



upon a golden bough

Foreword

The words you will shortly read are good news. And the young writers who put them together are good news. When you have good news, it strikes me that the right thing is to enjoy them and spread them. I'm lucky that, as organiser of The Heritage New Writing Contest, I have been allowed to enjoy them, and it now falls to me to spread them.

So, here you go.

(Sorry. The last sentence was a lie.)

But first, and hopefully without sounding too much like a bad award acceptance speech, I do need to add some thanks. I am grateful for the fact that The Heritage Private School conceived the idea of a new island-wide creative writing contest, that so many schools across the country found the time and the enthusiasm to promote it, and that the students who are celebrated in this publication – along with so many others whose efforts we applaud even if we could not award them prizes – found and formed the words that await you.

And I am grateful to the contest's judges, who responded to my tentative and apologetic appeal for their expertise and assistance with an overwhelming positivity that convinced me of the project's potential to really live.

So, for real this time, here you go.

Simon Demetriou, Contest Organiser



The Under 11s: Poetry

WINNER

Ioannis Mouloupoulos, 11, The Falcon School Nicosia

Harmony

I was a little kid listening to my dad's tales:
He was telling me all about humanity's fails.
The guns were spitting bullets everywhere,
They didn't protect anyone, they didn't care.
The world was collapsing, hope was lost,
Until one brave boy came out of the frost:
He said we have to unite and stop this war
Before we dig down and break Earth's core.
They felt empathy for him and dropped their guns,
They gave him a towel and some buns,
The bright brave boy smiled a big smile,
Way bigger than the river Nile,
Everyone was equal and united as one,
It was like the whole world had just won,
The globe was dancing and the other planets joined in,
All were dancing; they had a smile and a grin,
The people had peace and no one was ever sore,
Nobody could ever wish for anything more.



COMMENDED

Ioanna Antoniadou, 10, Foley's School Limassol

Harmony in my Home

For me

Harmony is music, melody and the beat
When I dance and prance around my room
To the sound of my radio
Or sing along to the songs on the car stereo.

Inside my house

Harmony is also peace, joy and happiness
When instead of shouting there is laughter
When my cat curls up like a ball
Next to me on the sofa
And softly purrs away.

But life is not always sunshine and rainbows
Because somewhere
High up in the sky
There is a rainy cloud ready to ruin the day.

For me

Disharmony is
When my brother is shouting loudly at his computer
My cats are fighting and hissing at each other
And my rabbit is stamping angrily in its cage.

But when it all comes to an end
That rainbow finally shines
And there is joy and harmony again.



The Under 15s: Poetry

WINNER

Iliana Skordi, 14, The Senior School Nicosia

Harmony at the end of the race?

Young Amal apprehensively watched the other runners contract,
and pounce onto the meandering track that unfolded before them,
They eyed the distressed ocean of Aleppo, missiles attacking it outwards...
They needed to win the race.
Last place would mean death.

One,
After,
the other,
They passed the baton, each with a trembling yet firm grasp,
A grasp which was nearly eternal.
It would soon be her turn,
Her chance to win,
Why did she need to win?

The shot has been fired,
And the race has begun...

She turned around and eyed the ancient Medieval Citadel,
Perched on her favourite hilltop,
Bulging with memories, culture and history,
Bulging with her past...
It winked at her.
And with that wink, the race had begun!
Instinctively, she sprung forth and sprinted across her singular track,
The only one she could take,
taking an early lead,
But the runner recklessly caught up with her,

He was in her track, risking disqualification
Lurking behind her, a malevolent shadow.
Sweat dripped from her brow as she pushed through a burst of energy,
It
dripped,
and dripped,
Forming an ocean of trials and tribulations around her,
Forcing her to wade through,
lifesaver-less,
Grasping the cold baton, which sent a momentarily paralyzing chill down her spine.
Even as she passed the baton on to the next runner,
could she feel the mysterious runner looming over her...
Even as her fellow runners championed the competition,
could they, as well as she, not feel the pride of first place,
As the runner was still chasing them.
He would never stop chasing them!
War would never stop chasing them.

P.S: the phantom of their homeland, would never leave the racetrack.



COMMENDED

Eva Nikityuk, 15, Foley's School Limassol

Harm(ony)

Harmony.

As its leaves fall in front of me,
I can only see:
three vowels, four consonants, seven letters,
flaking, crumbling, finally plummeting onto my knee.

