



WINTER WONDERLAND

ediția a XI-a

Hîng School



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Winter Wonderland

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**WINTER
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Graur Mara-Ioana

clasa a XI-a, Colegiul Național
„Mihai Eminescu” Iași




The subtlety of you

Winter has always come with a feeling of emptiness and the weather – as dreary as it can be – dampens the holiday cheer that surrounds her. She sees it, catalogues it and ultimately despises it. It's a sensation that grips at her heart, cold fingers of jealousy latching onto her in a manner she cannot quite control.

(„It's always been like this,” is the cold comfort that she tells herself in the depths of her mind, but she can't help but feel the bitter tang of a lie on her tongue.)

She exhales the breath from her lungs then, watching in fascination as the puff of warm air curls upon itself before dissolving in misty tendrils. Her eyes focus back to the pane of glass stretched in front of her. She stares into her reflection and the sight that greets her seems so foreign.





A person she does not know stares back at her, the picture that she paints is lovely by all accounts; the gentle glow of the toy shop's Christmas decorations and the snow performing its tantalizing dance, weightless in the background. She looks like a doll, like she fits right in with the other toys on display.

„Look at you, dressed up so nicely.” Gentle hands, calloused by hard work, adjust her hair, pinning it behind her ears and out of her face. „Little doll, will you give your mom a smile?”)

She hates it.

She steps away then from the display window, eyes downcast so as to not gaze at the winter fair that was in full swing around her. She doesn't want to be here, but this street is the only shortcut that she could take. So she bears her teeth and soldiers on, soft layers of snow crunching lowly under her slow footfall.

Her feet are cold in spite of the fur on the inside of her boots and she is quite certain her hands have turned a sickly blue – maybe purple – from constant exposure to the elements. She knows her face is beyond flushed from the harsh wind that blew not even moments ago. She runs a tongue over her lips and finds them dry, their soft skin on the verge of cracking.

She doesn't know why she punishes herself so – by standing outside in the freezing weather for hours on end when she can get away with not doing it. She doesn't know why doing it feels like righting an ancient wrong.

Human emotions are complex, hard to understand even by those who analyze what they feel.


„It's hard,” she doesn't say, afraid the meaning of her words would be misunderstood.

„I hate it,” she chants to herself whenever she can, under her breath and within her mind.

„Can I be happy?” She asks out loud, anxious for an answer. But her bravery is rewarded by silence and she doesn't bother asking again.)

She's always been quiet. A little mouse in the background. A wallflower simply observing. Never giving input. Never making itself remarked. Standing in a corner and watching the world go by, not feeling like she belongs.





Perhaps that was what stopped her from truly blooming. But she is far from a conventional flower. So distinct and different as she is. Or perhaps it is the environment in which she spread her roots that ruined her flower buds.

She is dragged out of her thought by a buzzing from her coat's pocket. Her phone, most probably. She moves her hand to take it out, her fingers numb from the cold making the task a tad difficult.

A contact shines on the device's screen. 'Sis' it says and a ghost of a smile stretches over her chapped lips. The message received is a picture of a red mug with tiny images depicting Santa Claus littered over its paint. The picture is followed by a short text, „What do you think?”

„It's ugly.” She types back, absently noting the warmth that spreads within her chest. „I love it,” she adds for good measure before a childish banter could break out.

Her sibling isn't always around, moved out as she is, but she's always made a point of coming back home for the winter holidays, simply to spend more time with the ice flower that she calls a little sister.

It's... nice. Being someone's priority, she means.

Her phone buzzes again. „Wanna meet up and get hot cocoa with peppermint and extra marshmallows?”

Oddly specific of her sister, given her personality. She's always been like that, with her head lost in worlds beyond mortal understanding and coming at everything from a sideways perspective.

'Quirky,' they call her.

(„Brilliant,” she whispers.)

She smiles at the onslaught of messages that flood their chatroom, momentarily contemplating putting her notifications on silent, yet not having the heart to actually ignore her sister.


She abhors winter. Loathes it with a passion, yet Christmas is weirdly comforting.





Petrache Maria

clasa a IX-a, Colegiul Național
„Mihai Sadoveanu” Iași



The Lame Crane's


December 20, 2021

Ever since I woke up this morning, went downstairs and had breakfast, I felt that, today, something was wrong with the world I lived in, that something had changed. The air seemed to vibrate with energy, and the earth rumbled muffled from somewhere in its depths, from its bowels. The sky had split into pastel, contrasting colors, and a strange wind had brought a warm breeze and a sweet, woody smell from beyond the horizon.

