

A friendship of...words!

Recently I've been thinking about the meaning of the word friendship.

I know you can have a friend, but how can that friend be a ship? And if it is a ship, what short of sheep is it?

Is it one that travels over the seven seas? Or one that goes baa! when in front of the wolf?

Either way how can things and animals become friends? And can a sheep and a wolf develop a friendship? If so, I think it would be a delicious one for the wolf, at least until the sheep disappears.

But what is the meaning of the word friendship? Would anyone care to explain it? Does it mean that you have to give what you receive? If it is so, this means we should apply the old saying "an eye for an eye" to it; because this does not sound very friendly to me.

Sheep, friendship, ship are all different things, why search for a meaning, when they all are under the same sky, is it right for me to question them? No! I think not!

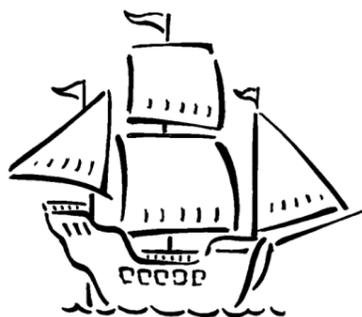
Things are better left unquestioned, in the end who cares about the meaning of ship, friendship and sheep...in the end all that remains is the distant echo of a ship.

Ioana-Cristiana Isachi, E-F, III

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FRIEND



ROMÂNIA
MINISTERUL EDUCAȚIEI, CERCETĂRII,
TINERETULUI ȘI SPORTULUI
UNIVERSITATEA „VASILE ALECSANDRI”
DIN BACĂU
FACULTATEA DE LITERE



STUDENTS' LITERARY SUPPLEMENT



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Poems

When dream just touched it with its wings,
A kiss is merely a kiss.
No tinge of joy, no sound of bliss,
No trace of it – away it sings.

When dream besets around it with its wings,
A mere kiss is trite no longer
But, on the contrary, 'tis stronger
Than the reality to which it clings.

When dream hath long caressed it with its wings,
The kiss should not be felt or seen,
Nor be disturbed with what else might have been,
Or it will meet its ruin – it will perish.

You must not dwell upon it, you should cherish.



Enlarge upon the following topics:

Hast thou sinned?
Hast thou taken the name of your god in vain?
Hast thou wreaked havoc and collected storm?
Hast thou forgotten to smile and be blind?
Hast thou told lies properly?
Hast thou remembered to lock and throw the key?
Hast thou put on thy mask of resemblance upon wak-
ing up?

Hast thou committed any crime against humanity?

Who is there to judge or mark?

(You will receive 40 points for the first 7 questions,
50 points for the 8th, 9 points for answering
Neatly and following the basic normality pattern.
You have one point for the aesthetic framing.)

My content self

The sound's whistle dwells on bricks of brain,
It is of gulls, of oceans, of drops, a pouring rain
I feel, but cannot see; blue circles of pain deafen me,
Growing in me as clinks of heavy chains.

My frozen gaze longs for nature's savoury kiss
To overcome the thirst that kills my spirit's bliss.
When waves of drops turn warm in a cold hiss,
I sense my heart, l'abîme of what I really miss.



How do I dare pray and say the words I say
When I am blind and poor, a beggar of the day?
My hands will feel the earth in which I lay
Till I can choose the path towards my inner way.

To climb was hard and to descend was shame,
Cause what we've learned was not love, but just fame.
I leave to you what can be touched and put into a
frame
Or you can come deep down with me into the flame.

If you are strong as iron claims to be, I can foresee
Fire at work, removing from you only the impurity.
If you are earth and under rain you will become clay
There is still hope to create a new you under a sunray.

Y.E.B



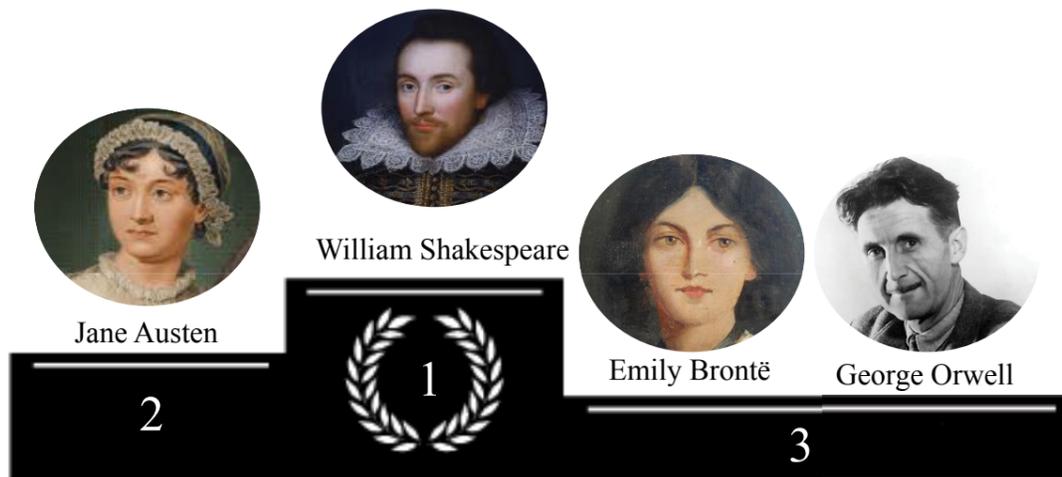
“My meaning simply is, that whatever I have tried to do in life, I have tried with all my heart to do well; that whatever I have devoted myself to, I have devoted myself to completely; that in great aims and in small, I have always been thoroughly in earnest.”

Charles Dickens, *David Copperfield*



My favourite...

This year, 53 students from the R-E, E-R, R-F and E-F sections, from all years of study, participated to our inquiry. William Shakespeare won the first place, while Jane Austen came second on the list of preferences. When it comes to favourite books, students definitely expressed their great love for *1984* and *Pride and Prejudice*, which won the majority of the votes. *Wuthering Heights*, *Romeo and Juliet*, *Pamela* and *Jane Eyre* came close behind, with an equal number of votes. *Great Expectations* occupied the third position. Other authors who were given at least two votes were: Geoffrey Chaucer, John Fowles and Henry Fielding.



Endless symphony



A purple veil in clear design
 Hovering over my glass of wine.
 Time stands still, my breathing heavy...
 My sole comfort: an eerie melody.

Sleep is a torment I cannot reach,
 The silver tune my soul has breached.
 Playing with unuttered need
 And pursuing my big dream.

The symphony is clear and tender;
 It's beckoning me to surrender.
 Lost among the waves of time,
 It summons me... I'm hypnotized.

Like the moon's broken tears,
 I am inspired by my fears.
 As the ancient clock strikes three,
 I drown in silent misery.

Andreea – Elena Manea, R-E, III

Little by little

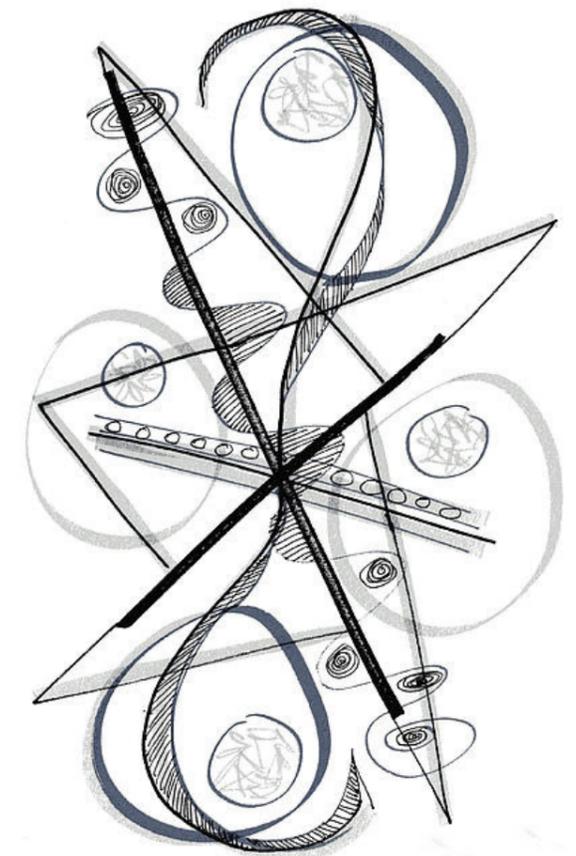
Little by little
 My life passes by
 Little by little
 I feel death's coming by

Little by little
 People fade away
 Little by little
 I am farther away

Little by little
 The dark's closing in
 Little by little
 My dreams disappear

Little by little
 I am letting go
 Little by little
 I am no more

Ioana-Cristiana Isachi, E-F, III





perfect sky was covered in gray clouds, and, in the distance, there was a shadow.

