No, he had a gift. A power, granted to him by a magic animal of the forest. He was the only one that was aware of his powers, because he was scared of what they might do with him. "They" are the townsfolk, back in the 1500s. Witches and witchers were gaining popularity at the time, and a boy like him would not be welcome in their village.

This power, is a very special one. It wasn't super-strength, the ability to read minds, or flight. No, Michael could speak to birds. He communicated with them just by speaking English, but they could understand him. When they talked to him, similarly, they also spoke their own, in this case, bird language. Although, somehow, his mind translated the chirping into well-spoken English. From an outsider's perspective, he was crazy. No one can talk with birds! But he didn't mind being thought of as crazy. These birds were his only friends. He was a lonely boy, so every day, after school he would go to a nearby forest and talk with them. They made him happy, and that's all he wanted.

These powers were gifted to him by a magical being, which goes by the name of Kratos. Now, Kratos was a peaceful God, even though he looked scary. He was a 16-foot-tall beast, glowing green eyes, grey fur and massive wings. Kratos was the leader, the God of all birds on this planet. One of the most powerful beings on this planet, yet he still chose to be a peacekeeper.

One night, Michael had escaped into the woods, as far as he could get from home. He had an argument with his parents, and ran away. After a while of walking in the forest, he realized he was lost. He started trying to mark where he had been, and trying to get out of the dangerous woods. But, soon, he understood there was no point. He was out in the cold, autumn woods at night, one of the worst situations you can be in. So, in a last effort, he screamed:

-Help me! Please! I don't want to die!

Suddenly, a giant beast appeared out of nowhere. His name? Kratos.

-Are you okay, boy? – he said in a deep, grating voice.

-Ah! What are you? Please don't hurt me! – Michael said, his voice shaking in fear.

-Don't worry, I come in peace. – he said while chuckling.

-Okay, can you please help me? I'm lost out here and I have no food!

-Oh no! What's your name, boy? – he asked

-Michael, sir. – he answered

-Listen Michael, I can't help you, but maybe these birds can. – he winked

Then, he disappeared. Michael was left there, horrified. He yelled at him to come back, but he didn't. Then, he heard a voice speaking to him. It was a high-pitched voice. He turned around and saw a bird, speaking English. He was left puzzled. Then the bird asked him:

-Do you need any help?

-Yes, I guess I do.

Then, the bird flew onto his shoulder and guided him back to the town, into his house. He could barely get any sleep, still wondering how it was possible. The next day, he came back to the forest and made some more bird-friends. He never did see Kratos again, never even got to thank him, but for the rest of his life, he always remembered that day. When he grew older, he worked as a puppeteer, as a child entertainer. He acted as if the bird was a puppet, but really, it was his good friend Joe, who performed with him at all of his shows, so that they could make enough money for all the bird seeds he could ever want.



## In Love with a Statue

8<sup>th</sup> grade, 1<sup>st</sup> place, Bozhidar Tamanov, Peyo Yavorov High School, Petrich

Another day with my curse  
despair-full I sit.  
Though my plight is well deserved!  
That I must admit.  
Who could've known  
my love would end in a tale of agony  
and a woman so my own  
would turn statue cold and full of apathy?  
What is my curse, you may ask.  
I'll tell you with a sigh.  
I will uncover my granite mask  
and get gladly rid of a pocketful of lies.  
Quite a few mistakes ago  
I was mesmerized by an apparition.  
I was speechless, couldn't go-  
just stood numb beyond recognition.  
Her pitch-dark eyes saw through my weakness,  
her locks were venomous snakes,  
her breath – both a scent and a sickness,  
demolition sparkled in her gaze.  
I knew I had to stay away  
and not succumb to the gorgon charm,  
yet I was motionless, in dismay  
giving myself into ruin and harm.  
Each man she set eye on  
was made into a death-cold stone.  
Surrounded by empty shells to pine for  
she was thoroughly alone.  
They all seemed so lifeless,  
mere fragments of their former souls.  
She walked proudly among them-  
the icy queen of them all!  
Locked within their rocky silence,  
deprived of feelings, lacking human touch and a kiss,  
statue-like herself, no guidance  
to show her she was loved and missed.  
How very sad! How unfair!  
My love had wings but it was motionless.  
It stood still under Medusa's stare -  
a look so frighteningly emotionless.

I am now pitifully mourning  
and staring into empty space-  
a statue now but full of feelings,  
a man turned cold by a woman's grace.  
So I cannot stop to wonder  
who's the statue in my tale of woe,  
I, a dead rock cast asunder  
or the coldest-blooded living soul?



## Is There a Pilot on the Plane?

8<sup>th</sup> grade, 2<sup>nd</sup> place, Alina Boyanova, First Private Mathematic High School, Sofia

It is just a normal day, in a small but busy airport and there are many planes all departing at ones. Overall there is nothing extraordinary going on. There are many people hurriedly walking towards their gate and thinking whether they will arrive on time for their departure. But no one even considers if there is a pilot on their plane. There is a big chance that someone is operating the machine but what if there is no one on the pilot seat? What will people do?

Let's consider for a moment that there is no one operating the vehicle. How will you react if that happens to you? Imagine that it is just a normal Saturday morning for example. You decided that you want to go on a trip to Rome, Paris or maybe somewhere where you could be alone and as far away as possible from your life like the Maldives. Your plane has just took off 10 or 20 minutes ago and suddenly a strange voice begins speaking on the intercom. It says something like that: "Good morning passengers! Today is a beautiful day, isn't it? I hope you enjoy the rest of your flight, but I just wanted to inform you that there will be no pilot today. That is way there is a large possibility that we will crash, so I hope you are happy with the way that you have lived your life and that you have made amends with your family."

What will happen after this message is delivered? Probably the plane will go silent for a few seconds and then the passengers will began screaming, crying for help or demanding answers. But the question is not what the other people that for some unknown reason where unlucky enough to get on that specific plane will do, is it? It is what your actions will be, your reaction and your thoughts? Will you think about your family and friends in your last moments on Earth? How you did not have the chance to say one last goodbye, to hug your parents that took care of you when you were a kid or to tell them how much you love them. How you could have spent more time with your close people rather than working, studying or being mad at them for some stupid reason. Or will you be sad about how unfairly your life will come to an end? Maybe you will be angry, because you could have done so much things if you had even one more year to live.

Another option is that you will be too shocked to do anything and you will just seat there waiting for the inevitable. Or you could be amongst the desperate passengers crying for help, but knowing deep down that no one will answer then. You may have made peace with your life and the way you lived and just try to enjoy your last few minutes. There is a possibility that you want to be the hero and save all the others. You could try to go to the pilot cabin and operate the plane, but you will find out that it is locked from the inside.

Whatever you try to do after hearing the dreadful message it will not matter right? Because the plane will crash. After all it cannot fly without a pilot. So you are in the vehicle with all the other people scared and waiting for the inevitable. But after one hour the plane lands. Everyone will probably be amazed, relieved, happy and wondering how they survived. Then the strange voice will speak again: 'This is the end of your flight. There was a pilot all along. You may wonder then why I scared you like that. Well it was so you could learn that your life is too important and that you should live every day like it is your last. After all, you never know whether there is a pilot on the plane.'

## In Love with a Statue

8<sup>th</sup> grade, 3<sup>rd</sup> place, Yong Park, Acad. Boyan Petkanchin High School, Haskovo

I am so beautiful. I simply am. I am famous for my beauty all over the world. Every day, men from all over the world come to see me. I was surprised at first, but now I am used to it. I've got two sisters who are not as pretty as me. When I was little, they told me not to look straight in a person's eye, because they would surely be frightened of my beauty.

Each day handsome men come to me and bring me gifts. Swords, armor, shields- they are in abundance. They want to receive something from me, but I have made up my mind to not fall for them. So, when they come near me, I look them in the eyes and tell them to go away. When they see me, they freeze in place in awe of my heavenly beauty. They don't move- I guess their minds are not yet ready to witness a beauty such as mine. They stay still for days in order to get a glimpse of me. I do not blame them- I am just too beautiful.