If you ignored these obvious signs, as my brother and parents seemed to do, this could have been a day like any other, with its routine: waking up at 6 o'clock, going to Mr. Stefanescu's workshop, where I work as an apprentice during the school holidays, and the way back home in the evening at 6pm. But this was definitely not an ordinary day.

I got dressed and went out through the gate of our yard, directly into the empty village lane bordering the city, which was looming grey in the distance. I stepped onto the frozen ground, covered in a thin layer of snow, and looked around me, trying to find another living creature. But there was no one on the street, in the courtyards, or even behind the window curtains; not even one animal to announce its presence with a characteristic sound. It was all emptiness and a deep silence, interrupted only by the muffled rumble that could be heard from the depths. I walked slowly, anxiously, always looking back cautiously, for fear someone should be following me, a feeling which was getting stronger with each step. Suddenly, the rumble stopped and I began






to hear, coming from the underground land, a rhythmic drumming that grew in intensity and resounded infernally in my ears, making my heart beat faster. Overwhelmed by an unprecedented fear and unable to bear the tension, I ran away for a few minutes with a force I did not know I had, desperately trying to get to Mr. Stefanescu's workshop as soon as possible. I turned left and right on the streets, until I got exhausted and stopped, gasping for breath. I looked around to identify the workshop, but all I could see were some small, crooked houses. I was confused: the workshop, which, for sure, should have been right in front of me, because I knew perfectly every street in the village and I was sure I was on the right track, wasn't there, and I can even say without a doubt that I was on a new alley, which I had never seen before. Disoriented, I returned to the main road and changed the route, thinking that I was probably just dizzy and had mistaken one street for another. I chose the longer road, which led directly to the workshop, as anyone who had lived, like me, 15 years in this village knew. I ended up on the same mysterious lane, only to see a brightly coloured wooden house, adorned with yellow and red lights, and a rotten sign reading „The Lame Crone's – the shop of the good”, and, below: „300-year-old family business”.

Now I was really confused: not only couldn't I find the workshop I'd been working at for three years but, on its very place, there was an old shop that I'd never heard of. I was curious and felt the need to enter that mysterious house, but my anxiety and fear had not disappeared and I wanted to return home to my parents and my brother. So, I turned my back to the shop and returned to the main road, heading home. After a while, a fierce blizzard broke out, sweeping the street and bringing a frightening smell of rot, and the sky began to rumble to the rhythm of the underground realm. A terrible snow avalanche poured over me and then I could barely pass through the thick, frozen layer, stumbling more and more often. The movement was slow and difficult, but I had no choice but to continue on the road, ignoring the cold that was freezing my body. I don't know how long I kept going, minutes or hours, but it is certain that, after all the effort I'd made trying to get home, the same strange lane appeared in front of me, as if all I had done so far was to move in a circle. I gasped desperately, but I mumbled to myself :”If someone wants me here, so be it!” Then I opened the wooden gate with a resounding creak. Sweet, pleasant





smells greeted me instantly and, hesitatingly, I entered the shop.

Here, the light did not have a well-defined color, oscillating between all the perceptible shades. All the walls were covered with shelves full of indistinct objects, hidden behind thick spider webs, gently blown by the wind. In the middle of the room there were three shiny showcases, in which I could see three glowing globes. Something like a multicolored smoke was twisting inside the globes, and in front of them was written, on a plaque, „Essences”. An old woman covered with a thick woolen coat was dozing on a chair in a corner of the room, still holding a wooden spindle wrapped in fleece. When I passed the showcases, the crone woke up, analyzed me for a long time, then, slowly, she got to her feet, leaning on a carved cane. „Do you want to buy or just to look?” she asked me suddenly, breaking the grave silence that had spread since I entered the shop. Seeing that I didn't answer anything, she mumbled, limping across the room to me, „I think you are one of those who want to buy.” „But I have no money.” I answered anxiously, and the old woman looked at me thoughtfully, saying „It only costs you a smile. Here you go!”. She then handed me one of the three mysterious crystal globes, and when I looked at it, I began to laugh more copiously than ever, holding my belly. Then the globe shone so brightly that it filled the whole room with an immaculate white light, and the crone smiled satisfied. „Run, child, it's closing ...!” said the old woman, raising her voice suddenly; „What's closing?” I asked, to which the crone just whispered as she was returning to the chair „The Wicket.”