Her heart skipped a beat and she knew it was him. Tears streamed down her face before she could stop them. "Josh!" she sobbed, and then she was hugging the shadow that was now her best friend. He hugged her back really tight and it felt real. "What are you doing to yourself, Jules?" "But I love you", she said, in her mind. "And I will always love you."

Joshua let her go, kissing her forehead. "Look, the sky has cleared out." Julie smiled, sadly. It had, actually, and now the sun set over the sea, making the sky red and green and purple. Bloody sky. Like an angel without wings. "Just the way you like it," he added. When she looked back down, she was alone. "Goodbye" she heard him in her mind and one hot tear crossed down her cheek.

Julie opened her eyes and she was standing in somebody's arms. He smelled foreign, but pleasant. Julie stepped back from the embrace to see the blonde Toph look at her with interest.

"Sorry," she mumbled. "I didn't realize what I was doing." She wiped her wet eyes with her still damp sleeve.

"It's okay. Are you alright?" He looked worried.

"I believe so..." Julie remembered the Joshua in her head: young, just as he was when they were both sixteen.

"Would you like to go somewhere for a cup of coffee?"

"Hot chocolate, please." She smiled. It was the best proposition she had heard for days. She shivered and remembered her damp clothes. "Wait a second."

Julie went to the backroom where Nate was playing on his PSP. He hid it in his pocket when Julie entered.

"I'm going to lunch, and then I'm going to take the rest of the day free, please," she said in a hurry.

Nate's eyes widened: "Did he finally call?"

"No." Julie already had her coat on. "He's here!" and she got out as fast as she came in. Behind her, Nate probably said something more. She didn't hear.

In the shop, Toph was waiting for her near a shelf, examining a blue book.

"Sherlock Holmes?" she asked, smiling, and he put it back.

"Was it?" he smiled in his crooked way. "Shall we go?" He offered his hand and Julie took it. It was warm and soft.

"Yes. To my place first, please. I gotta change."

Roxana Lupașcu, E-R, II



Ion Luca Caragiale
(1852-1912)

CHARLES DICKENS

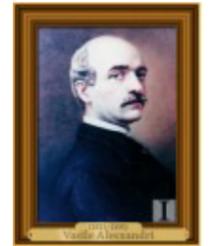
(7 February 1812 – 9 June 1870)



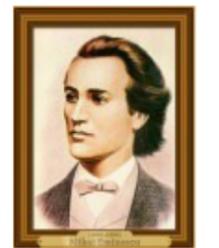
Charles John Huffam Dickens is an English writer and social critic, generally regarded as the greatest novelist of the Victorian period and the creator of some of the world's most memorable fictional characters. Dickens was 19th century London personified, he survived its mean streets as a child and, largely self-educated, possessed the genius to become the greatest writer of his age. His novels and short stories continue to enjoy an enduring popularity among the general reading public. This year the 200th anniversary of Charles Dickens's birth is celebrated around the world.



Ion Creangă
(1837-1889)



Vasile Alecsandri
(1821-1890)



Mihai Eminescu
(1850-1889)

Dombey and Son (excerpt) by Charles Dickens

Upon the Doctor's door-steps one day, Paul stood with a fluttering heart, and with his small right hand in his father's. His other hand was locked in that of Florence. How tight the tiny pressure of that one; and how loose and cold the other!

Mrs Pipchin hovered behind the victim, with her sable plumage and her hooked beak, like a bird of ill-omen. She was out of breath—for Mr Dombey, full of great thoughts, had walked fast—and she croaked hoarsely as she waited for the opening of the door.

'Now, Paul,' said Mr Dombey, exultingly. 'This is the way indeed to be Dombey and Son, and have money. You are almost a man already.'

'Almost,' returned the child.

Even his childish agitation could not master the sly and quaint yet touching look, with which he accompanied the reply.

It brought a vague expression of dissatisfaction into Mr Dombey's face; but the door being opened, it was quickly gone.

'Doctor Blimber is at home, I believe?' said Mr Dombey. [...]

'I think,' said Mr Dombey, 'I have given all the trouble I need, and may take my leave. Paul, my child,' he went close to him, as he sat upon the table. 'Good-bye.'

'Good-bye, Papa.'

The limp and careless little hand that Mr Dombey took in his, was singularly out of keeping with the wistful face. But he had no part in its sorrowful expression. It was not addressed to him. No, no. To Florence—all to Florence. [...]

'I shall see you soon, Paul. You are free on Saturdays and Sundays, you know.'

'Yes, Papa,' returned Paul: looking at his sister. 'On Saturdays and Sundays.'

'And you'll try and learn a great deal here, and be a clever man,' said Mr Dombey; 'won't you?'

'I'll try,' returned the child, wearily.

'And you'll soon be grown up now!' said Mr Dombey.

'Oh! very soon!' replied the child. Once more the old, old look passed rapidly across his features like a strange light. It fell on Mrs Pipchin, and extinguished itself in her black dress. That excellent ogress stepped forward to take leave and to bear off Florence, which she had long been thirsting to do. The move on her part roused Mr Dombey, whose eyes were fixed on Paul. After patting him on the head, and pressing his small hand again, he took leave of Doctor Blimber, Mrs Blimber, and Miss Blimber, with his usual polite frigidity, and walked out of the study. [...]

He sat, with folded hands, upon his pedestal, silently listening. But he might have answered 'weary, weary! very lonely, very sad!' And there, with an aching void in his young heart, and all outside so cold, and bare, and strange, Paul sat as if he had taken life unfurnished, and the upholsterer were never coming.

said, finally, and her heart beat so slowly that it hurt.

"Okay," she barely mumbled.

They walked through the rainy streets of Baltimore in silence, as if all the stories in the world had died on that train and now there was none to tell. Finally, he spoke again.

"So, do all your stories end in death and loss?"

Julie didn't answer and neither did she look up at him for that matter. His voice echoed in her head.

"Did you love him?" he said again.

"Who?" But she knew very well who he was talking about.

"Joshua. And don't tell me it's just a story because we both know it's not."

Julie stopped in front of her apartment block and looked up at him. The rain got into her eyes.

Toph raised his hand to her face and wiped the water from under her eyes with his thumb. He wasn't much taller than her. His once spiky hair was now stuck to his forehead, dark blonde to his pale face. She avoided his eyes and looked aside.

"Look at me." His hand was hot on her face. She didn't move her eyes. "Look at me, Julie!" She did. The color of his eyes startled her, she shivered. They were green with darker edges, a shade of green she could not name.

"What do you want?" she said, looking in his eyes.

Toph shrugged and made Julie's blood rise in her cheeks. She shoved his hand aside and stepped back. She didn't care about the hurt face he made.

"So you come and sit near me in the train, you tell me stories with angels and curses, you offer me skittles and walk me home when I'm sure Baltimore isn't even your station, and you won't even tell me what you want?" she shouted over the damp sound of the rain.



"Will you invite me up for a cup of coffee?" he said, as if that was the right answer to her question.

"God, no!" Julie took her bag from his hands

and stomped her way up to the door.

"Okay, then," she heard him say behind her. "I have your number!"

Julie turned around, but couldn't see him anymore.

Three days later it was still raining in Baltimore. It was heavier, louder and even more wet. Julie still didn't have an umbrella, or a call from a strange beautiful blond boy she had met on the train. She had promised herself not to tell anyone about what had happened. However, as usual, she could not keep the word to herself. Her boss, Nate, was kind enough to listen, and cared enough to ask her each morning if Toph had called.

Wednesday morning, clothes all soaked, nose running, Julie stopped waiting for his call, or for anything special from life, really. It was almost lunch and few people had entered the bookshop. Most of them probably just to get away from the rain, for they didn't buy anything. Who goes out on a day like this, even to buy books?

The door bell rang again, but she didn't look up as she was reading from her psychology book. She could hear no steps on the carpet. Probably it was an usual customer who knew what he wanted.

"Close your eyes," his voice said and it startled her. Julie fought the urge to look up.