One day there was a guest, as usual, in front of my house. The moment I looked at him, my heart skipped a beat. He was the man of my dreams! His handsome face, curly hair, muscular body, wide shoulders and tall height- he was just perfect. There was only one strange thing about him- he kept avoiding looking at me! He told me he wanted something from me. I answered I would give him whatever he desired only if he would become stay with me. He seemed a bit anxious, maybe because it was his first time being in the presence of such a beautiful girl, but he agreed.

For the next few days, we became very close (or at least I think we did). I decide to call him Thes in short. Every day we walked around the house and observed all the men, who had fallen in love with me. Every time Thes saw them he looked a bit nervous or even a bit angry, but I guessed that it was only because he was jealous. Little did he know that all my heart was his forever...

One day Thes told me he couldn't wait any longer and he was going to leave if I did not give him what he wanted. I would have surely given him anything in the world in order for him to stay next to me, but if I answered his asking, I knew I would not be able to see him ever again. I begged and begged him to stay with tears in my eyes. He didn't listen to me. He got ready to leave. I asked him for a final kiss. I didn't even wait for his answer: I ran in front of him, pulled him towards me, and then I looked straight into his eyes. His eyes met mine. Just like the other men, he froze in place, like a statue. I hugged his cold body. I kissed his solid lips and whispered: "Oh, I would have given you anything, except my neck. If I cannot have you, no one can. My joy, my life, my love- oh dear Theseus..."



- ...Medusa's diary

## Are You Coming Too?

9<sup>th</sup> grade, 1<sup>st</sup> place, Marina Kotarova, 91<sup>st</sup> German Language High School, Sofia

I'm going to a different place... I'm running away. I don't care what the man with the chubby face and fluffy white beard says. He has always limited me in ways of utmost inconvenience. Be nice. Listen to me. Follow orders from the golden Fathers. This is wrong. That is wrong. Everything is wrong. Wicked. Evil. Including love.

So, I have decided. I'm going away. I'm leaving this rotten world filled with demons, bad deeds and sins, with everything but light. And I'll be going to the garden. They told me I couldn't enter it, but I've started to doubt their words. Because love doesn't hurt, and hot iron doesn't cleanse. Then maybe the garden isn't meant only for the shy and good?

But, but... Let me tell you about the garden. It's a magical, magnificent place. The flowers bloom, the sun shines, the birds are chirping and nobody can die. No, that's an understatement, even. The sun is glazing your skin with its soft, warm rays, holding you and embracing you like you've only been held and embraced by your mother. The trees tower above you like giants, protecting you from rain, sun and anything you ever needed protection from. When the rain falls, it soaks you wet, but you never get sick. You only feel the water running down your skin, washing away all the mud, dust and sadness. The pearly clouds are chasing each other across the sky, pale and playful. Colorful flowers are scattered across the emerald meadows, putting you in a haze with their sticky-sweet aroma and their bright-painted petals. The waterfalls are cold and calming, they massage your sore muscles and cool down your mind. The lakes are deep, filled with harmless fish and there is always light at the bottom and air in your lungs. The caves are deep, their passages and galleries send the echo of your footsteps to faraway places. They turn it upside down, twist it, amplify it and sing with it, let the tones sway through the dark space and come back to you even stronger than before. The wind whispers and whistles in your ears, carrying stories from faraway lands and sharing small secrets with you.

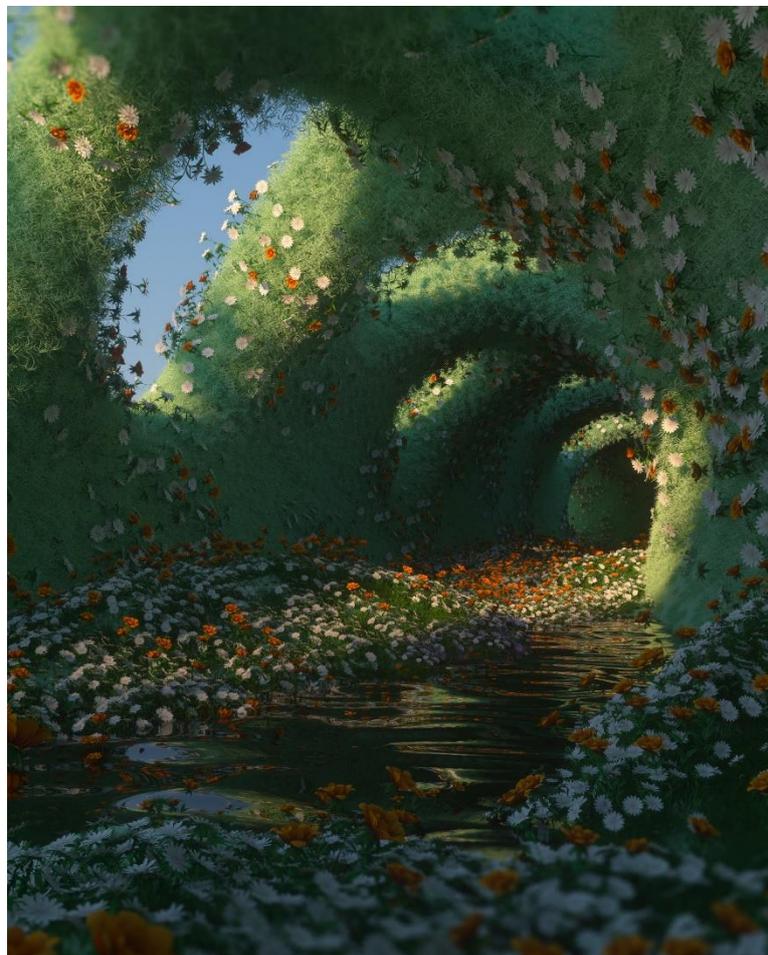
The moon shines above you, bright and strong, leading the way and illuminating even the darkest of nights. It shows you the way when you're lost, lets you get drunk on its silver light and listens to your primal howls when you need to let the voice inside of you out. The animals are in tune with you, they lead you, play with you, help you, speak to you in a language long forgotten and watch over you when you sleep. Yes, this is a place that brings you back to life and heals your broken soul. It gifts you the ability to walk again, to talk again, to love again just as fiercely as you once could. And I am leaving through the golden-plated gates, in hopes that it will do this to me too. In hopes that it will take away my bitterness and show me what the world looked like before the fire, the iron, the pain and the Fathers. It will show me the kind of love and affection that I've always needed, but never received.

Once I get to the gates, there's no turning back, you say. Well, I don't want to turn back. I don't want to live in a place where peace and love have been broken, twisted and of their remains we have forged castles that thrive at the expense of other people's lives. A place where feelings like mine are forbidden and my own "loving" mother won't accept me on her table. So yes, I'll be leaving. Forever, for good.

For I can't stand these conditions anymore. Secret promises, hiding, stolen moments, all for a feeling the Fathers condemn. This dirty, dirty world, stained with blood and mud, with hopelessness and suffering, with darkness and shame. They hate me, they hate what I mean to them. They hate that their own demons and feelings are locked away, while I have found the bravery to express them and live them. They don't understand the man with the chubby cheeks and white beard, so they make us believe he said things he didn't so that we can do things we don't want to. No, I will not be ashamed of myself anymore. Mother, if you read this, be not ashamed of me too. And when you don't find me in my bed tomorrow morning, fear not, for your daughter has always been and always will be a warrior. A lone one, yes, and right in the heat of the storm... But a warrior of love.

I know I'll never make you proud. I'll never be in broad daylight. I won't look behind my shoulder, so you'll have to look out for yourself. Unless perhaps, you want to follow? To the light, the freedom, the green meadows, the trees with branches heavy with fruit, the cold waterfalls, the echoing caves, the whispering winds, the silver moon, the animals, the eternal youth, light and warmth.