But why can't I *see* harmony?
Why do its branches surround everyone but me?
But why can't I *feel* harmony?
Why are its wooden wings picking, piercing, pushing me away from the tree?

And then I realise:
It's not wrong not to be
sheltered by this tree.
What if it's concealing something,
blinding us from a new version of harmony?

I glance back at it.
My glimpse turns into a gaze
A shiver crawls down on me
My thoughts race, race, race.
The tree that seemed so pure, so genuine, reassuring in every way,
was nothing but a thorn: threatening, thickened, ten times taller than any prey.
A once lush, emerald coating,
all withered and dimmed by sickness,
squashing its structure into a bloating,

hideous
ruin.

But nothing compares with the cries from within.
Innocent victims (known as humans)
Stuck forever in this ceaseless prison
we once labelled “harmony”.
I gasp as some are stabbed by the spear of racism;
I yell as millions are suffocated by gas;
I collapse as all the inmates are manipulated by a tiny screen,
seen as revolutionary in the past.

And yet there’s nothing,
nothing I can do to save them,
however much I try.
I realise I have nowhere to go,
no tears left to cry.
Everything I knew was inside this tree / this thorn;
I can’t move forward on my own.

Blinded, yes blinded, I kneel to the thorn,
I plead for forgiveness: I would rather be lonely than alone.
I redraw the “o”, the “n”, the “y” in its faded title,
I let its prickling arms chain me, knowing it’s vital.

Restricted, I am finally dropped into the headquarters of “harmony”
and there I see:
a gun pointed towards me.



The Under 15s: Prose

Marilou Schini-Panagiotou, 14, Pascal Private English School Limassol

The Irony of Harmony

I stand paralyzed in an unknown space, crowded with thousands of children just like me. I try to look around, but I get pushed to the ground; hundreds of identical shoes engulf my vision. My body becomes weaker and weaker as I get squeezed, stepped on and shunted on the cold, hard floor. My shirt is now no more than a piece of fabric dangling from the end of my collar, trying to desperately hold on. I roll to the side and catch a glimpse of her. My mother's beautiful, sad eyes, with a rheumy gaze as dreadful as a field of withered roses, are trying to find words to apologize. I try to stay strong for her, but the feelings of desperation and sadness consume my body. My vision blurs and I hear someone calling my name. "A2457, come with me." I tremble at the acrimoniousness of his voice; I hesitate at first but then submit to his command like a halfwit.

I am led reluctantly to a windowless box. Dust floats around aimlessly, trying to find a surface to latch on to. Abruptly, I hear a hissing sound coming from the vents. Abiding strangeness fills the air and an endless variety of dream-distorted versions of myself fill the room. I hear angels promenading quietly over the universe, a texture of amusement, hope and pride all mixed in a beautiful symphony. My mind fogs and I am taken back to my garden. The garden where the daisies peeped through the grass, where the lawnmower came to life and where I would spend most of my evenings. I stand there mesmerized as I watch the bees glide through the air from flower to flower and as the sky changes shades of grey and blue. I see her laughing, like a glacier among wildflowers and I see myself next to her reading a book. I would always hold my mother's favourite book, brush over the pages and laugh at its funny illustrations.

The melody changes. I serenely watch as my garden goes away and all my memories of it go with it. I am now in my aunt's porch, and I listen to the autumn af-

ternoon's gentle swishing sound; the whistling of the soft wind brushes my ears. I breathe in and out and I listen to the creaking of my stiffened lungs, like a piece of rusted machinery. I remember the smell of pumpkin pie coming from the kitchen, lazy spirals reaching my nose and the beautiful fragrance making me float in the air. The melody blends into the background as if it was there all my life. Violins echo in the sky; I feel their vibrations overrun my body. I feel every note, every key of the piano, every strum of each guitar. I stand in awe as I free my body from all the troubles it carries. I finally see myself laying on the ground, unconscious. I try to scream, but there's something in my throat...



WINNER

Elizaveta Gruzintseva, 13, Silverline Private School Limassol

Harmony

A long time ago, nobody knows when exactly, families would miss small, but really important pieces such as harmony, luck and happiness.

Gods saw it and made a decision to create three angels. These angels were supposed to help hopeless families find their bliss by giving them pieces of their hearts.