December 23, 2021

I don't remember anything after that, just a terrible tiredness that suddenly overwhelmed me, the persistent cold and then my warm bed, in which I woke up this morning, and continued to sleep almost the entire day, while my worried mother was checking my temperature.

December 24, 2021

I found it under the pillow, because it was shining and vibrating, as if it was eager to be watched. But, compared to a few days ago, the globe had visibly shrunk, its colors had faded, and the luster was





much pale. It was as if the magic sphere had withered in my pocket. After analyzing it for two hours, I went out on the street again and tried to walk on the same route as the last time, to the crone's shop; but this time I was disappointed to see only the ordinary workshop of Mr. Stefanescu. I didn't find the Wicket. Just a carved wooden key, which had fallen in the snow.

December 25, 2021

The day had begun with a slight vibration of the air, but, from the underground, no more rhythmic drumming. The hours passed quickly, accurately counted by the clock in my room. The beginning of this day was torturously normal for me and, as time was passing by, I felt that I was withering like the crystal ball in my hand. I had a key and a globe which were rejecting me, which were not revealing their secrets, and I was trying in vain to unravel them.


The night spread over the world far too quickly, bringing with it an impenetrable darkness. I got out of my bed, went to the window, and in the moonlight that surrounded me, I grabbed the globe and looked at it, hesitating: its light was pulsing rhythmically, and the brightness was strong again. I took the key and slowly brought it closer to the globe, breathing deeply, and I gasped with relief when, on the smooth surface of the sphere, a small keyhole began to emerge. I turned the key in the lock and, with one last tense pulse, the globe shattered in my hands, letting that colored smoke rise and spread throughout the room. Suddenly, a breeze from the sky or the underground made the smoke swirl around me, like a multicolored and fantastic whirlwind, and children's giggles could be heard everywhere.

I'd been trapped in that vortex for a long time, before I was released from the enchanted round dance. Now I feel like something has changed inside me and I can't understand what. I'm very, very tired. I don't think I have enough time to write anymore...

December 26, 2021

This diary is mine, but I didn't write it down. That's something I'm sure of, because I haven't experienced anything that's written here. Every day, for the past six days, I have gone to Mr. Stefanescu's workshop, and I spent Christmas with my family, watching a movie and






eating a hearty dinner. What's really weird, however, is my own handwriting on the pages. I don't like pranks and I ask the one who wrote this foolish story to stop immediately. I don't even understand how you found my diary, but one thing is certain: I have to stop confessing to a notebook and burn this diary, so that all this nonsense with which you, anonymous writer and prankster, tried to make me think that I'd discovered something fantastic and scare me, can turn into ashes.

Creșu Bianca Melissa

clasa a XII-a, Seminarul Teologic
Ortodox „Sfântul Vasile cel Mare”,
Iași



The 18th winter

The princess was looking through the window of her dark room while a cold wind was caressing her cheeks. She felt like a prisoner trapped in her childhood castle overlooking a remote kingdom frozen in time, where there was no happiness or hope of a better life. She went down the spiral stairs with a torch in her hand, got out of the castle through the massive golden door and saw her favourite white horse, Snow. He was a magic horse who could speak and understand her words. She was the only one in the castle who knew that.

“Winter is coming, little snow horse”, she whispered to him.

The horse looked into her eyes as if he understood the meaning of her words. He realised she was scared and couldn't enjoy this winter as much as the others before.

“It's my 18th winter and you know what that means... I'm going to be the queen of this snow kingdom and I have no idea what I'm supposed to do”.

“My mistress, you must continue to be the person you used to be before, with a smile on your face, always generous and loving.





Having said that, you reminded me to teach you an important lesson”.

Suddenly, their discussion was interrupted by the voice of one of the maids who told her that she had to go inside and try on the coronation dress. The princess thought that the maid was the most annoying person in the castle and wondered why she was still working there. However, she went to her room accompanied by her white horse and tried on the gorgeous dress made especially for her. She couldn't wait to go to the ceremony dressed like that. But while she was admiring the beauty of her dress, the princess started to feel very strange and noticed that her favourite horse had disappeared.