"What do you want?" she demanded.

Out of the corner of her eye, Julie saw him come around the desk and stop near her. She closed her eyes, not thinking that she probably wanted him to touch her.

"How did you know I worked here?" Her voice was wavering.

"Keep your eyes closed." His voice was so close to her ear that she could feel his breath on her face. It was sweet, like Skittles.

"How did you find me? Why didn't you call?" She was rambling and she was aware of that.

"Shut up!" His tone was just a little bit harsh. "Imagine the sea" he said in his story-telling voice and she did, unwillingly. "Feel the lazy waves on your feet, coming slowly to the shore, one after another, after another. The water feels cold at first, but it becomes warm. And everything is silent. The wind is soft and doesn't make a sound. Stay there, in the middle of the ocean. Do not tell me what you see."

Julie stood straight in her imaginary perfect sea. Her hair tickled her back in the wind, and the warmth was pleasant to her cold skin. Her otherwise

"Twenty-three. But that is no reason for not telling me a story. People are never too old for these things."

He was two years younger than her. Not that she cared. Toph's face was all excitement, as if she were some famous storyteller and was about to tell the greatest story ever.

She wondered then if a simple story like Snow-White or Cinderella could make him go away. It most probably wouldn't.

"Once upon a time there were a girl and a boy," she started. Toph's face was set. "They were both six and they were best friends. He was the only one she loved. He died at sixteen - the end."

Julie ended the story when she realized what she was saying. Why hadn't she invented a story? A simple, easy, happy-ending one?

She looked at the boy facing her. He had swallowed the candy and was now looking at her as if analyzing the complicated layers of the story.

"Your story sucks!" he finally said, the aura of mystery suddenly vanishing.

"Wow, thanks!" Julie crossed her arms.

Toph threw another jelly in his mouth. "Well, you totally suck at telling stories" he said, chewing. "Try again, put some details in."

Julie knew resistance was futile. She sighed. "They played together all the time, spent every second together; when they fought, they were terrible, they screamed and hit... their parents couldn't understand the way their friendship worked..." She stopped and looked up at Toph, he was still waiting for more.

Sighing again, she continued: "They had their first kiss when she was 14 and seven months older than him. They were lying on the lawn before her house, looking up at the cloudy sky. It wasn't at all warm but the grass smelled like summer and they liked it. It was the last day before school started. Her mother called for the girl to come inside.

She rose on her elbows, he did so too.

"See you tomorrow," she said, and then he leaned in and kissed her. She was also taller than him at that time."

"What was the boy's name?" Toph interrupted. Julie thought for a while "Joshua."

"I am very sorry for your loss," his tone was serious, his face sad.

Julie jumped at his words. "Who said it's a true story? It's just a story."

"But no story is made of lies only, they all have some truth in them."

"If it's imaginary, then it's not the truth," she argued.

A thunder rolled and covered his answer. Julie followed his lips as they moved, but she did not see the words they formed. Toph smiled, as if he had heard his favorite song and for a while, still looking at his lips, Julie's breath refused to go out.

Toph's voice broke the eerie atmosphere as he announced: "It's time."

Julie exhaled and her voice came out in a whisper: "Time for what?"

"Baltimore, our station."

It sounded strange for something to be theirs, but even so, she liked that they had something to



share. Even a train station. How did time pass so quickly?

They got off the train and Toph helped her with her bag. She noticed he didn't have any luggage. The train station was wet as they got out and it was still raining. That slow light annoying rain she hated the most.

Toph looked up: "Do you have an umbrella?"

"No" Julie said, hugging herself tighter. "It's my way of saying 'no' to the rain."

He laughed. "And how's that working out for you?"

"Not so well," Julie sighed and made her way to the end of the tracks.

He laughed again. "You are so strange..."

She laughed, too. "Look who's talking!"

"I could walk you home if you wanted," he

Dombey și fiul (fragment) de Charles Dickens

Într-o zi, Paul stătea în pragul ușii doctorului cu inima palpitând și cu mânuța lui dreaptă în cea a tatălui. Pe cealaltă i-o ținea strâns Florence. Cât de puternică această mică strânsoare; și cât de rece și molatică cealaltă.

Doamna Pipchin, cu penajul ei negru și clonțul coroiat, plana în spatele victimei ca o pasăre de rău-augur. Abia-și trăgea sufletul - pentru că domnul Dombey, plin de gânduri mărețe, mersese foarte repede - și vorbea răgușit în timp ce aștepta să se deschidă ușa.

"Iată, Paul", zise domnul Dombey entuziasmat. "În felul acesta ajungi să fii Dombey și fiul și să ai bani. Ești deja aproape un bărbat."

"Aproape", răspuse copilul.

Nici măcar agitația lui copilăroasă nu putu controla privirea șireată și stranie, dar înduioșătoare care îi însoți răspunsul. Un aer vag de nemulțumire apărui atunci pe chipul domnului Dombey; dar dispăru iute pentru că se deschise ușa.

"Doctorul Blimber este acasă, presupun", spuse domnul Dombey.[...]

"Cred, zise domnul Dombey, că mi-am dat toată osteneala de care era nevoie și că îmi pot lua rămas bun. Paul, copilul meu", s-a apropiat de el în timp ce se așeza la masă. "La revedere!"

"La revedere, tată!"

Mâna moale și indiferentă pe care domnul Dombey o apucă, se afla într-o neobișnuită opoziție cu melancolia chipului. Dar expresia suferindă a chipului aceluia nu avea nici o legătură cu el. Nu îi era adresată lui. Nu, nu. Lui Florence îi era adresată - în întregime lui Florence.[...]

"Ne vedem curând, Paul. Ești liber în zilele de sâmbătă și duminică, să știi."

"Da, tată", răspuse Paul: uitându-se la sora lui. "În zilele de sâmbătă și duminică."

"Și vei încerca să înveți multe aici, și să fii deștept, adaugă domnul Dombey, nu-i așa?"

"Am să încerc", răspuse copilul obosit.

"Și în curând vei fi mare!", zise domnul Dombey.

"Oh! Foarte curând", răspuse fiul. Încă o dată expresia aceea de om tare bătrân îi cuprinse o clipă trăsăturile ca o lumină ciudată. Căzu apoi peste doamna Pipchin și se stinse în rochia ei neagră. Această veritabilă zgrițuroaică înaintă ca să-și ia rămas bun și să o îndepărteze pe Florence, lucru pe care tânjea de mult să-l facă. Mișcarea ei îl dezmetici pe domnul Dombey, ai cărui ochi erau ațintiți asupra lui Paul. După ce îl bătu ușor pe cap, strângându-i din nou mânuța, își luă rămas bun, cu aceeași frigiditate politicoasă, de la doctorul Blimber, doamna Blimber și domnișoara Blimber, și ieși din birou.[...]

Se așeză, cu brațele încrucișate, pe pedestalul său, ascultând în tăcere. Dar ar fi putut răspunde "obosit, obosit! Foarte singur, foarte trist!" și Paul rămase acolo cu un gol dureros în tânăra lui inimă, și totul în jurul său era așa de rece, de pustiu și de ciudat, de parcă și-ar fi luat viața nemobilată și tapițerul nu avea de gând să vină niciodată.

Andra Peltea, E-R, I
Tudor Ciupercă, E-R, I

Walk again!



On a hot summer day I was walking across the park to relax for a few moments. The noon was unusually still. Maybe it was because of the scorching heat that drove people to cool places. I sat on a bench under the shade of a high tree and watched the clear blue sky.

Suddenly, I could hear a strange sound, not far from where I was. I approached the bushes in front of me slowly and, to my surprise, I saw a puppy with its both front paws badly injured. I was so impressed by the suffering of the little creature that I decided to take it at home right away.

I took great care of it and after several weeks the poor dog was completely recovered. And still it would not walk. This worried me considerably and so I took it to a vet to see what it was that prevented it from walking. I explained to the doctor how I had found it in the park, took it home and treated its injuries as well as I could. After examining the puppy carefully, the vet confirmed that I had done a wonderful job and that theoretically the puppy should have no problem. Then, bewildered, I asked the doctor why it was not able to walk:

"I think your dog doesn't want to. Unfortunately, it got used to being mistreated by other dogs or by people", the doctor said frankly.

"But I can't believe this, it's just a dog, not a human being. Perhaps it is fear, or perhaps...", I tried an explanation.