I must go now, but before I die, before I ascend into the heavens good, I must ask you:  
Are you coming too?



## She Looked Around Quickly to See if Anything Had Been Taken

9<sup>th</sup> grade, 2<sup>nd</sup> place, Vesela Marinova, Plovdiv Language High School, Plovdiv

She looked around quickly to see if anything had been taken. She had almost hoped to see some sort of horrific monster standing right behind her, drool dripping from its giant mouth, filled with needle sharp teeth. She had hoped to feel its twisted claws painfully grasping her shoulder and to see two bright yellow eyes staring back at her. At least that would've finally given a face to whatever or whoever had been terrorizing her. Annie sat there for a few more seconds, trying to trace the weird events that had been occurring for the last three days.

It all began last night when she had a sleepover with her new friend Maria. The two had been having fun, despite all the rumours Annie had been hearing about her. "She's a witch!", claimed people wholeheartedly, pointing at her as she walked down the hallways of the school. Painfully shy and having just transferred, Maria was quickly labelled a weird loner and turned into the perfect victim for the merciless bullying of her peers. That's probably why she looked so happy when Annie finally had the courage to approach her. The two grew really close really fast and were soon inseparable. The happy sleepover however quickly turned into a heated argument, as Annie caught Maria trying to steal her favourite necklace. The friendship they had been building for the past few months fell apart in maybe five minutes. In the heat of the moment Annie yelled:

-Get out! I don't want to ever see you again!

-Well fine! I will - Maria yelled back, spun on her heels and headed for the door. She stopped at the doorway, turned her head around and hissed – You'll regret this!

That night, as she was brushing her teeth and thinking about what had just happened, Annie caught something with the edge of her eye. A small, shadowy figure stood in the corner of her bathroom, staring at her with those huge yellow eyes. The girl jumped and turned around, only to find that she was alone in the bathroom. She let out a sigh of relief and finished her routine. That same night she had a weird nightmare – something was chasing her. Something huge, running on all fours, growling as it slowly closed the distance between them. She kept trying to figure out what it was, but it was casted in shadows that seemed to run with it.

The next incident happened the following morning. She was making herself a bowl of cereal when she realised that she had forgotten the milk. She quickly went to grab it from the fridge. When she returned, the cereal box was nowhere to be seen. Not only that, but her favourite scarf she had left on her chair had too, disappeared without a trace. Annie got freaked out, but she was running late for school and couldn't do much about it. The rest of her Friday was pretty uneventful.

When she came home however, she was greeted by the angry faces of her family. Her mom, dad and little brother all blamed her for having stolen or lost the most random items – her father's coat, her mom's favourite blouse Annie had worn yesterday and even her little brother's blanket.

-It wasn't me!

-Then who was it, Annie? A ghost? You were the only one home this morning!

After dinner, she went to her room. A chill ran down her spine. It was so cold... She looked around. The window was open. She couldn't remember when she had opened it. Had it been like that for the whole night? She walked over to close it, when she heard shuffling behind her. Annie froze. What was that sound? The sleepover, all the rumours about Maria and the girl's last words all came to mind. "You'll regret it!" What could that possibly mean? Annie gulped. Could Maria have... cursed her? No way, that was impossible! Witches and curses didn't exist, right? She turned around quickly to see if anything had been taken. The room had gone quiet. Nothing was missing. No one was there. The silence was deafening as Annie was contemplating whether she had imagined the shuffling.

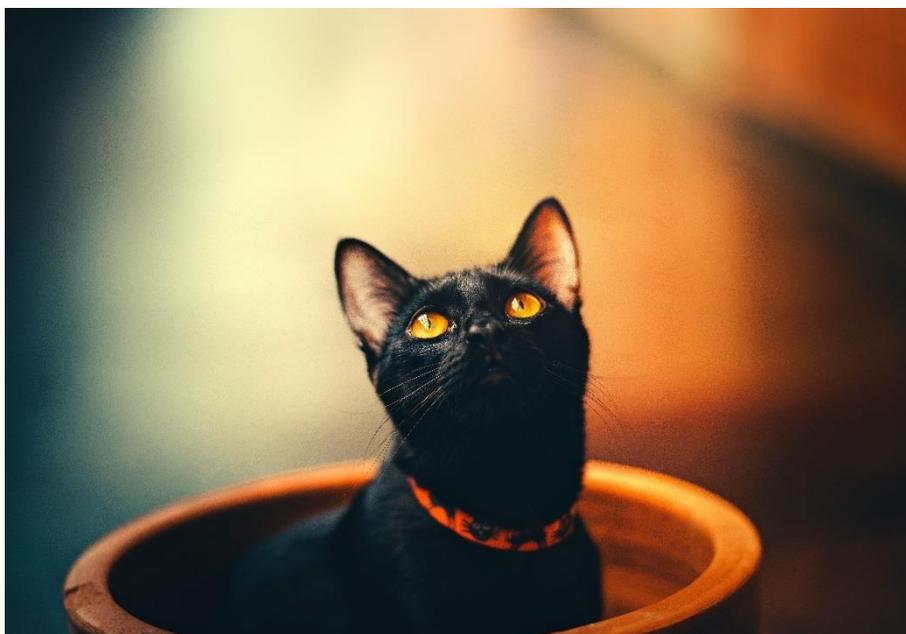
Her brother's scream echoed through the house and Annie snapped out of her trance. She ran down the hallway, holding the only thing she had managed to grab – a heavy book.

-Monster, monster in my closet! – Evan yelled, pointing at the direction of a new sound – weird hissing and scratching. This was it. The moment of truth. She looked at Evan's pale white face. Her knuckles turned white as she squeezed the book while walking towards the closet. Annie twisted the doorknob with shaking hands and a pounding heart, ready to fight the creature. The thing jumped out of the closet and landed in front of them. It was a lot smaller than she imagined...

-A cat?!

Annie jumped back, shocked to see the black furball which started meowing loudly in answer. Annie picked it up and the animal started purring. She looked inside her brother's closet where it had been hiding, only to find all the missing items and on top of them lay three tiny kittens. It all made sense now! The pregnant cat had jumped in her room through the window. It had dragged the softest things it could hide to the safe closet where it had given birth. Annie smiled at the cat and placed her back next to her new-born babies.

-I'll name you Maria.



## Are You Coming Too?

9<sup>th</sup> grade, 3<sup>rd</sup> place, Lachezar Toparov, Yane Sandanski High School, Sandanski

“She probably doesn’t remember me – he thought. – “How would she? It was such a long time ago and I was something of a different human myself.”

The night was cold, the sky – full of stars. He looked up. The stars were watching him, too. All of them shiny and gleaming in the dark. “They are all there – he thought again. – They are all watching me. I’m living the life we all dreamed and the life we all knew we wouldn’t get, and there’s still something missing. How ungrateful am I?”

He started walking through the thin barely-lighted street. He was free after three years of hellish prison. It felt surreal. Like a feverish dream.

It started raining. The rain was cold. He could feel it on his forehead, on his cheeks, he could see it in his eyelashes. It was like the sky was crying over him. It was the most gentle touch that he had felt since the Great War started.

Six or maybe seven years ago, he had a name, he had a family, he had friends and most importantly his heart was beating not only for the sake of life. He could love. Then, it all went down.

He remembered very well the night when all of Germany went crazy. It was the night when he stopped being human.

His name was Max. He was a Jew. The year was 1946. And he was free after three years spent in Auschwitz.

“She doesn’t remember me.” The thought was buzzing in his head like an annoying fly. Her home was just two blocks away. His own home didn’t exist anymore. From what he knew, it was a smoking pile of rubble in a nameless field of ash. The city where he spent his childhood was gone.

Max had left that city when he saw what people are capable of doing to other people only because of the belief that they are something more of them. He came here, in Munich, five years ago. He spent two of them hiding in places so dark, cold and wet, that he forgot what a sunrise or a sunset looked like. He forgot the taste of good food and of fresh water. He forgot what it felt like to be loved. He was living in a world where there wasn’t any place for him. He lived in a world of hatred. In a world of a never-ending war.