“Snow! Where are you? Snow... „

She looked for him for several hours to no avail. The coronation was approaching and she didn't have time to look for him anymore... A loud roar enveloped her and she fell to the ground... When she regained consciousness she saw a familiar face.

“Snow? Is that you? What's happening? Talk to me... Snow?”

It was no longer her white horse, but a handsome young prince. Then the roar was gone, the prince disappeared and she heard her parents' voices calling her name. She asked them if they had seen her horse, but they hadn't either. The coronation ceremony was about to start, so they went together to the large celebration hall. After the ceremony was over the young prince that she saw after she regained consciousness appeared again and told her an amazing story.

“Do you remember the lesson I wanted to teach you? It's called gratitude. No matter how great your trouble is, be happy with what you have. Do you know that maid you can't stand? Well, she's our mother and I'm your twin brother. When we were born, my father was enchanted by his current wife to love her. Our mother became a servant and I was changed into a horse because she couldn't stand the idea of living under the same roof with me in the form of a human being. According to the curse, only true love could have broken the spell in the 18th winter of our lives. Your love saved me!”

Once the spell was broken, the wicked stepmother was cast out and the king, his children and their mother lived happily ever after. The frozen kingdom became a land of joy and hope where winter was *splendidly celebrated* every year.





Panțiru Mihaela

clasa a XI-a, Liceul Teoretic
„Al.I.Cuza” Iași



Winter Magic

Cold days and warm hands...
It's the winter of creation.
And the sound of the grands
It's between reality and imagination.

Fluffy snow clouds
And scented candles,
As night enshrouds
Winter... Is beautiful from any of angles.

Snowflakes and lights
The season of the soul,
Those magical nights...
We all want to have Santa's role.


It's the most exciting time of the year
The snow is brighter than ever before.
The children are under the three, all near
It's the period we all adore.





Matei Alexia Cătălina

clasa a X-a, Colegiul
Național "Vasile Alecsandri",
Iași




The last sparkle of Christmas

The spirit of the winter holydays... what could be more beautiful than that? Family... delicious food... presents... snow... Christmas tree... cozy atmosphere... What more could you want from life? You can consider yourself one of the most lucky people in the world if you have all of these. But what if you have none of them? Just imagine... no people to talk to, nothing to eat, nothing to give or to receive around the Christmas tree, no feeling of safety. It sounds sad, doesn't it?

It doesn't just sound sad... it really is... and unfortunately... there are some people around the world who celebrate this special event in this sorrowful way... and the hero of our story is one of them. His parents died in a car crash when he was five... and since then he has been living in an orphanage... or better said he should... because he never did. The caretaker was an old harridan who only lived for alcohol and for her bald, creepy and bad smelling cat. She would beat him black and blue for every little mistake. One night, she almost killed him... but when she was asked at the police department what happened to the little boy... she exclaimed with a sugary voice: "I swear, mister policeman... I told him a hundred times not to jump out of the swing... poor child... I love him too much to let something like this to happen again... if only I had been more careful..". Did I forget to say that she was a good actress... ? Yes... but i am sure that you noticed by yourself.

Since that incident... he has been living on the filthy streets. It was better like this from all points of view. What's an empty stomach compared to an empty soul? At the age of seven... he was more mature than a significant part of the grown ups. Even if he seems to be lonely,



this kid has never been on his own... they were always three of them who would take care of each other no matter what: him, himself and he.

As he walked across the street, the child was contemplating the Christmas decorations and the happy families carrying colorful gift bags. Through the big display window of the shops he could see fragile porcelain dolls with little full red lips and pensive big blue eyes, luxurious varnished toycars as he has never seen before and huge teddy bears that he didn't even dare to dream about. He was truly mesmerized. Above a toystore there was a sign where was written "For all the kids"... If he was a kid... and the toys were for kids... as it was written there... it meant that the toys were also for him, not just for the wealthy children, right? Even if the boy was shy, he decided to enter there and ask for a toy. "Hello, madam! Would you mind giving me that bear?". A mischievous laugh surrounded the room.

"You can't afford it, fool! Get out as fast as you can if you don't want me to call the security guard!" exclaimed a middle-aged blonde lady. "A bastard like you has nothing to do here!"

He ran. Crystal raindrops started to fall from his eyes. They were burning his cold cheeks and his breath was ruled by an acidic sorrow. The night was laying down on the city, highlighting the contrast between dark and Christmas lights, his cruel childhood and the magical ones that others had. The Christmas tree brought him back memories, pellucid memories of his first Christmas. It was cold... so cold...