"Oh, fear indeed, the poor thing is paralyzed with fear", continued the vet.

I was completely lost. I really didn't understand the meaning of the vet's words. He put it more clearly:

"The suffering made it feel so little that it is now terrified at the thought of confronting the world again", he said.

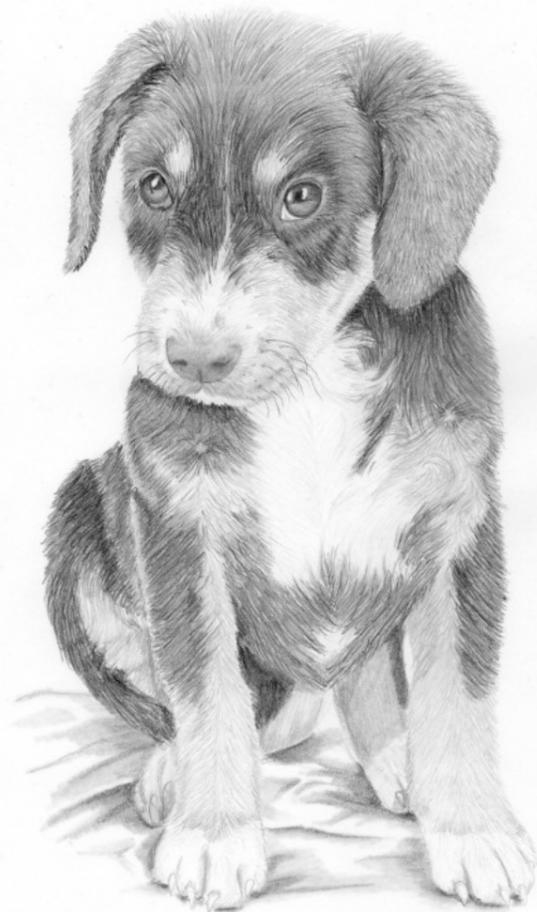
"So, this is a reaction, a form of protest. But it doesn't do it any good. I wonder how I could help it", I asked the doctor.

"You can't do anything about it. Just continue to take care of it and show it affection and, little by little, it will recover", the vet advised me.

This whole incident made me understand that

such problems may occur in the daily lives of us, humans, and that everyone has a battle to fight that is more or less similar to this one. Whoever reached the bottom of his "hell" and didn't die of despair in spite of what he saw there will definitely have the power to reconstruct him/herself and "walk" again.

Ionela Starparu, LEPC, I



"You know, it's not polite to leave someone with his hand out like that," and his smile was reassuring and confident.

Julie looked from his pale face down to his equally pale hand, then back up. He was still smiling, waiting. She gave him her hand and he took it. His



was warm and smooth and felt nice over her frozen skin.

"Nice to meet you." He held her hand in his for a little more than necessary, and then she took it back, uncomfortably.

"So" Julie started, trying to seem only mildly interested, "why are you telling me stories about fallen angels anyway?"

"Not fallen," Toph corrected her, "cursed."

"How do you know?"

Toph shrugged and looked at her sideways. He was sitting with his back at the window, one arm rested on the backrest. "Then why are you telling me such things?"

"Because it's a beautiful story. People don't listen to stories anymore."

Julie didn't answer. The train ran fast and the wheels made a soft rhythmic sound. Click-clack! Click-clack! It made her sleepy. Outside, she could see it was barely raining, but the clouds were still heavy above the world. She closed her eyes and thought of nothing, but in her head, the train's rattle sounded like the battling of wings. There was a great light coming towards her. The man, for she knew in her head it was a man, came closer. She could see the feathers of his attached wings, every white, shiny feather.

"So, where are you going to?" his voice interrupted her dream. She wondered what the angel would have said to her.

"Baltimore" Julie said sleepily, and immediately regretted it.

"Cool, so we've got time." He smiled.

"Time for what?" her curiosity kicked in, like a flashing light bulb.

"Stories, that's what this is all about."

"You know what? Just... just stop talking to me."

The blond boy leaned back in his seat, as if taking a better look at her.

"Hmm, why don't you tell me your story, then, Julie?"

She didn't like the way he uttered her name, as if like she were some kind of sweet candy he could use as he pleased. Julie responded in the bitterest tone she was capable of: "I don't talk to strangers."

"But Julie, I am not a stranger, I am Toph, I told you a story, now it's your turn to tell me one." Now she was annoyed.

"If I told you a story would you stop talking, then?"

"If you want me to..."

Julie sat back in her seat, her back to the window, mirroring the boy's position.

He had a box of Skittles in his hand and laboriously threw one candy into his mouth. That distracted her.

"Do you want Skittles?" He offered her the box.

"Aren't those for children?" The colored pack looked strange in his hand.

"They aren't if I eat them." Toph said and took another candy.



The faded light of the rainy day outside made his hair look silver and his teeth white while he was chewing the Skittles, one after another.

"How old are you anyway?" she wondered aloud.

until then. Some time after that, people found out that he had sinned with another woman, and, ashamed, he left, and went to be a priest in another village, far from that one. After a while his wife died. He continued to live and deliver services until one day the bishop invited him to the celebration of a holy day. After the liturgy, all the priests gathered and ate together and talked about the saint they were celebrating.

The priest interrupted the discussion and said: "That is not true. The saint was my neighbor. Let me tell you how that happened." "But that is not possible" the archbishop said "The saint lived more than 300 years ago. That cannot be possible." "I tell you it is true." The archbishop took him aside and the priest told him everything, about how the angel's wings fell. And how he hadn't died since.

"You are bound with the angel's curse" the archbishop said, "You should go to that church and offer forgiveness to the angel."

And they went back to that old village, but there was a forest in the place where the church used to be, and at the altar site, the priest found the wingless angel wandering.

"Angel, I cannot die, I have to give you forgiveness in order to die," the man tried.

"But you bound me with your curse, so you are bound with mine too. You shall forgive me first, then I'll forgive you and we shall both be free."

"But if I give you forgiveness first, then you will have your wings back and you'll fly away, and I'll stay here forever."

"God never deceives anybody. You shall trust me," the angel responded.

The priest sighed "Very well then, angel. I forgive you!"

And then the angel regained his wings of light and rose into the air. "You shall have my forgiveness too, father!"

At that moment, the archbishop saw the priest fall on the ground, and there was nothing left there, but bones and dust. Before the angel left, the bishop cried: "Angel, please, before you fly away, sing me

something you sing to God, there in Heaven."

"That is not something given for the ears of mortals to hear."

"Please, angel," he pleaded again, "so we can sing to God what you sing to Him."

"Very well then, but I shall rise to the third Heaven, and only then should I sing."

And the luminous angel rose and the bishop waited, and then the angel sang. And the archbishop had never heard anything so beautiful before, and would never hear it afterwards. The angel sang what we now sing, Halleluiah, and there is no translation to that, in any language—the end," he said abruptly and then smiled.

"Are you the angel?" Julie said and she covered her mouth. But the words were out already. The boy laughed, like someone who knew the answer to a very important question:

"Am I?" What was that supposed to mean? Julie realized she had been leaning towards him and that they were now very close. She sat back in her seat and crossed her

arms. The boy leaned back in his chair as well.

"That was all? What happened to the priest? Did he just die?"

The boy shrugged.

"What about the archbishop? Or the angel? They can't just go away like that"

He shrugged once more, raising his square shoulders just the right angle of carelessness.

"You're incredible!" she gestured. "You can't just start stories and leave them hanging in midair like that!"

"Yes, I can" he said, and his calm voice somehow sounded reassuring in Julie's ears, "I just did." He smiled, wickedly, with only one corner of his mouth.

"Pff!" Julie pouted and turned her back on him. What was he trying to prove, coming to her in all his blond glory and telling her angel stories? Maybe he was one of those Jehovah's Witnesses. They always sent the cutest boys. And then, out of the corner of her eye she saw his shadow coming closer. She looked at him. He had his right arm stretched toward her.

"Hi. I'm Toph." Julie raised an eyebrow. "Julie" she said, without moving.



Harley

Harley, light of my soul, fire of my heart. My freedom, my wings. The tips of my fingers taking a trip down the tank, resting on the warm leather seat. She was Harley, plain Harley, in the garage, resting heavily on her foot peg. She was Hog on the highway. She was Softail with her Heritage styling. She was Harley Davidson in adverts. But to me, she was everything I dreamed of having. Had there been another dream? There had been, indeed, for I had spent one dream-like summer on the seat of a bicycle, riding from village to village, by the sea, in Italy. You can always count on a motorcycle to take you where you need it to.