Then he met her. It all changed back then. She was more beautiful than any woman he had ever seen. Her eyes were dark like black pieces of crystal, her lips full and red, her hair long and soft, softer than anything he had ever touched. She could be a queen. He was nothing and the only future perspective he could see for himself was a chamber, filling with gas and with screams still echoing in its ceiling. But she didn’t care. She saw in him something that no one else could. Even though she knew his big dark secret – the curse of his existence. She knew that he was a Jew and she didn’t care. She loved him like he was pure-blood like herself. She wasn’t scared of being with him. They were happy in a world of suffering.

Then they found him and the dream shattered like a piece of glass.

It all happened so quickly. It was a rainy morning like a hundred mornings before that. She looked outside the window while he was sitting there, in her home, watching her. She was smiling then. Max had never seen a smile so quickly fading into a mask of pure horror.

“They are here! – she shouted. – The Gestapo!”

And then... All of his happiness vanished on the way to the concentration camp.

Three years. He had survived three years in hell. At one point he had forgotten his name. He was just another dead man still breathing for some reason.

When the war ended and the Furer killed himself, at least this is what he heard, he felt like he was climbing out of his grave. The only thing that he could think of, was about her.

And there was he. A ruin of a human being standing in front of a door. It had been the only door left open for him during the War. He wasn't brave enough to knock on it. The windows of the house were spraying yellow light through the gaps between the curtains.

Max pulled out of his pocket the curved wet piece of paper that he had written his message to her on. He put in the ground, then he put a rock over it, so the wind wouldn't blow it away. It was the difficult part remaining. He knocked on the door and ran away in the shadows. He ran and ran, and he couldn't stop and look behind. What if she did remember him? What if she didn't love him anymore?

He stopped in the city square and looked around as if someone was chasing him. Then, Max remembered every single word he had written on that piece of paper.

“I'm still alive. I came back from the dead. I guess it can be put in that way. I dreamed of you every single night in hell. I want to see you one more time. I'll be waiting for you in the city square. In midnight. Are you coming too?”

He waited with hours and hours. He was sure that she wouldn't come. But she did.



## Don't Cry Because It's Over. Smile Because it Happened

10<sup>th</sup> grade, 1<sup>st</sup> place, Nadezhda Zlatareva, Plovdiv Language High School, Plovdiv

"This one looks really cool," Leslie said, pointing to a small, ordinary key. There was nothing remarkably special about it, except for the fact that it was meant to be inserted sideways into the keyhole, not upwards. It had a rectangular shape, symmetrical on both sides – up and down, left and right. It was a little bent and a little dirty, rusty toward the edge.

"I've never seen one like it before." Leslie's voice, although soft, startled me and I flinched.

"You seemed deep in thought," he noticed.

"I wasn't," I answered hesitantly, "I... wasn't."

After a bit of silence, I sighed.

"It's from my old apartment." I rested my legs and lied fully on the dry yellow grass.

"Do you still go there?" He followed my movement, dropping the key back in my pocket.

"I don't. We changed the locks."

The wind shuffled the dying leaves above our heads and I closed my eyes.

"I wish I could, though," I sighed, "Life seemed a lot better before there and then, you know?"

Leslie sat up suddenly.

"You really think so?"

"Sure."

We were away from the city, out in the field. It was a bit chilly, like any autumn afternoon. Quiet.

Peaceful. Empty.

Frozen in time.

"Let's go then."

"Go where?"

"To the warehouse. The abandoned one, the next hill over, you know which one I'm talking about?"

As he saw I wasn't moving, and didn't seem like I would, anytime soon, Leslie took my hand and pulled me up. "Come on, hurry!"

"Whyyy do you wanna go so bad," I grumbled, rolling my eyes, but getting up anyway.

"I have to show you something, quickly."

He didn't let go of my hand until we reached the place.

"So, what now," I asked.

Leslie reached into my pocket and took the bunch of keys. He didn't struggle to find the one he had looked at earlier and inserted it into the keyhole of the back door of the warehouse. I didn't say anything, but he probably knew I was confused...

"You go in, then, I'll wait here."

"You're gonna drive me crazy, this door has always been locked. No way my key matches."

"You have to turn it first, right? No way to know unless you try."

I didn't mind trying. In fact, I didn't mind anything. I just went with the flow. I was too tired to bother. I turned the key and it clicked, the door opened.

I didn't expect that, sure, it was weird. But I only got surprised after I opened the door. It was my old apartment on the other side, exactly as I remembered it.

"Wait... what?" I whispered to myself, stepping inside. The door closed softly behind me.

I walked around for a while, checking the rooms. Nothing had changed. Everything was in place. The fire hadn't happened, my bookcase was fully intact. The carpet was clean. The cat was sleeping on its little pillow. The washing machine was working. None of my grandma's plates were broken. Even the kitchen window was whole, no sign of cracks and tape marks. And definitely no cockroaches, anywhere. It was magical. An ordinary apartment, my ordinary apartment. Everything was normal. My home.

I made sure I hadn't missed anything. I walked every room, checked every corner. Nothing had changed from then. I could stay there forever, live back in the past. When things were better, easier. When I knew what I liked, had friends. Knew who I was.

I wasn't that person anymore, though. I soon noticed that half my book collection was missing. None of the books I bought after the fire. I couldn't find my mom's new plate set, the one with the blue lining. None of my plants, none of my silly trinkets.

It was nice to remember. It was nice being there. But it wasn't my place. It belonged to some other person. Some other me. Some other time.

I pet the cat and he purred, licking my hand.

Then I left.

Leslie was waiting in front of the building, sitting on a small bench and watching the wind push the heavy clouds away from the sun.

I closed the door, taking the key and putting it in place in my pocket. I sat down next to my friend and followed his line of sight.

"Thank you," I whispered.

"Anytime," he replied.

My friend. The one I didn't have before the fire.



## Dance Without Me

10<sup>th</sup> grade, 2<sup>nd</sup> place, Neda Hristova, Uwekind International School, Sofia

The sun sets, as yet another day goes by. My body, resting on our couch, is reminded of your absence. It's cold. It's dark. It's scary. And you're not here. The house we designed now feels too big for my lonely soul. It feels too big, without you in it. But yet it's so small. So small that I am suffocating. The dream home isn't a dream when you aren't here. It's a nightmare. It's a dark, lonely space, filled with your scent, your figure, all over it. The carpet, the one you bought, is stained with your footprints, with your last steps. With our last dance.

Our beloved song, the one that met us and tore us apart. The one that made me dance and sing until morning. That very song is a memory in my empty heart and a broken cassette on the Television stand. It's a cry for help and a prayer for one last dance. But to dance without you feels impossible. As impossible as wishing for you to be alive. For you to come down the stairs and scare me with a hug and a smile. With candy in your right hand and a flower in the other. Still, I play the song, as I let my tears fall and my fingers drum. I am again reminded of you.

Your tall figure is approaching as I stand in the center of the room. Your look at me, with your loving green eyes. With the warmth of a summer day and the fear of a little boy. Your smile, like a bunny, slightly curved at the edges, but as bright as the sun and reassuring as a mother's hug. Your unusually styled hair - a bit messy at the ends. And that outfit, oh that funny little outfit. You have placed a bowtie on your chest, slightly messed up, as your shirt, that has obviously not been straightened. Your brand new shoes - already dirty from the winter snow, step ahead confidently. Then you stand in front of me and as the song ends - you disappear, and the little boy is gone.

Your tall figure is now skinny, for you haven't eaten in days. You look at me, with your bland green eyes, now red, from the tears you've cried. With the coldness of a winter night and the fear of a grown man. Your smile, still there even though filled with pain. Your messy hair has almost fallen out. Systems are attached to your chest as you fight for breath. But still you manage to hold out your hand and with a whisper, we say goodbye.