Harmony brought calmness and the absence of quarrels, helping families live in peace and tranquillity; Luck helped find homes in need of help from the angels; and Happiness would bring joy and warmth into their houses. The three angels used to live together.

In those days, harmony was the most needed by families so Harmony gave each one a piece of his heart. He was generous and did not spare his heart for the sake of helping those in need. As a result, one last piece remained from his huge heart. Harmony's heart was enough for the whole world, but one last family was left, begging for the angel's help. He gave the last piece to them and was gone.

Luck and Happiness found they could no longer get along with each other and they turned into Sadness and Loss. Their journey couldn't be continued without Harmony, so they decided to separate.

However, Gods were not pleased with their behaviour. As their punishment, they took their homes away and turned them into white as snow cats. Now they are stray cats!

But why? Was Harmony that important? Sadness and Loss wandered the streets in search of someone who would look after them, but the New Year was very soon and

it was necessary to prepare, buy gifts. The cats finally gave up.

One evening, a girl, full of tears, was searching for happiness, but she was unfortunate.

"Hey!" she heard a whisper. It was a cat that long ago looked very different and went by a different name.

"I see you need help. Take me with you," Sadness continued.

The girl picked up the cat and as soon as she did so, another cat, the long lost Loss, appeared in front of her.

"What's your name?" the two cats asked her.

"I'm Harmony," the girl replied, wiping away her tears.

Luck and Happiness exchanged glances. The trio was back together.



Egor Sobchinsky, 15, The Falcon School Nicosia

How to Find Harmony

“And another stupid day begins,” thought Mr Sarov as he woke up in the morning. He was a normal person in his forties. He was totally normal except for one thing: he was the most depressed human being on Earth. He hated every single day he lived. Everyone hated to talk to him, work with him or even look at him and that was because everyone knew that nothing good would come of it. If you just took a small peek at Mr Sarov your mood would go down for the whole day. But then something happened...

The information about Mr Sarov was given to the director of the factory where he worked, who decided to do something about it. The solution for the problem came very suddenly. He found a ticket and went to Mr Sarov.

“Mr Sarov, I have two options for you,” said the director.

“I don’t care. Goodbye!” growled Sarov angrily.

“You aren't in a position to decline it.”

“Who cares!” replied Sarov.

“The options are: either I fire you or you take this ticket and go to the mountains for a yoga retreat.”

“I guess I have no choice. Now give me the stupid ticket and go away!”

The boss was extremely happy because Sarov left for the mountains and therefore the efficiency of his workers was brought up to a normal level. “At least this will continue for a month,” the head announced at the meeting. And he saw smiles on many people’s faces.

As the trip promised to be a long one, Mr Sarov took a large suitcase out of the back of his closet, a suitcase that could fit nearly his whole room. And that’s what he did.

He packed all his clothes, socks, and trousers, shorts “just in case”, towels, the small rug that lay by his bed so he wouldn’t have to touch dirty floors, and the little collapsible chair he kept with him at all times so as not to sit on bus stop benches.

Sarov was instructed to meet the rest of the yoga group in the centre of the city at 8:00 a.m. Only six or seven people turned up, and they went to the mountains by bus. When they arrived, they went straight to their luxurious rooms and unpacked their bags. Every day they went for a walk, then they had a two-hour meditation, breakfast, several hours of yoga, and after all that, they had time for themselves. In this time, the hotel usually provided them with something enjoyable like a massage.

As the weeks passed by, Mr Sarov began to experience this funny feeling inside of him and suddenly, on his last morning in the mountains, he woke up and suddenly smiled and he was so happy that he could jump and collect the stars from the sky. Now Mr Sarov realised what he had been missing the whole time. He had never felt happy in his life. Normally Mr Sarov saw everything in dark tones; for example, if it was windy, he was annoyed with how cold the wind was. But now he was at the top of the mountain where it was windy and freezing cold (the thermometer read -20°C) - and he was enjoying every moment. The things that were irritating before now became enjoyable. The whole world became colourful for Mr Sarov.

Sarov's co-workers had been dreading the day of his return. At 6 o'clock, everyone came to work, and they couldn’t believe what they saw. Everyone had a gift on their table. Nobody moved.

“It's a joke, isn't it?” someone said.

“Nothing is impossible,” Mr. Sarov said.

Everybody laughed and they opened their presents. They were so shocked, that they couldn’t even move. All of them had about ten packs of tea and a ticket to the mountains, with a note that said: “Harmony to be found here”.