I had married Charlie in a haze, in Vegas. He had taken me there from North Carolina on the back of his Harley, and the rare times when he would take me with him in his rides were the only times when I would be allowed so near the Harley. His beautiful Harley, with her powerful humming, her throaty growling exhaust.

I had never really loved Charlie, but once you started seeing a member of the club, you'd better become his old lady if you didn't want to be treated like trash. When Charlie got shot and killed during some club business, I didn't cry. I didn't stay for the funeral either. I emptied the bank accounts, took the Harley and began my ride across the country.

The first night was the hardest. I was still in North Carolina, it was past midnight and I was tired. I decided to spend the night in a motel by the highway. It looked like a family place and that made it feel safe. The man at the front desk eyed me, looking suspicious and said: "Not many women venture to ride Harleys all alone at night..."

I could do little but smile and mumble something about being braver than others. I signed with a fake name, paid in cash, took the key to my room and spent all night trying to fall asleep but not being able to because of worry, despite the sleeping pills I had taken. I was worried that the club would send someone after me – once you were in, you were in for life. Every passing light I saw outside made me jumpy; every engine that sounded like that of a motorcycle took me behind the curtains, trying to take a peek at what was going outside. When the morning finally came, I managed to fall asleep for a short time, but then I woke scared that someone might have stolen my Harley. She was still there, in the parking lot.

After months of cruising on the highway and sleeping in cheap motels, I decided time had come to settle down. Since that last night before passing the state border, nothing made me feel unsafe again, and now that I was all the way in Washington, in a small town where I had managed to get a job as a waitress in a decent diner, I felt that I had managed to escape my husband's old life, that his Harley was truly mine now and that there was no need to run or hide. Some of the town folk seemed to have accepted my story of a widow honoring her husband's memory by using and taking care of his beloved Harley just as he would have, but there were those who did not approve of the idea of young woman living alone and riding a Harley – it seemed so rebellious – and it didn't take long before rumours of alleged drug and alcohol abuse, sexual promiscuity and bar fights caused by me began circulating. It looked like just a year after Charlie's death, a year of nomad life, I was to begin my travels once more; my good luck was running low.

I was once more on the road, once more sleeping in hotels, and this time, I felt like I was being followed. I was tired from all the cruising, from sleepless nights due to my paranoia and I was worried that I would soon be running low on cash, for my job as a waitress had not allowed me to save much. In Nebraska my good fortune hit the sack when one late night, I lost control of the motorcycle and crashed. I woke up next day in the hospital. I was told that I had a broken arm and a couple of cracked ribs and some cuts on my face, but that didn't seem important at the time.

I had no idea what happened with my Harley, how badly I had damaged it in the crash and where it was now. Two police officers came over to inquire about the accident, and after answering all their questions, I was able to ask some myself, about my motorcycle. There was some chassis damage, scratches and dents, broken mirrors and headlight; they would cost to replace and repair, and there would also be medical bills to settle. There would also be a fine, and a tax to pay at the local pound. I would have to find a garage with a good mechanic in the area.

I was kept in the hospital until next day, and as soon as I was allowed to leave I went to the pound to claim my bike. It wasn't there. That was impossible, I had been in the hospital, I was told it was there where I would have to pay the tax and claim it. I gave

the man at the desk the plate number. The tax had been paid yesterday, and the motorcycle picked up. By whom? By my brother-in-law. But my husband had no brothers! That was when I knew that I had been indeed followed.

I must have been followed from the very beginning! The club probably had someone tailing me all this time... and now I was without money, without the possibility to leave, someone waiting for the right moment to deal with me and my betrayal of the club. Before I had much time to worry for my safety, I was taken into custody for theft as the local police found out that I had never had legal ownership over the Harley.

Years after all that, I still have other memories, some turning themselves into the wind on the highway, some into the nights spent awake in dirty motels, or worse, in jail. That time spent in hospital, soon after the first encounter with the cops, it struck me that I simply did not know a thing about what it really meant to own a Harley, what it meant to be a nomad, to not belong.

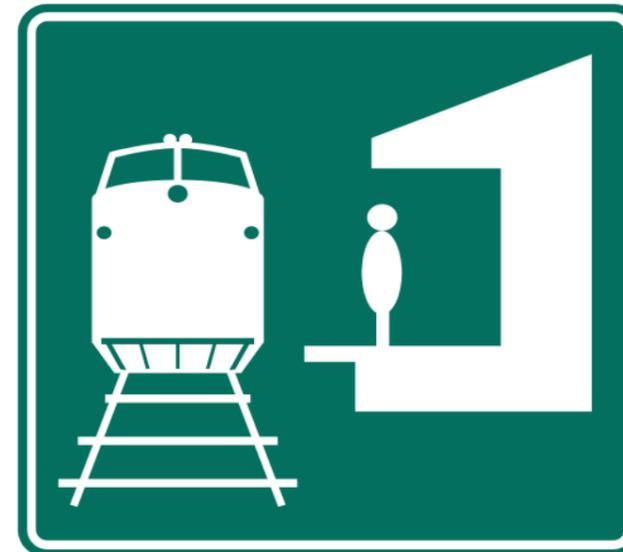
Noemi Neconesnic, CLAPD, II



not so good to marry anymore, and how she shouldn't wait for "the right person" because there was no "right person". Midnight caught them fighting over her low pay and how she didn't want to finish college. She tried, endless times, to just get up and leave the cold dinner untouched on the table, but she couldn't until her mother rose and stormed out the room after Julie yelled at her "You have no authority in my life anymore."

Saturday was slow and they barely talked. On Sunday, when she left, Julie couldn't be happier. She only missed her dad, who talked to her and who hugged her goodbye in the train station. Sometimes she thought her mother would, long ago, have divorced her dad, if only they didn't believe in the sacred nature of marriage. But there was nothing sacred still left in their marriage.

The sky was cloudy and the air was humid and stale in the railway station, it had rained during the night and it started to drizzle when she got on the train. In Baltimore she was sure it would already be raining, the weather was always worse there. But it didn't matter as long as it was far away from this. Her father waved her goodbye, the train finally left and she was relieved to have left her hometown once more.



The car smelled of dust, and sweat, and mud, and wet dogs. She walked to the emptiest side of it, and sat at the window. The balance of the rails made her sleepy and she allowed herself to close her eyes. She relaxed on the soft seat.

Julie emptied her mind of everything- the past weekend, the past month, the past five years since she left her parents. She opened her eyes and looked out of the window through the raindrops on the pane. Fields ran past her in a blurry green haze. She looked

up and gazed at the aisle and for a split-second, she locked eyes with someone walking towards her. He was medium-height, blondish and pale, and resembled annoyingly well with someone she knew; only she could not take a grasp of who it was. He walked steadily and confidently, despite the sway of the train. When he met her gaze, his mouth spread into a wide crooked smile and his eyes lit. Julie looked away and tried really hard to look out of the window. She examined the rain drops on the glass and the specks of dust, but when she looked up again, against her will, he was approaching her seat with what seemed like determination. Only it was just in her head. Julie turned her face away.

"Is this taken?" a melodious voice asked. She looked at him, all radiant and young and blond and pale and smiling.

"No" she mumbled and her voice was barely audible over the sound of the train. But he sat across her, nevertheless.

Julie looked out of the window again. The rain from last night made the green look brighter. It seemed, somehow, alive.

"Nice weather, huh?" He looked like Bon Jovi in his prime. He smiled at her with genuine interest.

"Do you like this?" she asked, pointing at the window. How could someone like the rain? It's wet and cold and it soaks your socks.

"Of course I do. Rain is the best season of all." And in saying this he gave her a big great smile. She noticed his teeth were a little crooked. But rain is not a season, Julie wanted to reply. Instead, in such a harsh tone that it even surprised herself, she said: "I hate it."

He shrugged. "Your loss."

As if she was losing something because she didn't like the rain! She turned back to watching the passing fields and minutes passed before Bon Jovi spoke again.

"Do you want to hear a story?"

"Sorry?" and she couldn't stop the mockery in her voice.