I wake up, as my face is now wet and my breath - unstable. I hug my knees as I try to stop the tears. It doesn't help. My hands and feet are trembling as I try to stand up and then I fall.

The sun sets, as yet another day goes by. My body, resting on our couch, is reminded of your absence. But it's not cold anymore. It's not dark. It's not scary. Yes, you are not here, maybe not physically, but somehow, I can still feel you. The house we designed is filled with little toys. It might be big without you in it, but Toby doesn't mind. He is just like you. Sometimes I feel that he might be your incarnation, or maybe it's just me who is going crazy. The carpet, the one you bought, is stained with little dog prints that have replaced yours. I haven't forgotten you, not yet, and I don't think I ever will, but I managed to stand up, as you had told me to. You should thank your best friend when you meet again someday. The poor old man bought me a dog, the Toby I speak of. He is still very small but a strong puppy. He has green eyes, just like yours, warm and reassuring. He also has quite messy fur,

if you know what I mean. Every Sunday we visit you, with a little something I hope you receive. Toby also likes to dance, but I might have to say he is better at it then you are.

I think I have grown and even if it was hard, I learned to dance again. I also started wearing that funny sweater you had knit me, even though I might say that Tobs isn't fond of it. Someday we will meet again, but make sure to save up some time off your busy schedule, because I for sure have a lot to share...



## Go Wild for a While

10<sup>th</sup> grade, 3<sup>rd</sup> place, Elitsa Aneva, 91<sup>st</sup> German Language High School, Sofia

*W Thurrock way, West Thurrock, United Kingdom*

*November 29<sup>th</sup>, 1996*

*Broad Street, Birmingham, United Kingdom*

*Downing Street, London, United Kingdom*

*Douglas Dr, Morro Bay, California*

Hello.

Such an empty word that is, yet so often used. I feel like it really shows human nature. People are so empty, yet they live so long, experience life without really touching it.

We laughed and we cried together. The rain fell, seasons changed and we were so free. You were my everything. You are all memories and dry eyes now.

It was such a long time, such a short time, momentary happiness, still my whole vision. I feel so old now, wasted in those juvenile years. Not that I know much, not at all. It just feels like we drained each other, like we used up all our emotions and lost our passion for life.

I remember it all so vividly. It is so colorful in comparison to my current being. Now everything is gray and moves slowly, but back then I couldn't catch a break.

We were students and we roamed the dark hallways of the school. We were a nightmare to all teachers, yet always got straight A's. We were perfect and horrible, vibrant and clear.

I look at the pictures spread over my desk, and pain once again hits me as a tsunami. My limbs are so heavy and I barely breathe.

I tried to forget, I really did my best. All the sleepless nights, all the museums and galleries, the old lake and the big ballrooms in school. To study literature, such a privilege. I never saw it as one. Everything was granted and we had it all. At least me. Maybe I was way too conceited.

I remember his death. In my memories it is as red as a Christmas star, as black as the sky in a moonless night, as painful as a burn.

He was my everything. My role was always that of a sidekick and I had no problem with it. You had your characters too. It was how the world was meant to be.

Did we take our own breath? Did we ignore our gasps, hold on to a vision that could never be fulfilled? Days before that we went to the woods. I never told you this. It was my sacred place, but I think it's time now. We went to the woods and we ran and we laughed. We stopped by the lake and we waited a moment, just to catch our breaths.

When I think of him, such grief washes over me and emotions of all kinds overwhelm me. I sometimes smile. He was so bright.

We lay on the green grass, we talked for ages. Philosophy and creativity ran our tongues, words flooded our mouths and I felt like dancing. My hand is somehow in his and all I can think of, all I can see, is this amazing happiness. What more do I ever need? I can stop eating, I can stop drinking, I can stop breathing, as long as you are next to me.

Now? Now I've forgotten all words, lost all my oxygen.

People told me to be grateful he existed in the first place. To be grateful for meeting him, to smile because it happened. How could I.

Sometimes anger fills the void of what a smile meant only to leave my soul forever weeping. How dared he steal his own light, be the water to his own fire. Were we not enough for him?

I know that you think of that too. I know it terrifies you that we might have been his reason. Did he try to tell us? Were we his prison cell, were we his biggest tormentors? Questions cram my mind. When I imagine you, I see the same faces. You haven't changed in the slightest bit, just as he hasn't. With you I have lost all touch, with him all touch has been roughly cut off.

I am writing this and dreaming. I see change. But as Shakespeare said, "dreamers often lie". I see hope and laughter and all of us together. All except for one.

I am aware that we could never be as we were. I don't know which one I prefer, the prison we built for ourselves or the endless and lonely freedom I feel here. Freedom, such a funny word. We always thought that was what we pursued, but he really took it to another level, didn't he? It was an obsession for him, everything was.

He told me by the lake that day, "I want to fly". We were never enough for him, but he was all for us. He was color in the dull places, he was ambitious between the spiritless, he was consumed by his purposes and he never let go.

He told me by the lake, "I wonder what death feels like". I guess he knows now.

He always surprised us. This time, he outdid himself.

I can't help but contemplate the way he did it. So messy, so bloody, so like him and so unlike him. He was always put together, but his mind never ceased exploring. Now that I sleep on it, I realize why. I've always known if we are being truthful. He wanted to stop thinking, to lose humanity for a moment, to live life led by instincts. To go wild.



I am waiting for one day, when I will also be able to say, "So that's what it feels like to go wild for a while. To lose sight of everything, to simply release your spirit. So that's what he wanted". I still don't have the guts, but the future holds so much unknown factors.

'Til then, farewell, my old friends.

## Go Wild for a While

Special Mention Award, 10<sup>th</sup> grade, Niya Pehlivanova, Peyo Yavorov Language High School, Silistra

I am a cloudless sky,  
I am the crisp morning air.  
I am not each thought that flies  
through a sleepless night's despair

I am not the picture in the frame  
sitting idly just to watch you go.  
I am not my restless brain  
and the girl you knew too long ago

I am the river running down to meet the sea,  
I am the first bird to ever sing,  
I am the Sun in every sunset you see,  
I am the every in everything.

I have looked through every telescope  
just to see a single star.  
The star that shines the brightest,  
the one you beg to touch from afar.

I followed the light 'till I found  
the furthest place away from man.  
A whisper was the only sound,  
a whisper saying "You can."

The star was one of millions more,  
just as I was, too,  
the first to run, like never before,  
to be the wildest's muse.

I am the wildest star,  
I know how to be true.  
You look like me from afar,  
and your thoughts are also blue.

I was alone in the sky,  
smothered by the celestial noise.  
I want a twin spark by my side,  
so go be wild for a while.



## Memoirs of an Old Wig

11<sup>th</sup> grade, 1<sup>st</sup> place, Asen Avramov, Prof. Dr. Assen Zlatarov Language High School, Haskovo

There was a certain chill to the air. The thin t-shirt and shorts that little Edwin had been wearing proved to be quite insufficient. It always amazed him just how cold the attic could get, even in the middle of a particularly hot and blistering summer. It mattered not, though, he would only be here for a few minutes at best, he knew exactly where the box he'd been sent up to get is.

A decrepit little thing, it stood in the corner of the attic, far away from the light and warmth of the windows. As he approached it, he took note of the books resting upon it. Were they books? As he got closer, he could make out an obviously old and vintage photo duct taped to the cover of one of the books. On it he could see two figures. The clothes they were wearing gave them a mature look, but he could make out their young age by their full cheeks, hopeful eyes and bright smiles. Not a tooth out of place, and not a single hair going against the flow of their curly hair. A handsome young boy smiling ear to ear at the camera as he was being embraced by a significantly shorter girl. The boy was surely his grandfather, Edwin thought, but who the girl was was a complete mystery to him. At first, he thought it could be his grandfather's sister, aunt Lejla, who he had never gotten to see before her death. It wasn't her, though, he mentally scolded himself for ever thinking that. Sure, she had the signature curls of his family, but she looked nothing like his grandfather. She had what seemed like vibrant red hair, it was hard to tell due to the age of the picture and its orange hue, but no matter if it was actually ginger or just seemed so, it was definitely far from his grandfather's raven black locks. Oh well, he would take the books or albums or whatever they were downstairs with him. He picked up the box with the mysterious books still resting on it and went on his merry way down the wonky stairs to the attic.