In the end he... fell asleep. It was the coldest night in the last twenty years. The little boy didn't know that he would never wake up again...





Dimitriu Larisa-Elena

clasa a IX-a, Colegiul Național
„Garabet Ibrăileanu” Iași



A Winter Wonder


I wake up suddenly. I stay still for a few seconds. Then I realize it's December. I look out of the window. Small, shy flakes strike the glass and settle on the windowsill outside. I've been waiting for this moment for days. I feel the blood flowing through my veins madly of joy.

I get up from my bed, run into the bathroom, get dressed, go out and let the the flakes settle on my lashes. I dance in the snow and I enjoy the wonderful view that winter offers us.

I return quickly because the cold is not mild and I don't want to hear my mother scolding me again. I hear her wake up. I know she'll be in the kitchen soon, so I run to pick up my boots from the floor and clean the almost thawed snow under them.

“How is it outside?” asks mom.





She looked at me from the window in her bedroom so I choose not to deny that I left the house.

‘„It’s great. A little cold, but wonderful.”

“Then I’ll take you to school by car today.”

She tells me to go get my backpack and the food package from the fridge.

* * *

When I open the door, tired after school, I am greeted by a strong smell of fir and cakes. I haven’t seen the Christmas tree yet, but I know what it looks like. It is adorned with glittering white garlands and red glass globes. Cakes, too. I imagine them as soon as I associate the smell. Round and steaming, with the sweet chocolate tangled in the dough. Although it is not Christmas, my mother chooses to decorate the tree from the first day of winter. Cakes are also something specific to our family when December comes.

Everything looks perfect. The pleasant holiday atmosphere, the enticing smell of sweets, the approaching winter holiday sound magnificent. But not everything is in place. My father. He’s not with us this year either. And his presence is the most coveted gift I want.

He’s been missing since I was only 4 years old. I didn’t grow up with him. I don’t how it’s like to feel a father’s love and I don’t know what it’s like to feel safe around both parents. My mother works hard to support us and sometimes I notice the fatigue in her eyes and I feel like crying. When I offer to help her, she tells me the same thing. “The only thing you can help me with is by studying.”

I remember when my mother told me about my letters for Santa. In addition to the toys, I asked for my father, and when I didn’t see him under the tree, my mother told me that I ran to my room and started crying. It wasn’t just because of my friends’ opinions about his absence, but I simply needed a warm hug from my father.

I don’t cry any more, but the desire is the same.

* * *

It’s Christmas Eve, December 24th. I wake up around 10 a.m. I do my routine and go to have breakfast. I look subtly at the tree. There’s nothing under it yet, but it looks like something has changed. There’s something different. I don’t know what it is, so I go to the kitchen. It’s a new perfume around. It’s basically the same, but something has been added.





“My daughter! Are you my daughter?”

It’s him. He’s my father. I immediately notice his features. Bright green eyes, ruffled brown hair and his posture. It’s exactly as my mother described him to me.

“Dad! Are you my dad?”

I’m copying his question. It’s the only thing I can say. I want to run to him and hug him, but something stops me. I don’t know what. My mother is not here and I need her now. I want to see her and ask her, but he, my father, the person I always wanted to see, is coming to me now. I notice the tears in his eyes and let him hug me.

“I’m so sorry.”

It’s the only thing he says, then there are moments of maximum silence.

* * *

Next to the Christmas tree there was a letter he wrote for me. He wanted to leave it to me, then leave again, but now, seeing me, he decided to stay, to tell me why he left and to offer me the most wonderful Christmas of my life.


This was a winter wonder, a Christmas wonder.





David Letisia Merediss


clasa a X-a, Colegiul Economic
Administrativ, Iași



Flakes of Hope

It was cold outside, or it used to, Phil didn't know exactly, since he had been standing outside on one of the dingy benches of the Royal Alexandra Children's Hospital. Next to him his younger sister, Kate was sitting, wrapped in her brother's thick woolen jacket. "I think mom's going to bake a cake this year for Christmas." Phil spoke, disturbing the silence around them. "Really? I hope she'll make the chocolate one, that's my favourite." "Of course it is, you have the biggest sweet tooth I've ever seen!" Kate started to laugh, but a quick, yet loud coughing fit interrupted her laughter. "I think you should look at yourself first, Phil." "Oh, come on! You're eating twice the amount of sweets I do in a week! Either way, how are you feeling? Anything new from the doctors?" A sigh rang through the garden, before Kate spoke up: "I'm alright, some coughs here and there but nothing too worrisome. Mrs. Camberg said that if I'm lucky enough, I could get out by New Year's Eve. Not entirely sure it will happen though, and I'll be completely missing out on Christmas."