The Under 18s: Poetry

WINNER

Chrystalla Fella, 18, The American Academy Larnaca

Fruit

Apple.

Its syrup dripping on the lips,
a familiar taste indeed.

But *she* was born without the taste buds for it,
and the taste of different individuals was neglected
as she only found interest at the words
swirling
out of their mouths.

When she chose a pomegranate to eat,
her unique glow drew too many eyes
but why is there unease with the unusual?
Chased and hunted, she was a shipwreck.
“Your existence is hateful!”
And so, she despised what she once found comfort in.

An imposter in the crowd,
A pretender trying to detect the undetected apple,
while the pomegranate was the only thing she was craving.
All the colours and shades of resentment,
guilt and pain going hand in hand,
“My existence is hateful”

A neon sign of overcast and cast down,
the reflection of filth
in the eyes of a mirror,

she only saw a demon,
that answered to her name
and messed with her brain.

She longed for the harmony that came with the pomegranate,
the way her heart pumped blood of melodies and freedom.
Sipped wine that blossomed
against the poison
her mind poured
yet wondered:

Of all the things we could fear in this world,
why we pick love?



COMMENDED

Jane Lorens, 18, The Grammar School Limassol

The Last Harmony

While on the paper with the simple lines
He had been writing complicated patterns,
The golden sun rays spilled on colored posters,
The dust had danced in midday peaceful calmness.

On his wooden table the books rested,
They also had been scattered on the bed.
And among the towers of CDs,
He sat with a guitar in his hands.

Like the wind his lyrics were whispering,
Sometimes becoming heavy, like a stone,
In the quietness, filled with rustle of his papers,
In the loudness of his never ending thoughts.

The tension then in his left hand has increased,
He relaxed his palm and put it on a fret,
The right one built a wonderful arpeggio,
Sometimes he stopped to have a minute's rest.

The harmony he built up sounded clearly
In his head even before he took his pen
And started noting everything that mattered,
Remembering the chords and playing them again.

Sincerely believing it would last forever,
He lived the melody. The darkness of some days

Had just become another song to live for,
And he was sure he had a lot to say.

Maybe he could live a little longer —
Instantly someone would disagree.
The smell of the sterility and peroxide,
The whiteness of the walls he had to see.

The bandages were tight. The cries were quiet.
For everyone around him: just some tears.
But in his head there were explosions,
And inner war against his pain and fear.

All of the years he spent with his guitar,
Now it was not a warm and pleasant thought.
They had been lost in his chaotic memories,
He couldn't mention them, but till the end he fought.

His harmony has been erased forever,
As he survived the silence of his days.
And after losing everything he lived for,
He failed, for he never played again.

COMMENDED

Eva Stylianou, 15, Pascal Private English School Limassol

Harmony-Feathered of the Orchestra

His hands hang in the air
The flute blows
As his baton ballets in a tender hand
Delightfully orchestrating its soldiers
Into No Man's Land
As the Conductor quivers with each sound,
Betrayed, as he is reclaimed by his dark room
In which abundances of raw wrath rest
From soil of no water but the thick red
Souls succumbed to burdens of bangs and demise
To be hanged in his den for observing in the exhibition

The flute blows,
A bullet whizzes past
His eardrums burst as the bass drums thunder,
He starts to warp and stray
All he can do
All he must do
Is keep the memory in a moment of sombreness and sorrow,
The viola vibrates in ripples as it plays in a sul tasto,
No longer allowed to squander over lightless-eyed soldiers
Forever framed in graphic white prints
As the night is gone and
No moon hovers for their plight.

And so must he do the same,
The Ensemble roars only louder as, they dare him,
To tread on any longer
But he did dare tread on
And he did dare lead his Symphony on
As chimes cheer and saxophones sneer,
He heightens his hands once again
His tuxedo tail drenched heavy of shame as though treason,
The Ensemble awaits his commands,
Just as his camera had awaited more casualties
But now, at last for good reason,
They look forward for the rondo form,
And finally violins shudder and are relieved of.