As he walked down the stairs to the open living room, he saw the back of his grandfather's figure. Resting on the sofa, watching some old Bosnian soap opera or another. Edwin never gave much care for them, he didn't know Bosnian fluently enough to understand anything of what was going on. He walked over to the sofa and his grandfather gave him a warm smile, it did turn bittersweet and sour, though, when the gaze of the old man wandered down from his grandson's face to the old cardboard box he was carrying.

**"This is you, isn't it?"** Edwin asked, taking the book from the top of the box and sitting down on the armchair next to the sofa.

*"Don't open that album yet, but yes. It is me, Ed. You wonder who the girl is no doubt?"* he was right. Edwin did wonder.

**"I thought it was aunt Lejla at first, but she has black hair."**

His grandfather reached for the box.

*"Could be a wig."* he opened the box, and pulled out the same red hair that was in the photos.  
*"Could be this wig."*

There were items rested beneath where the wig had been, but grandfather had now successfully focused the little boy's full attention to the red hair. He didn't even take note of the album still resting on his lap.

**"Why was aunt Lejla wearing a wig?"** Edwin inquired

*"We never did tell you much about her, did we? You can open the album now boy, but try not to get scared, the first pictures are of war. There could be blood and worse..."*

Indeed there was, little Ed started shuffling through the pages and was met with pictures with his grandfather and what was probably his old family. Aunt Lejla included, although she had the hair he pictured in them, raven black and curly.

*"These are photos we took as we fled out of the old country. You'll see cuts and bruises on our faces, torn clothes and charred skin from all the smoke from the bombs but we were happy then, your great grandparents hadn't been... taken from us yet."*

A silence befell the room. The loudest silence Edwin had heard in his short 13 years of life.

*"...They passed on quickly. They didn't suffer. It is one of the better deaths you could've had during that time. Your father did teach you about the war and death I believe?"*

Edwin nodded. Father did tell him of the horrors of humanity. He did tell him humans occasionally engage in bloodlust and end up killing each other. He didn't take it seriously, though. War seemed so impersonal and far away from him, death an abstract concept.

It felt real now. The pain in his grandfather's eyes felt real. The sorrow in his voice felt real. Cycling through the pages and seeing this family who he knew got torn apart in the worst possible way felt real. All of them died, save for Ed's grandpa.

*"When they passed me and your aunt were lost for a time. It took two days before she could convince me to abandon their bodies, she had been ready before they were even cold. She'd always been strong like that. When we left the village and walked to the city a soldier found us. A female soldier. This to our eyes was quite scandalous, but she was apparently American, of a land where women could join the army. She was short. Shorter than me even at that age. What struck both me and your aunt the most about her, though, was her hair. Bright red. We did not have redheads in Bosnia."*

Edwin started to see the connection, the wig was red.

*"Her name was Ashley... The soldier I mean... She got us out of Bosnia safely. Her family even fostered us as she continued to do humanitarian work after the war. We spent the rest of our school years and our life here in the end. The picture on the cover of that page is from a Halloween. Whilst everyone dressed as those new comic book heroes, your aunt decided to dress as Ashley. When Lejla had told Ash about this, she reminded my sister of the reality that her hair is black and she'd need a wig. Before Lejla could even let out a sound, Ashley instantly suggested her own hair. By the next day Ashley was bald and Lejla had her new wig for Halloween."*

A chuckle escaped the old man's lips, even though his voice remained sorrow and sad. Edwin knew why, of course, he was not stupid. His aunt Lejla is dead. Gone. No doubt this story would have a sad ending, he dreaded that it would be especially traumatic, but maybe it wouldn't be too bad.

*"She loved that wig, wore it for the whole week after Halloween as well. You'll notice in the pictures if you haven't already reached that point that the wig will become all Lejla ever wears."*

Indeed he had. Her hair had been exclusively red for the past 5 pages. He was turning them slowly, though, taking his time.

*"That's because your aunt got sick. Lost all of her hair. It annoyed me how she had spent all of her life hating their family's hair, wishing it was straight and blonde, later wishing it was red. She hated it, but when she lost it, she missed it. She cried every time more clumps of hair fell out of her scalp. I heard it every time, my room was next to the bathroom and the walls were thin."*



**"Did she have cancer?"** Edwin asked, quite bluntly, but with a meek voice.

*"Yes, but it was going good. She was fighting it quite successfully, the doctors were hopeful. One day, though, a policeman knocked on our foster family's door. Their landline hadn't been working. The officer informed them of very bad news and they rushed out. Later that night, me and your aunt found out it had been news of Ashley's death. A nasty car crash, she hadn't had the pleasure of dying quickly like my parents, though... The paramedics found her a few meters outside of the car, bled out. She'd probably been crawling out."*

**"And aunt Lejla?"** there was a crack in his voice as Ed inquired

*"All the hope was drained from her eyes. She looked dead. Her cries felt very alive, though, she spent most of that night crying, not letting me in her room. The once always strong and hopeful sister that I had, the one that took me through the hellscape countryside of our old country at war, the one who saved me, fell asleep crying. I'd never seen her that weak and vulnerable..."*

Another deafening silence ensued as his grandfather paused. He wiped away a tear from his face. Little Ed had never seen any man cry, let alone his tough and stoic grandfather.

*"The next day, I found her dead. In her bed, the sickness had taken her. Her head was bald, she had taken the red wig off and was clutching it in her arms, hugging it like it was a pillow."*

The tears streamed freely out of his grandfather's eyes now, and Edwin could relate... The album in his laps was opened, on the last page. Two red haired women. A picture of who was surely Ashley, and his aunt Lejla, wearing that old wig. A tear fell on the page, so Edwin closed the album as to not ruin it.

## Chaos is a Friend of Mine

11<sup>th</sup> grade, 2<sup>nd</sup> place, Liana Bebina, Geo Milev English Language High School, Ruse

Coffee brewed from weeks ago stained the wooden floor. The splotches of dark brown were so evenly spread throughout that they formed a pattern into the oak planks, almost like it was intentional. The gaps between the boards were thoroughly filled with coffee grounds, and the mug from which the energizing liquid had been spilled from lay on the desk in such a manner that would give anyone a heart attack if they saw them, sitting oh-so-carefully on the edges of the desk, most certainly not going to be collected soon, lest they fall and break into tiny little pieces, which would be ignored until they poke into the feet of the one arriving there, soon adding splotches of sanguine into the mix of brown.

Ah, the desk. A rustic old thing, with a barely working gas lamp. Clearly, someone has been burning the midnight oil as of late, what with all the pens scattered on the worn-out surface, half of which were missing their caps and the other half – the ink. Both halves were sorted into two piles sitting behind the tall column of books that was close forming a bond with the ceiling with the ceiling. An old creaking chair was tucked into the desk, though one would argue it was not used for sitting, unless the owner was so very short that they would need three shirts, two sweaters, and a pair of baggy pants folded on the seat to lift them at the level of comfortably writing on the desk. The clothes stood out too, the vivid pinks and greens and blues colors popping out against the mahogany seat, as if a child had grabbed a Renaissance painting and drew over it with neon paints. They shone brightly compared to the dimming yellow of the lamp as they reflected the light coming from the window, which was sitting open and was left as such long ago, almost as if to welcome the leaves that had fallen inside from the branches of birch sitting above the opening of the room, which formed dramatic shadows sitting at the edge of the bed, like nightmare creatures attempting to grasp it. Although there wasn't much to grasp. The bed covers had long been removed leaving only the mattress with its spots of maroon on top, someone having cried tears not only through their eyes, but also from their countless glasses of wine left sitting on the bedside table, organized neatly to hide the meaning of their being there.