"There was once a priest who was also a drunk", he started. Julie raised an eyebrow. Really? "Once, he went to the pub and drank a lot all night. And then he did some other bad things. And he shouldn't have attended the mass anymore. But he kept doing it every Sunday." His voice became husky as he continued. "Once, while he was in the altar, an angel came to him and told him he shouldn't deliver service anymore. But the priest cursed the angel and his wings fell." Julie couldn't but stare at him.

"But the priest continued his life as it has been

The way you sit in the corner

Julie got out of her apartment block to a roar of heavy rain. The sky had apparently chosen that exact moment to pour water over the city. It fell with force and determination. Her sight was blurred and her ears tingled and she had no umbrella. Under the canopy of the Curiosity Shop across the street, a man and a woman were talking very excitedly in the rain. Julie checked the time on her phone: 8:43. She had exactly seventeen minutes to get to the library.



The girl-Julie waved and a taxi stopped in front of her. She ran towards it in the pouring rain. But before she could realize it, there's the man, covering his head with the morning newspaper, opening the taxi door. The door closed two seconds later and the yellow car was gone before she could argue with anyone. She looked back at the shop. The woman, who was now inside, gave her a pitiful look through the window. Already soaked, Julie looked for another taxi, but there was no patch of yellow visible through the water curtain. Julie checked the time again- there were still fifteen minutes left to get to work and there was no use waiting for another taxi there. She walked in the rain. She couldn't get any more wet than this anyway...

Julie arrived at the bookstore half an hour late. She was wet through and through and big water drops from her forehead were getting into her eyes. As she opened the shop door, a familiar smell of dust and paper welcomed her. Julie wiped her eyes with the back of her hand.

The old book store is rather big for such a shop, and very neat. The books are arranged in parallel rows on the shelves, first by category, then by size. It is all her work and Julie is very proud of her sys-

tem. There is little light in the shop, the way it always is in the morning. The yellow ceiling spot lights fall on the shelves, casting dark shadows on the floor.

"You're late." Nate said from the back door. "What's happened?"

Nate is her boss. He is a tall man in his late twenties. He wears his short blond hair spiked up and Julie sometimes finds herself wondering if he puts his fingers in the socket every morning to achieve this look. He wears thick, black framed glasses and he sometimes looks like a schoolboy. But one would never treat him like a school boy.

"Sorry," she said, taking off her jacket, "There was no taxi."

Nate went back in and Julie could hear French music coming from inside his office.

"Still no call?" Nate asked when she entered to leave her jacket.

"Still." She didn't look at him but she felt the pity in his voice.

"You're all soaked. You should turn on the heater before you catch a cold," he said instead of anything. She didn't say anything and went back to her front desk. She turned on the heat, as Nate had said and, reluctantly, sat down.

Julie wouldn't let her mind wander to the last weekend and its events, but it still did, for the heart never listens to the mind, but is its own master. She had gone, quite unwillingly, to her parents' home, that Friday. She saw again her mother hugging her, happy. Her father was reserved in expressing his emotions, but Julie knew he was glad as well. He hugged her briefly. The house smelled like childhood, a combination of fresh basil and her father's perfume. She let her bag down and followed her mother into the kitchen.

"What are you cooking?" Julie asked. It smelled strange. She sat down at the table and her mom brought her a plate of spinach and eggs.

"Umm, mom?" she started.

Her mother continued to lay down the table, "Yes?"

"Remember I don't eat spinach?" Julie said in a low voice.

And that's all it took to ignite the fire. Of course explaining that she only despised spinach was useless. Then they argued about how she hadn't gotten married yet and how after the age of 25 girls are

Born of ashes

Renu was young, was virile, yet he was tried by the mischievous Destiny so many times. He used to have a family many people dream of but few achieve — a beautiful, loving wife, two great children. One day Fate decided to burn it all to the ground and spread the ashes in the wind as if none of it had ever existed. After a while, he decided to look for those ashes and put them all together again and so he became a sailor. A sailor on a small merchant ship. An insignificant sailor on stormy seas. Expectation, dream, hope — did these mean anything for him? If they did, what was the meaning he gave them?



On the ship he was but an empty presence, doing his job then fading again in the shadows below the deck till he was needed again. He would enter a kind of state of hibernation and would stay in the darkness of his cabin for hours without doing anything else but staring blankly in a corner, his mind completely devoid of any thought or feeling. He no longer had any sense of time or space, his eyes had lost their youthful shine. There was nothing left to keep him in that world. This is how his days went by.

One day the ship came across an abandoned vessel aimlessly floating, waiting for its fatal descent into the blue depths. The sight of it stirred the spirits up on the merchant ship's deck and all men were summoned to board the unknown vessel and look for any survivors. There was obviously nobody left alive. Meaningless random dirty objects were lying scattered all around. There was no sign of a fight, not even a corpse. While searching for any item that might be of value in the very least, Renu found a blood-stained tarnished old book amidst a completely messed up room. As far as he could figure it out, it was the captain's journal. When he took it, a page fell out. It was a very vivid drawing of a young woman and the page was the only thing there that had remained so im-

maculate despite whatever must have happened, untouched by even time itself. He gently folded it and put it in his pocket.

That evening, for the first time after losing his beloved family he sat under the clear sky looking at the sunset. The seagulls were screaming under the stars that had slowly started to twinkle like millions of small candles shimmering in the water, lit by an unknown force. The wind started to blow, and Renu got up. As he was heading for his room, the echo of a sweet song stopped him all of a sudden. He turned around. Mermaids? They're just children's stories! Thinking it was only the product of his imagination he decidedly went to his room. As soon as he stepped into the darkness of his cabin he strongly felt the presence of someone else in there.

'Please don't leave me, my dear...' he heard a female voice like that seemed to be coming from the back of his head.

A woman on board? That's crazy. Women bring bad luck to ships, the captain would never have allowed such an abomination.

'Who's there?'

As Renu hurried to light the lamp he heard that voice giggle and the presence completely disappeared as the dim light began to silently flicker. So he was hearing voices and feeling presences that weren't there. He had finally gone mad. He returned to his empty self and didn't sleep all night. The ship was creaking as the waves crashed against it. On deck the soldiers on watch were drunk and were being very noisy with their ridiculous laughter. At least they, in their unconscious way, were happy.

The first rays of light found Renu sitting in a corner. It had gotten silent outside. The other sailors must have fallen asleep. He got up to see what was happening. There was nobody on deck. Since his voice didn't allow him to scream and call his mates, he went searching around. The rooms were all messy as they usually were, only now there was nobody else left on board but him. That was weird. What could have happened to the crew? His passive nature made him decide to wait for them to come back from wherever they had gone. Days passed by but nobody ever returned. He was all by himself. One day, as he was sitting in the captain's cabin, he heard the same female voice he had heard before. He couldn't really understand what she was saying. He closed his eyes,

as the voice began to sing. He felt a hand playfully combing his hair. He opened his eyes, shook his head and looked around.

‘Who are you? What do you want?’

He got no answer. That night he fell asleep under a starry sky. In his sleep he heard a sweet but sad song. He woke up. He felt the unknown presence again.

‘...love?’ Renu heard a voice in his mind. He finally found the courage and he turned. He saw a tall slender woman standing in front of him. She was wearing a long old dress that was torn in many places, as if she had been in a fight and there were bruises and scars on her frail body. Her long black hair was fluttering in the night breeze and the cold light of the moon revealed the gentle face of a young innocent woman. Her splendid grey eyes didn't have the smallest glitter of life, the expression of her pale face showed no other emotion but pain. Her hand was on her heart and her head was tilted to the right as she fixed him with her bleak stare in a sweet but glacial look. There was something familiar about her... Renu wanted to say something, but words wouldn't come out of his mouth.

The woman touched his lips with a finger and slowly shook her head. She then pointed at his pocket. He pulled out the drawing he had found on the abandoned ship and unfolded it. The woman in the drawing was exactly like the one standing now before his eyes! On one of the paper corners, in faded letters, someone had written “Amara”. That was probably her name. She opened a small dirty notebook and gave it to him. It was the journal Renu had found the drawing in. He could only make out some fragments.

“She's been calling me for weeks now. I don't want to go, my wife is waiting for me. She's just a drawing that became alive in my crazy dreams, bewildered by how much I miss my beloved wife... oh, Amara, what are you doing to me? Your sweet voice, your laughter, your innocent face...I can feel her standing beside me, looking over my shoulder as I write...”