For he prevailed, and they rest their pinions
Suddenly, he flings his arms out
from his rear,
Blossoms two wings
At last, the triangle tings and now
All is done by decree
And now the dove is free,
And left in the conductors stand
Are white feathers from he



The Under 18s: Prose

Elizaveta Tolmacheva, 17, The Heritage Private School Limassol

Kammerton

Two bright pink boots, glistening with wetness, send ripples through the water as they descend, callous with their steps. They continue running without dropping a single apology, the earth already heaving from the rain plummeting down out of someone's clumsy, invisible hands. The pair is in a hurry, just like the pair of legs they sit firmly on and the pair of arms that help them balance and the pair of eyes that guide them.

The bakery closes in twenty minutes. The bus leaves in ten. The hands can fall down on the knees to fish out laboured breaths in seven minutes minimum, at the current pace.

That's what the head is concerned with, at the moment, but the boots find more pressing matters: racing with the thing on the other side of the water.

It's incomprehensible to them, a shape of colours and patterns that somehow manages to move cohesively, following in their footsteps. It's terrifyingly close, and yet the white on its soles smirks daringly, and the pink on this side of the puddle accepts the challenge, stomping in a futile attempt to separate.

The toes curl in, the thin cloth of the socks feeling wet in the drippy weather. They don't care about the creature in the puddle. They care about the soft carpet, and the radiator, both of which are at home, which is decisively not here. Here it's cold. Here they feel each contact point with the hard concrete, slamming into their bones. The toes whine. The toes don't want to go. The toes aren't listened to, the ears fully consumed with other matters.

The ears hear a ring. It's not an outside sound, but it is a sound they don't hear in-

side. It rings as if someone hit a tuning fork and left, the vibrations birthing tiny images in their wake. Who can tell right from left when there are five rights and five lefts? Who knows what's a mirage, and how?

That's not a concern of the ears.

That is a concern of the eyes.

The eyes aren't concerned with the tuning fork.

They wouldn't describe themselves as concerned at all, mostly because that is the job of the tongue.

They choose to watch the creature on the other side of the water, instead.

From where they are, they have a better view than the boots, and they look over the splotches of motion, trying to identify them: a black coat, denim, open, revealing a red scarf that's swinging as it runs, in tandem with the creature. A striped sweater underneath. It's blue, and yellow, and green and red and yellow and blue and green. It's washed out. It's clumsily pulled over a pair of jeans, also washed out, ripped at the knee.

Its grey socks peak out from two bright, pink boots.

The chest feels a sharp blow as it collides with something in front of it, and the eyes snap up before feet stumble back and hands land behind so as to not let the already tattered pair of jeans land in the puddle.

The large man frowns apologetically, reaching out a hand. The rest of the bus stop murmurs.

"Is the boy okay?" asks an old lady.

The boy blinks. The reflection merges at the feet and the hands, embracing its owner

to become one. The tuning fork is grabbed, the myriad images abruptly stop to reveal two distinct identities.

The boy takes the hand in front of him, and stands back up to his feet.

He dusts himself off and watches the approaching bus.

He wants a vatrushka.



Harriet Economidou, 15, The Senior School Nicosia

A fine line

Our universe was drenched in light. Woven intricately between every rushing stream and into the heart-mending giggles of children, there was always a bright pocket of hope to be found. No matter how life decided to unfold - whether it fought with ferocity or sang the sweetest melodies - the sun would rise again, the day anew.

It takes a certain type of courage to read the tear-stained pages of the past. To relive the moment when the claws of grief sank their way deep into my soul, gnawing at the fraying strands of whatever was left of me. I could've let darkness consume me – yet I wouldn't allow myself to waste a life that had been spared. Today, I'd read the chapters of hurt; I'd remember my friend who was taken from me 47 years ago.

Slowly, I began my journey beneath the comfort of darkness. As I walked along the narrow side roads holding painful remnants of a united past, I looked up and released a breath of longing. The warm glow emanating from the millions of stars held me in a protective embrace, almost reassuring me that his soul was safe with them. We were twin constellations – our spirits burning bright in the blaze of unity. Soon, I reached the long-abandoned shop which stood just before the defining line, splitting one heart into two bleeding wounds. With a trembling hand, I slowly turned the rusted doorknob and evaded a suffocating plume of dust that quickly dissipated as I moved farther into the shop. There it was. Standing proudly after so many years of desertion was the adored grand piano which held a million stories shared through melodies. And so, after dusting off the worn piano seat, I lifted the cover and began.