One would look at this room in horror in disgust. Maybe there is worry towards its user, or maybe there's frustration. But I like to see this room more warmly, seeing as it's mine. Maybe it's just that all the glass inside the room, be it windows or the lamp, are stained a bright pink to tint my view and enclose me inside a small world where the condition of this room is acceptable, and not a place that has survived a hurricane, a flood, and an earthquake. Maybe it's that the door stays locked and I forget to unlock it, leaving myself stuck in for days in the small space of mess and disorder.

Or maybe there is something more, like how I've separated the pens without caps and the pens without ink fillings in two separate places, so I know which ones I can write with still and which ones are empty. Maybe it's the mug that constantly gets refilled and forgotten sits on the edge so that the liquid stains the floor, not my notes and writings. Maybe it's the light left working in case I decide to stay awake all night, instead of spending twenty minutes trying to light it, usually ending up losing motivation.

Or it's the soft clothes on my chair so that my bottom doesn't get sore by the ancient wooden seat that is so hard that it gives me bruises when I sit too long on it. My books that tower over me leave me much space when I need to take out only a few, and can spread them across my desk while I work, instead of having to constantly move around the piles of hard covers and flying papers until I set them comfortably up on my available space. My covers are outside, left to dry in the weak autumn sun, giving me a lot of time to rid my mattress of the aftermath of a writer's block that I attempted to cure through wine.

To an outsider, my mind is a storm. It's a forest where all the trees were cut but not collected, where no one can make their way around. However, I know better. I know to trust my college professor when he says the best artists are messy. I know to listen to my instinct when I find similarities in the way my academic friend organizes his desk with mine, though where there are pen and pencil holders on his, there are piles of used writing utensils on mine. I am sure of the system I have inside my little place of comfort, my own personal haven, which I know like the back of my hand. The one that no one needs to be acquainted with. I need not strangers coming inside and telling me how they feel about it, for I have only one other allowed inside, one who knows it almost as much as I do. He barely leaves, it's almost his home too. For he is Chaos, my room's best friend. That's okay, because he's my friend too.



## Chaos is a Friend of Mine

11<sup>th</sup> grade, 3<sup>rd</sup> place, Mihaela Mihailova, Yordan Radichkov Foreign Languages High School, Vidin

Me and Chaos are at a party. By the time this party is finished, someone will be dead. "Watch where you're going, psycho" Kayla mutters under her nose when I accidentally bump into her while trying to get through the thick, sweaty crowd. Chaos is wandering somewhere around me, but no one seems to take notice of him even though he bumps into them all the time. Of course, they don't, he's only ever always been amazing. Can you really blame them?

Chaos is a friend of mine. Quite literally. He is my best friend, and my roommate. You're probably going to pause there, scratch your head and wonder "Who in the world would name their baby Chaos?". Now that I ponder about it, Chaos's name does not really make much sense, but he never explained how he got it and I never cared enough to ask. What is significant to the plot though, is that me, Havoc (funny, yeah) and Chaos, are attending a frat party. And, like every other stupid college party we have been to, someone will die an agonizing, painful and ugly death. "How, how, how?" you will jump up and down in anticipation.

Me and Chaos are going to murder them. I have zero clue what got into me after I began my education at Hampden College and met Chaos. I experienced traumatic events when I was a child and Chaos was really the only person who stood by me when I tried to kill myself, multiple times. I would do anything for him, for his loving heart, warm embrace, shiny eyes, gentle speech. He saved my life. It was only right I would save his next, and that's exactly how the first murder happened. The second was because Chaos said slicing throats made him all giddy inside and he was dying to do it again. It didn't matter to me what we did because Chaos made me feel content, mysterious, savage... and I adored him. So, we continued. A third victim, a fourth, and today... today will be the fifth.

This time, Chaos and I came up with the plan to lure a frat boy, John Edwards, who had been picking on me ever since we started college into a tiny bedroom on the second floor of his house. He is the host of the party, and every single girl is draping herself over his lap, trying to get his attention, so it would not be strange if he went upstairs with one of the many. And because they're far too drunk to function, no one would remember who exactly was the one.

So, after a bit of sweet nothings into his ear, I drag him by the wrist, desperately struggling to keep his eyes and hands on me, so he would not see Chaos when we enter the room. As soon as he starts doing more than I would prefer him doing, Chaos takes a stance beside him and goes for his neck with the bedside lamp's rubber cord. The blonde, clueless little boy's eyes pop out like ping-pong balls in fear. Chaos is heavier, taller, and stronger than him, so he easily manhandles the boy while I put a piece of cloth in his mouth to silence his choked whimpers. Soon enough, Edwards goes still in Chaos' arms and slumps quite ungracefully to the ground.

"Good work. I'll throw a rope around to make it look like suicide and you get the cloth out of his mouth. We really need to get out of here as soon as possible" Chaos instructs me gently and pats me on the back. Dear God, isn't it sweet how lovely and caring he is to me?

We quickly get our wits and leave through the back door. We sprint through the thick forest for a mile and finally reach the main highway. Chaos's car is parked there, and right as we are about to enter, a hand lands roughly on my shoulder. I spin back, ready to swing whoever dared to follow us, but it's a policeman. And he's not alone. There are about ten of them behind him with their pistols blazing, aimed at me. I stiffen. I look around, I calculate the chances of us getting away with this. There are none.

"Havoc Miles, am I right? You are under arrest for the murder of John Edwards. You have the right to remain silent and request a lawyer. Everything you say can be used against you in a court of law" he announces loudly and the next thing I hear are a pair of handcuffs click on my wrists. Is someone handcuffing Chaos too? I turn my head around, but I do not see him. My eyelids flutter lightly in happiness. Chaos is gone, he must have ran away. It does not matter what happens to me, because I'm certain he is safe. And that's all I care about.

Later, I get a lawyer. And they question me. They say the car is mine, but I know it's not. They claim I was the only one seen at the party, that two girls saw me going up the stairs with Edwards, that I had no roommate and I have always been the bizarre girl who talks to herself in class, in the hallways, in the college gardens. I tell them I have a friend, his name is Chaos, but they don't believe me. "He does not exist, Havoc" the detectives say. They tell me my foot and fingerprints were the only ones on the scene, although I know Chaos murdered Edwards. But it is alright. Chaos must have hidden well, then, and I am glad to hear that.

They will never understand. Chaos loved me, he was my best friend, he was everything to me. They will never know what it means to me that he is gone. They say I'm schizophrenic and Chaos was my imaginary friend.

One day I received a letter in prison that Chaos is dead. The author said Chaos thanked me for being a pawn in his silly chess game, said Chaos lived his life through me, said I'm worth nothing, and I will be never worth anything to anyone, because he's gone now.

Chaos was the one who made *me* feel alive, although now I realize, that unfortunately... he was not. And once again, I... I am all alone.



## Chaos is a Friend of Mine

Special Mention Award, 11<sup>th</sup> grade, Selin Myumyun, Thomas Jefferson Second English Language High School, Sofia

The same old lonely emptiness,  
present in this agitating game of chess.  
No sympathy for me – the miserable fool,  
how can romance be my only tool?  
Standing in this endless pit,  
I take a glance at the awful slit,  
that time has opened in this room –  
the mess around it filling me with doom.  
Does it ever stop, the chaos in the air?  
Or will it always wrap around my mind and hair?  
Can I escape the never-ending loop?  
Or shall I simply fall and travel through this timeless hoop?  
Will I succeed in finding company for this life-long ride?  
Or is my only opportunity to hide?  
Faith might guide me all along,  
singing its slow and quiet song.  
All the objects floating above my head  
and the passing years creating their own bed.  
I cannot catch them in my desperation – when does it end?  
Oh well, I guess chaos is my only friend.