A frown lined Kate's face; she had been locked away in the hospital for the most part of autumn and now winter, and during all that time her hope came down to none. "Why the long face? I'm sure you'll pull through and come back home soon; maybe we'll all come over to the hospital and celebrate Christmas with you, how does that sound?" Phil put on a bright smile, which was more or less mirrored by his sister "Sure, I guess. Although I'll be missing the atmosphere we had back home last year. Tina really made a full show with her piano!"



... The two continued to chat on, all the way until one of the nurses came and took Kate in, since the visiting hours were over. Phil then made his way back home, yet he couldn't shake off the sad look on his sister's face. He knew it had been a rough couple of months for her, but seeing her so torn over Christmas made his heart break in two. That was the moment he decided he would do everything in his power to bring joy and hope back on Kate's face, no matter what.

The next couple of weeks, Phil showed up to the hospital every single day, bringing in sweets and games in order to cheer Kate up and to bring back her love for the cold season and its holidays. Yet the more he tried, the less he seemed to get a reaction from her. Phil felt his own motivation was going down, still he decided to hold on and keep going, since the love he had for his sister couldn't be replaced by anything. However, what he didn't know was that a joyful old man riding a red sleigh up in the sky saw and heard the love and care he had for his sister and decided to reward him for that.

It was the 24th of December now, snowflakes were dancing through the air, adding onto the piles that had already been on the ground. Phil was getting ready to go visit Kate once again, when he heard the phone ring. He quickly picked up and answered it, only to hear his sister's excited voice coming through: „Phil, Phil! The doctor said I can come home, can you believe it?!” „That's great news, Kate! I'll be there soon.” He couldn't believe his ears, his sister was out of the hospital just in time for Christmas!


Phil hurried over to Royal Alexandra, picked up Kate, and drove back home. The smile on both their faces was grand and bright, almost like the lights that were glittering on the houses on the streets. It was like a Christmas Miracle, and even though Phil didn't fully believe in magic, he was extremely grateful for whatever helped his sister get over her disease.





Crețu Roxana Gabriela

clasa a XI-a, Colegiul Național
„Vasile Alecsandri”, Iași




Nostalgia for a long gone Christmas

At Christmas time, I want to say
How things just aren't the same.
Heartache when someone speaks your name...
Unseen, unheard,
And always missed.

It's hard today...
It's grueling tomorrow...
It's harrowing in every single day,
Because everything I do
Is reminding me of you.

Now I'm gazing at the Christmas tree,
Imagining that you're here with me
Laughing, just by staring at each other,
Enjoying the voiceless carolers.

With each falling flake,
A tear flows down my face.
And I'm screaming inside
Because...
All I want is nothing more,
Just to hear you knocking at my door.




But I will be good.
I will love life, as it should.
Because that's what you've wanted me to do,
And that's all I need to do.

At Christmas time, I want to say
How dearly I miss you...
I miss us...
Just the two of us,
You and I.

Vârlam Andra-Maria


clasa a IX-a, Colegiul Național
„Costache Negruzzi” Iași



A Christmas Dream

24th December 1914. Christmas, as close as it seems, is still far away. The world is falling apart, piece by piece, the blood of genuine people stains the ground, which becomes colder and colder each day as the war and the winter are just as ruthless as the stories were telling. However, over all the madness going on, far from where soldiers are dying, a shy light coming through an old cottage window may turn into hope. A very beautiful young lady is decorating her Christmas tree and her angelic pale face can effortlessly make you think she's never even heard about the harsh conditions from out there. The war is the unknown. And why would you think about the unknown? A sudden, but not unexpected knock at her door...





„Enter, enter, please, darling. Outside there is a terrible blizzard, isn't there?” the woman asked, without moving for a second her eyes from the star that has to be placed perfectly at the top of the tree. From the scattered darkness of the night and the brutal cold, a young man, no older than 20, entered with his hand clenched on his abdomen, trying to hide, probably, his bloody wound.