At first, the notes came as dissonant noise, abrupt and unwelcome in the emptiness I had grown accustomed to. Yet, I continued and allowed myself to close my eyes as the familiarity of the tune overtook me. It began as a slow, sweet melody. The times

when we were only children, oblivious to anything but the wide smiles on our faces and the speed at which we could run. Then, my hands moved quicker, sharper, as an underlying hint of worry crept in. Still, we remained ignorant to the impending doom. Decided to ignore the rageful outbursts and speeches from panicked politicians which blared on the television every night. It was background noise, an annoying buzz that barely bothered us. Instead, we only grew closer, making futile promises of everlasting friendship. As my feet pressed down on the pedals and the crescendo hit with all its might, a pained teardrop fell from my eyes dampening my deeply creased face. The gun shots, war sirens, screams. Your tearful eyes staring into mine as I was dragged away from you. The moment I knew I would never see you again. Like a slowly fading pulse, my tune quietened. Yet I wept. I wept for my friend, for the lives lost and for my country ripped in half. And in that moment, I understood.

It's when realization, that a life full of wonders has been wasted in a whirlwind of hate and fear, hits you abruptly in the depths of your soul. Only then do you start appreciating the simplicity of love and how if we truly believe, we can once more allow the golden glow to flow endlessly through our hearts. Mending every unhealed wound.



Ksenia Lizyagina, 17, The Heritage Private School Limassol

Lifeline in dog tags

Murder. We are brought up with the mindset that taking another person's life is bad – a deadly sin for which you could end up burning in hell for the rest of eternity. People can't be born with the desire to kill. The thrill of the kill can't be implanted in their minds from the very beginning. Can it? If we put aside all the bible crap, human beings have evolved from primates. Animals. And for every animal there comes a time, a crucial point in its life when it is forced to either bare its teeth at its own kind, or perish. People have not evolved far from that. Each person has his own focal point from where the clocks set themselves and the person either becomes a normal civilian, living his life engulfed in numbers, or becomes a walking time bomb, just waiting for the right moment to explode. Life is full of choices that lead to actions – an input must always have an output. Choices are made by people on a daily basis: you wake up, you choose to live another day. So, can the choice of murdering another person also be justified as simply as that? The answer seems to be pretty straightforward – no. However, most people don't even realise that in many countries every single boy becomes a murderer. They call us heroes, they are thankful to us for protecting them, they celebrate our return. Do you know how many people we've killed? How many men died by our hands? You welcome us with open arms, yet place serial killers behind bars, branding them with shame and hatred for the rest of their lives. You shower us with love and praise. We, soldiers, are professionals. Our job is murder. There is beauty in everything... but the beauty of darkness surpasses the beauty of light. When you are surrounded by darkness with hues of crimson red and a metallic aftertaste all the time, you either choke on the feeling of guilt or you learn to see the balance of the universe. You drill it into your head that you're doing a good deed, that you're helping to bring life to an equilibrium once more. There cannot be a new life without death. Pure indoctrination, nothing more, but oh how much easier it is to believe this when you aim at someone's chest – right at the heart.

There is always peace, some sort of a constant pattern in chaos. Dreadful periodicity. Find it, and you will have the answer to all questions. For now, all you can do is try to make the storm in your head subside and stay sane. Look ahead, they say. We don't strive to kill; we don't look forward to obtaining victory – that's the past. Now the primary goal is to achieve the harmony of a lifeline in dog tags.



Anna-Myria Oxynos, 16, The Senior School Nicosia

Untitled

Outside, green-black clouds hung heavy in the sky, churning in tenebrous suggestion. A frenzied gale battered the glass, trying to find a way into the warm glow of the kitchen. Beth shook her head at the tomatoes she was chopping. No storm would breach her pristine walls. Glinting as it sliced the air, her knife parted the soft flesh of the tomato with ease. Neat rows of plates were polished to shining perfection, glimmering in the light of artfully-placed candles, flames rising from their necks like pale orange silks. It calmed Beth's soul, to bask in the harmony of everything assembled so perfectly. The creak of the front door heralded her husband's arrival, the wind's muffled moaning rising to a howling crescendo as James battled against its fury to slam the door shut. A stray gust sent icy tendrils wending through the kitchen, setting one of the candles into a frenzied dance before guttering out. Beth's eyes remained on the shimmer of the knife, red juice pooling with each slice.

"Hello honey, how was your day at work?" she chirped, focusing on the knife's steady thrum.

James froze in wide-eyed shock.

"Beth...what are you doing?"