## “Just Say It” You Silently Reminded Yourself

12<sup>th</sup> grade, 1<sup>st</sup> place, Jeren Apti, Petko Slaveikov Secondary School, Kardzhali

“Just say it” you silently reminded yourself.

The white little thing you chanced upon was still staring into your eyes with its soulless gaze, as if reading into your very being. Its beady and dark eyes seemed to open into the dark depths of a destructive black hole, sucking you in and pleading with you to get it over with, it almost seemed bored with your measly existence.

The thought sprung to your mind suddenly and inexplicably – Am I overdramatizing this encounter? – causing you to avert your gaze from the pearly beast. As your eyes glazed over and you entered your mind palace to discuss this with yourself and solve this dilemma that you found yourself in, the so-called beast that you thought fitting to call it, was shaking its fluffy-looking ass.

Through your peripheral vision, a few moments too late, you saw it stomp closer and roar its mighty roar startling you fully out of your daydream-like state.

“Quack”, its mighty scream echoes across the empty space of the garage, filling your head with the sound that will haunt your dreams and nightmares.

Your head suddenly empty and ringing from the disparaging sound, you stumble, on the flat empty ground beneath your feet, a wondrously foolish and clumsy feat, and your extremely astute self decides in milliseconds that you should lean forward instead of falling on your ass, causing your knees to cushion your fall rather than your suitably meaty hindquarters.

Now on your aching knees face-to-face, not physically but spiritually and mentally, with the beast’s round pale face and elongated rubbery jaws, you shudder. Its blank, glassy and unfathomable gaze locked onto yours it roars once more.

“Quack”, this time you finally pass the tip of your tongue over your dry lips, open your mouth and attempt to finally get it over with.

“Can I?” you utter with trepidation, holding your palm in front of it, at the exact height that would allow for it to perch itself atop your hand.

Finally, after what has seemed like a decade long battle of wits and enduring the silence that settled afterwards, it flaps its majestic wings once, as if it understood what you meant with your pathetic attempt at communication and waddles over to settle comfortably on your outstretched palm.

“Finally” you mutter to yourself with gleaming joy and stand up with the pearly beast you acquired in your hand. Now with it in hand you walk proudly back to your domain and think to yourself – Now what do I do with it?

## We're Just Tiny Freckles on the Cheek of the Universe

12<sup>th</sup> grade, 2<sup>nd</sup> place, Silvia Srebrevva, Acad. Kiril Popov High School of Mathematics, Plovdiv

I let the hot cup warm my hands, surprised that I am enjoying every sip of the bitter-sweet elixir She mixed for me. "This drink will go straight to your soul, trust me!". You see, I am not an adventurous person and I definitely do not play around with coffee. I am still asking myself how I even trusted the girl. The answer is simple, yet confusing – my heart said so.

Let me take you a few hours back. I met this curly-haired miracle at the bus stop. You know the Hollywood cliché – it is raining, a car drives by and splashes you all over. Disgusting, I know. Boring, I know. But the gods, or luck, arranged the events, so that She would be next to me. "Ah, you poor soul, now that's what they call "bad luck"", a soothing voice makes all the boiling annoyance for the stupid driver dissolve. Two green eyes and a freckled face make me almost forget the sensation of being soaked. The cold of the water slowly creeps into me and stuttering from the shaking, I manage to say: "And you being d-d-dry is what I call "stealing" my luck". A laugh escapes both of our mouths and I can almost hear the ice between us, two strangers, cracking.

She invited me to her home for a cup of warm coffee, "to return the stolen luck". Now, I do not promote going to a stranger's house, but in my defense, my brain was nearly frozen when I accepted. I wish I could describe how the home looked, but my mind has only collected the feeling of warmth, belonging, and welcoming. There was the subtle excitement of knowing that something special was happening. As if some part of me knew this was a monumental step. And of course - those freckles, scattered across her face, as if some artist had splashed her with tiny droplets of magical bronze paint.

We talked, we laughed, we shared. I have no recollection of how and when, only the warmth of my kiss on her cheek. That is when the cold of the rain truly left my bones, evaporating somewhere in the vast space of the universe.

There is this unwritten law that we, humans, are bound to find a subject which we will love and yet not understand fully. An artist and his muse. One finding inspiration in the existence of the other. A scientist and a discovery. The former – fascinated by the existence of the latter. A mother and a child. A mind not even capable of fathoming the existence of the other. Hearts beating with the same rhythm, their echoes synchronized in a melody. Hundreds, thousands, millions of people feeling this overwhelming excitement.

How does it happen that without ever meeting a composer, you can understand the emotions behind his symphony? It is as if an old god, or the Universe herself has created the human heart almost complete – with just a single piece missing. We long for it, we chase it, seek it, dream about it. We put ourselves through pain, grief, loss just in the search for finding that one single tiny fragment which can allow our heart to tune into the galactic song of hearts.

There is a duality in being human, in thinking that your love is the greatest love in history. We all somehow comprehend that there is a universal human experience and our interactions connect us, our exchanges make us as tiny constellations. The act of loving is the same, yet different. As I look at her, as I kiss her freckled cheek again, I feel like a little speck in the world, yet her moles arranged just as the stars in the sky, convince me that she is my whole Universe. Maybe we all have our own universes. Or do we all lay on someone else's star-freckled cheek? Does He kiss Her cheek the same way I kissed hers?



# We're Just Tiny Freckles on the Cheek of the Universe

12<sup>th</sup> grade, 3<sup>rd</sup> place, Alexandra Stoyanova, Bertolt Brecht School for Foreign Languages, Pazardzhik

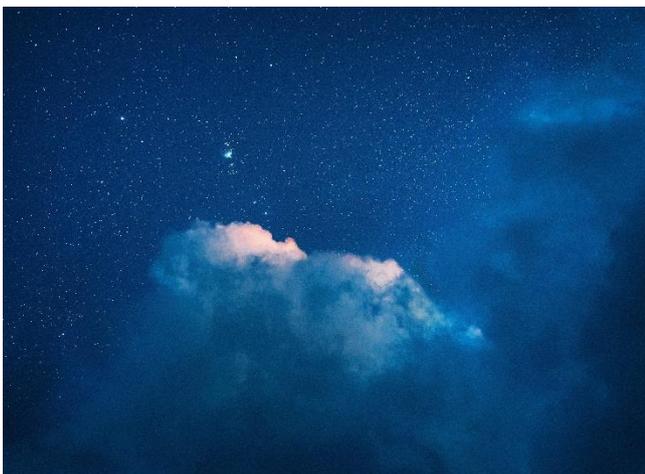
## See through the facts

Have you ever felt as if life is just a ruleless game?  
And you a simple pawn not even looking for fame...  
Don't dare think you are the one and only  
Feeling unnoticed, superfluous and lonely!

Actually, we all share the same faith  
We live trying to keep up with the world's heart rate.  
However, throughout the whole way we wonder  
If our voice can be compared to the sound of a thunder,  
Whether our bare hands can stop the destructive fire  
Or the world cannot be ruled by the simple human desire?

Sometimes, we spend our counted days  
asking questions while the answers are just right in front of our face.  
Are we tiny freckles on the cheek of the universe?  
YES, we are! But that is more a blessing than a curse...

Imagine everything existing is a picture rich in colors,  
We would be a spot in the field full of flowers.  
Now, use a microscope to see what you cannot at very first glance,  
you notice more colors, live stories, souls caught in an unstoppable dance.  
Do you already have the answer you were looking forward to know?  
Neither the endless space nor the future is under our control,  
But a different, even more powerful world is hidden deep in our soul!



"Why are we so special?" - you would ask  
Actually, answering is not an impossible  
task.

Although we are diamonds in the rough  
There is something exceptional about us –  
we feel, we struggle, we fight, we hate,  
we love...

And someone would say that being so tiny  
is not fair!

In fact, we are so extraordinary because we  
are so rare!