A blow of the wind turned the pages of the journal in his hands. “It's been a month since my crew has gone missing. I'm out of food supplies and Amara's still playing games with me, even if she's well aware that I'm not enjoying it. Sometimes she holds

my head in her lap while playing with my hair, telling me not to leave her. There are times when I swear I can hear my wife's voice begging me to come back to her, and this is when Amara gets mad, screaming and moaning and ravaging everything around in a fit of fury till I can no longer hear my wife's voice.”

‘Renu? Love?’

Renu instantly looked up. It was his wife whom he heard, he was sure of it. He looked around for Amara, but he couldn't see her anymore. He felt her growing agitation. It had gotten foggy and all he could see was the weak beacon of a lighthouse piercing through the heavy mist.

‘Renu! My dearest, please come! We're waiting for you!’

The unseen Amara grabbed him by the hand and forced his head on her lap.

‘...don't leave me!’ He felt her hand through his hair again, her cold lips passionately kissing him.

His body turned numb and he fell into a deep slumber. When he got up, his wife was standing before him, smiling innocently as she always used to. They weren't on the ship anymore, but in front of their house. He

felt complete once more, the embers of his feelings were rekindled, bringing to light long forgotten emotions.

‘Daddy! Daddy!’

His two children came running at him from inside the house and flew right into his arms, tightly embracing him.

‘Tell us how your trip was, daddy!’ Renu turned to his wife hoping for a rescue, as he felt too tired to move anymore. Instead, she smiled at him sweetly.

‘You're home, darling, you're finally home!’

Ioana Hură, E-F, I



“Maria, where is this kid? She didn't eat and I want her to help me in the garden. How long does it take her to wash her face and say angel angel, amen” said grandpa.

“Well, Ion, I think she said her angel angel prayer, amen, and went back to sleep” said grandma playfully. “You know she does it sometimes when she is tired.”

As I heard them mentioning me I was sneaking behind the window. My grandpa, who often cursed, said something in a lower voice and decided to go to his work.

“Did you say anything, Ion?” grandma asked grandpa.

“No, I didn't. But, I'll tell you one thing. This evening at nine o' clock she goes to sleep. She stays up late with her new gang here in the front of the gate, they talk, laugh, play, and what not, until eleven in the evening. I am tired because I can't sleep till she enters the house. She is tired, too, and can't help me the next day. So here we are, each morning it's the same story. When I was young I used to meet my friends at church on Sundays and that was it.”

“Oh my dear, those were different times. Besides, if you had listened to the sermon each time you went to church and not giggled with your friends, you wouldn't have been here cursing and taking your anger on the poor child today,” she said, looking straight at him with a thick wood stick in her hand. The stick

was for stirring polenta, but often used as Saint Nicholas, too, when children misbehaved. He left mumbling something as usual, and my grandma carried on with her chores in the kitchen. It was funny to think that she showed Saint Nicholas to him, too.

Yon Ela Brânză, E-F, III

"Oh, my dear, go home, I am almost done here. I'll catch up with you in a minute" he replied. The way back was as terrible as the way to the garden had been, and although the house was not very far, it seemed to me I had to cross the world till I would reach my grandma's loving arms.

"Oh my God!" she said shocked. "What happened to your legs? To your arms, too! Your father will be so angry with us. I told you, you should wear long sleeves and pants. Look at you now!" By the time she prepared some hot water for me to wash and clean clothes to wear, my grandpa came in. She looked at him angrily, yet her look was that of an angel. She started to scold him although she knew my scratches weren't his fault. I was a stubborn kid and did not want to wear anything that would cover me entirely. My grandpa did not know what to say, or he ignored her, but he looked at me with so much sorrow that it made me go straight to his arms and kiss him.

"It's ok, grandpa, it doesn't matter. I am here to help you both!"

I felt so guilty knowing that I was giving them more trouble than I was worth. I hated the work in the field and the early mornings when I had to drag a stinky, lunatic cow to the herd.

"Wake up, my dear! Please, wake up!" my dear grandma said at around 5:30 in the morning. It's late!" I had hardly opened one eye when my body was out of bed, bitten by a cold morning. The cow would drag me to the neighbour's cornfields. "I'll kill this cow," I would say each morning on my way back to grandpa. "It broke into a run on Mr. Potty's plantation. He let the dogs out. I was running to catch the cow. The dogs were running to catch me. I fell down. Look at my knee now! I hate this cow. I don't even know why you called it Fluffy! You should've called it Flurry. Anyway, that old crazy man said you should

go talk to him, unless you want that stupid cow and I to get in trouble again. He also said that I should not have been given such a big responsibility. That old hag of a wife of his said that my skirt was too short, and asked me if I was not ashamed to go around like this.

The truth is, I am pretty tall and portly. No one can say I am younger than 15 years old. As I have some childish anger in me also, I sort of lost control of myself, so I asked her without giving too much thought about it, if I should wear long skirts and no underwear like her. After hearing this, my grandpa blushed a bit and said I should act nicely with the neighbours and that Potty was the man's nickname. His real name was Mr. Potcoava. I did not bother about it anymore and went straight to see what my dear grandma was doing.

"Hey kitty, kitty, hey, kitty, kitty!" As always, she was calling the cats to feed them. I smelt a vanilla scent coming from the summer kitchen. I could not resist the doughnuts so I stopped in a corner and looked at her as if it had been the first and last time. She was neither short, nor tall. Neither skinny, nor fat. Beautiful brown eyes and a little fairy nose which neither my mom or I were lucky enough to genetically inherit. Instead, we did inherit the beauty marks: the so-called Indian one between her eyebrows was given to my mom and I got the one on the left cheek, which I proudly wear today. She was wearing a sort of grey-green dressing gown covered by a white apron. I could still see on her sleeves some spots of flour from the puffpastery. Her hands looked so feeble. When she would clench my arm to warn me of something or as forms of reprimand, it felt the strongest. Grandma's name was Maria, after the Virgin Mary, and her long white hair and lovely smile made her look like the greatest human being ever in my eyes. Unfortunately her heart was very weak and my mom said I must be nice and help her around the house when I saw that she was getting tired. I loved to cook, knit and she was also teaching me the needlework.

"Hey, I am back! What are you doing there?" I said.

"Nothing!" she said, as she wanted to surprise me with her goodies. "Go and wash your sleepy face and say your prayers and then come back here".

"Just one doughnut pretty, please," I begged her. But she gave me the look which meant that I had to obey her and follow the morning routine. Well, nothing was as you might imagine. I did not wash my face or say any of my morning prayers. I just went back to bed instead, and was almost asleep when I heard grandpa's voice:



Another... rose for Emily

I would never have left her. She was part of me. I would have done anything for her. I knew all her secrets. I was everywhere she was, lived on the air she breathed, sensed her every wince. I knew that my social status was nothing as compared to hers, but if she found a friend in me, I found love in her being.

When he disappeared, things calmed down and I was on the verge of telling her about my feelings. He never truly loved her and more than that, that man, better said that beast, treated her with no respect. It was he who had asked for what I later did. But peace ran out of time and Homer, once returned, stole her love again without returning any love back... the more he stole, the better she worshipped him.