Crystalline eyes, gleaming in the flickering candle-light, "What does it look like?" She gave a musical chuckle, gesturing towards him with the knife, its sharp edge sending fragmented rays of light spinning. "Making dinner!"

She hummed softly, a slight smile ghosting on her lips. James couldn't drag his eyes away from the knife, a shimmering streak of quicksilver between her fingers.

"You know James, I've been waiting." A slightly annoyed note broke her cheerful demeanour, "You know how long I've been looking forward to this; and you can't show up on time?" Her eyes were glistening now, lined with silver.

James clutched the counter with a white-knuckled fist, "Beth-".

Lightning flashed, sudden and silent and blinding bright. The distant clouds glowed for half a heartbeat, mountains heaped on mountains, purple and red and yellow.

"I thought you loved me." A choked-out sob, crystal beads rimming her lashes. "I did everything I could". The quiver in her voice had hardened to a steel edge. "I even got rid of that girl who tried to come between us." Whipping the knife up. Pointing it at him in accusation. Stalking towards him, skirt whispering lullabies as it brushed the floor.

"Please, I-I love you-" the stream of words cut off as the knife's edge came to rest in the soft skin at the base of his neck, its cool bite sending fingers of ice racing through his body.

"*Liar,*" she whispered, icy blue eyes burning. "You chose her, and then you packed me off to that *place*, discarded me like some used toy when something prettier came along."

Amusement flashed in her eyes, as she traced his quivering jaw. "Well, I suppose she's not too pretty anymore?" She shivered with delight, an elated smile stretching her lips. "Those pretty green eyes, that lovely pale neck, ripped apart."

A gasp escaped James, "Please."

She cocked her head to the side. "James darling, you know I love you." Gently, a lover's caress, she pressed her face to his, her breath a warm whisper in his ear, "And since you love her so much, I'll send you to join her."

The flesh of the stomach was surprisingly easier to break than that of the neck.

Turning to the counter, horror over-took her. “Oh no, this won’t do!” Frantically, she grabbed the edge of her dress and pressed it to the surface, breathing a shuddering sigh when the splatter of crimson disappeared, harmony restored.

“Can’t have a mess in my kitchen.”



The Judges

Christos Kalli studied American Literature at the University of Cambridge and he is now a PhD student in English at the University of Texas at Austin. His critical writing has appeared or is forthcoming in the *Harvard Review*, *World Literature Today*, the *Los Angeles Review*, and *Poetry Northwest*, among others, and his poems have been published in *Muzzle*, *Ninth Letter*, the *Adroit Journal*, the *National Poetry Review*, the *American Journal of Poetry*, *Faultline*, the *minnesota review*, *PANK*, *The Hollins Critic*, *Harpur Palate*, and *Dunes Review*, among others. Visit him at www.christoskalli.com

Eleni Socratous is a Cypriot writer who is currently pursuing an MA in Creative Writing at Durham University. She graduated with First-Class Honours in English Literature and Creative Writing from the University of Warwick and is the 2021 winner of The Orwell Society Dystopian Fiction Prize. Her story, *Needle and Thread*, is published in the society's journal. She is also one of the Editors-in-Chief for the 2022 Durham Peninsula Anthology where her short story, *Gypsy Bird*, will be featured.

Christos Hadjiyiannis is Visiting Research Fellow at the Institute of English Studies, University of London, and Research Fellow and Adjunct Lecturer at the University of Cyprus. He was previously Fulbright Visiting Scholar at the University of Texas at Austin and Junior Research Fellow at Wolfson College, Oxford. He is the author of *Conservative Modernists* (Cambridge University Press) and co-editor of the forthcoming *Cambridge Companion to Twentieth-Century Literature and Politics* (2022). He has written widely on twentieth-century literature and art. His essays and reviews have appeared in journals and magazines, including *Times Literary Supplement*, *Modernism/modernity*, and *Journal of Modern Literature*.

Polis Loizou is a writer, performer and oral storyteller. His debut novel, *Disband-ed Kingdom*, was published in 2018 and long-listed for the Polari First Book Prize. *The Way It Breaks* (2021) is set in his motherland of Cyprus, as is *A Good Year* (2022), a historical novella inspired by local horror folklore. Polis is also one third of the award-winning fringe theatre troupe The Off-Off-Off-Broadway Company. He's based in Nottingham.

Gary Butcher is the Head of Primary at The Heritage Private School.