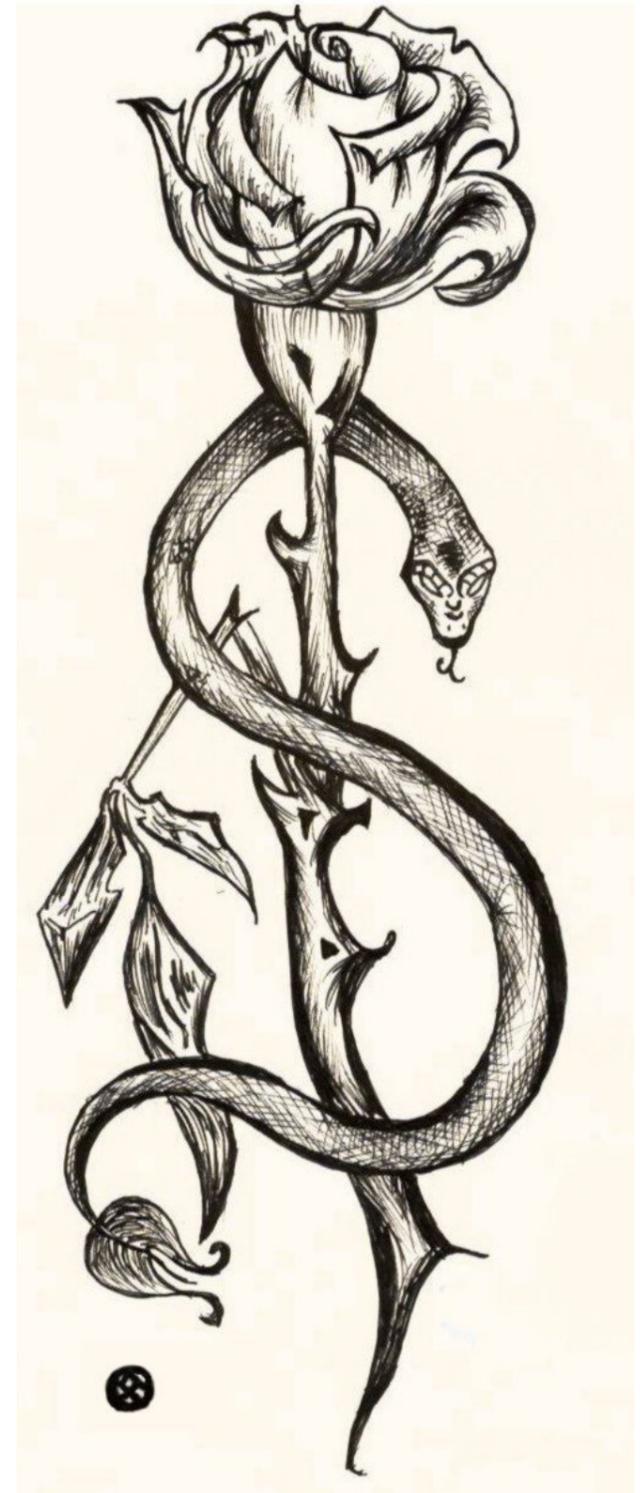
Until that day he would have ran away as always after spending a day with her, but she decided to keep him forever. She planned everything. She bought poison and asked me to do it. I hoped that once dead, he would be out of her heart but...

She spent every day in the room where he was, in the bed where he rested. I would have never used the other half of the arsenic bottle, she had asked me to throw it away, but I thought I might need it someday. Then, she was only mine and the downstairs room with the heavy walnut bed became our world.

But now I am sorry, love, I am sorry that I cannot protect us from the townspeople anymore...

I am only a Negro.

Simona Petrea, E-F, III



Thanatia A city of the future



25th December 2312. (For those who still use the old Christian calendar) Three hundred years have passed since the Absolute War (as the contemporaries called it) and 150 years since the foundation of PCH (The Party of Compulsory Happiness). I think there are a few of those who know what this action really meant.

The entire planet suffered a radical change. None of those who lived before the Absolute War could have imagined what a change there would be. Practically a new world appeared.

Firstly, we must say that this story is not addressed to our contemporaries (as the reading and the writing were abolished by the decree no. 21/2222), but to those who will live in the future and maybe one day will discover that something is wrong with their world.

This is a description of the everyday life in this modern world of Thanatia. Maybe some people will ask: "Why Thanatia?" For the simple reason that only Thanatia exists... When the world was reorganized, after that terrible war we were speaking about at the beginning of the story, the political leaders that survived decided to create a single STATE-City. They thought they would thus avoid other conflicts that could unsettle the order for the sake of which millions of human beings had been sacrificed.

As far as I can tell, this city is built in a place where once there were two great socio-political entities: Europe and Africa. But I am not too sure about it... What strikes the newcomer when first seeing the city is the color. What color? It is quite hard to describe it. All the buildings are painted in a bluish hue, a horrid color which strains the eye. What is curious is that not only the buildings are painted like this, but also the cars and the streets, the clothes of the people. The people themselves are all contaminated by this livid pigment. Their faces are bluish, savage; they have the color of dead bodies. Paradoxically, their awfully bluish faces seem transparent so one may see their interior emptiness, and how automatic their beings are.

Another odd (and hard to explain) thing is the light in this town. Here there is never night and never day. The city is continually bathed in an obscure light; a heavy, sterile light as if it were meant to kill the last trace of life in this city.

No one rebels, no one tries to change any-

thing; some kind of poison seems to have penetrated their being and they can't act but according to imposed rules created, one might say, for robots, not for people. In fact they aren't able to make the difference between free will and imposed order. Time seems frozen and people serve this infernal mechanism. According to the old way of measuring time, we can say that they work 23 hours a day... Strange enough, there are no clocks here.

In this city there are no human, family relationships or any other kind of connection. Not long ago, I found a book (one that escaped authorities) which says that in the Lost World (before 2012) people were friends. I must admit I don't really understand this word but I think it is something quite extraordinary... they communicated and even had children (they used primitive methods in this respect).

Now it is totally different; in fact they don't even have something to communicate. Communication works only one way: from PCH to people, not the other way around. Human beings are projected and created by the specialized department of PCH and they are grown in laboratories.

Maybe I should tell you something about the PCH, but we don't really know much about it. They are a small group surrounded by mystery that never comes out in public. What we do know is that the city is led by a woman, Nelleh, who belongs to the clan of Diavolines.

I also read that, in the lost world, on 25th December people were celebrating the Birth of God. I was wondering if a city like this could be roused by such an event if it were to find out about it...

Carmen Pascaru, E-F, III

The quietist behind the waterfall (I)

In my soul, I've treasured my moments with them. And this is their greatest gift to me: a beautiful childhood, simple and pure, a lesson of love never forgotten and a prayer to our Father that is in Heaven.

I had discovered love and nothing stopped me from enjoying it. Somehow, I acknowledged that there was no such touch of the heart, unless it was called madness. I wanted all those around me inside my happy world and longed for a few to be closer to me and my hidden painful thoughts. I would share this intimate corner with them, but they just stared at me, as if they had tried to see through me, and all they could give me was a smile on their face. I thought that they had already found their way through the maze of life. I was convinced that for them life - the one given on this earth, at this time, by God - was such an undoomed pleasure.

What a joy for them! They do not know what they've lost, because they never had it. They live day by day with no regrets, no tears, no anguish, no pain, maybe with love - the one they have been given - and they challenge life for more. But there comes a moment for all of us when we have to face the truth and see the reflection of the grey hair in a piece of broken mirror. A portrait reveals the struggle of beauty against with time and, at the same time, the inner image of what we have been cultivating in time. For some of us sadness rises in triumph, because time stole our innocence, for others a deep gap opens and they bemoan even what they have never had. Too late for feelings, when death and judgment day might be a second away and all we have are some memories we have been treasuring inside for years. I never understood what the best thing to do was, what best choice to make, what lucky number to choose, what path to take in life and with whom. It seems that what I've always refused was the right choice. I refused to study, I refused to go to grandma's bedside every five minutes, I refused to stand by my parents, I refused Romania...and so many other things. Now that I have grown up, I go back to them, and find out they didn't wait for me. I try to learn from what I consider a "mistake". God says that He is wherever there is love. My life was, and is, all about love and its consequences. I felt hate too, like a bitter rain pouring cats and dogs, but it won't take root inside me.

But this is me, always in contradiction with time and with everything. I am sheltered in my own

world. No definite explanation of what I am today might be found in between these lines, because life is a puzzle with lots of missing pieces and we are too busy to search for them. Nevertheless, I thought I would give it a try, in loving memory of my grandparents, Ion and Maria, and my moments with them.

*

The dust is choking me. My feet are so dirty that I'm beginning to think that I won't be able to wear my new sandals any time soon. I have under my nails, on my feet and hands, all the dirt that a five year old naughty kid could manage to gather in less than ten minutes. Somehow this is me too, and I am eleven years old. I feel lost in the middle of the corn field and it seems impossible to reach grandpa who is quite far ahead and very quick in picking up the weeds from the garden. I was told he was a little bit sick and I must come here and help him around the house.

"Hey grandpa, where are you?" I yelled out impatiently.

"Here! My dear" he said, in a kind voice, out of nowhere.

Here! Here! Here! What is 'here' to him?



Right? Or left? I cannot see him, I am thirsty, the corn leaves are scratching me and all I want is to go back home. "Are we done here, grandpa? I am tired and I cut myself on these hateful leaves. My legs look awful. I won't be able to wear a skirt or shorts any time soon."