„For God's sake, Lucas, how come you are here?” the pretty woman screamed when she finally turned around and saw Lucas, an old friend of hers, also a soldier who managed, through who-knows-how miracle, to run from the battle front into the deep forest and find the girl in order to see her. Esperanza, because that was the name of the gorgeous, yet mysterious woman, rushed to take care of his terrible wound as she knew best, bandaging it and trying to raise her lips in a gentle smile meant to hide her tears.

„It's wonderful here, I have to admit. It's like a farewell to war. Just us by the fire that burns peacefully and nothing else. But I feel so free. Could you please sing a carol so I am fully aware I have lived my last Christmas in a perfect way?” Lucas asked with a low voice. She immediately panicked, but she respected his wish and soon her voice, as enjoyable as her appearance, could be heard throughout the entire cottage.

„Esperanza, I am a coward and a traitor. We were attacked, this time harder than ever, we were totally unprepared, and I was one of the few who survived. But I am hurt and there is no doubt I have very few minutes of living. And I want to know one thing. Who are you? How come I can see you only around Christmas? Since I was 8 you appeared every Christmas and then disappeared without any explanations. Are you an illusion? Am I mentally ill and are you just in my imagination? Are you from the future? Are you my wife, maybe? That would be great, I love you, but I am sorry to announce you'll be a widow soon if that's true.” Lucas said, smiling, looking into Esperanza's warm eyes.

„Lucas, darling, I finally have to tell you the truth. My name is Esperanza Donatelli, and I died on 24th December 1984. The plague ended my life a long time ago. But souls who haven't found their meaning during lifetime are therefore turned into ghosts, and I was cursed to appear every single Christmas in my human form to find my way. And then I found you and I fell in love with you the






minute you kissed my cold hand when you've found me in the snow. You were 8 back then, and I looked 8, too, because I started aging not from the moment I died, but the moment I found my meaning. Loving you. I know it's too late now, you can't hear me anymore, but I will soon see you. I love you!" Esperanza said while she kissed goodbye the soldier who gave his last breath in front of her. She left the cottage and, as she was stepping on the snow her body change into flakes, taken by the wind that also brought the midnight clock. 25th December. Merry Christmas!

Gorgan Georgiana

clasa a XI-a, Liceul Teoretic
„Al.I.Cuza”, Iași



Dear Santa, I wish...


“Dear Santa, I have a question ... Why do you always confuse my gift with other children's? I always receive toys and sweets as a gift, but I asked you for one thing that you gave to other children ... A family.”

It was snowing outside, all the children went out into the orphanage yard to enjoy the first snowflakes, only one little girl was sitting at the window looking at the other children.

This little girl with brown hair and green eyes was called Melody. Unfortunately, Melody had not been chosen by anyone all this time. But she did not give up and every year she sent a letter to Santa with the thought that one day her wish would come true.

There was only one day left until Christmas Eve, so Melody eagerly begun her letter to Santa.





After finishing writing her letter, she hurried to the post office near the orphanage. As Melody ran, she tripped over the loose laces, as the letter fell onto the sidewalk and the wind blew it away. After noticing that the letter was missing, Melody began to look around for it, but did not find it. She was sad to know that it was the last day the letters were picked up at the post office. Melody returned to her room, sat on the bed, and cried, saying: „All I wanted was a family,” after which she fell asleep.

Roger was walking home after a tired day of work, when he noticed a piece of paper carried by the wind reaching his feet. He picked it up and realized that it was not just a piece of paper, but a letter to Santa. Roger arrived home and looked for Natalie, his wife, to tell her about what he had found, so they both took a sit on the couch and start reading it...

“Dear Santa,

This year I have the same wish... I don't want toys or sweets... Only a family that loves me. I want to feel the happiness that all children have and I hope that you will offer it to me.

Sincerely, Melody”

Roger and Natalie, excited by what they had just read, decided to look for this little girl and make her happy on Christmas Eve. After quite a lot of searching, they arrived at the orphanage, asking for permission to see Melody. Roger and Natalie went to the little girl's room, and after they opened the door, they burst into tears at the sight of Melody. They had a little girl a few years back, but lost her in a tragic accident. And Melody looked exactly like their little girl, Ola.

After spending a few hours together, Roger and Natalie knew that it was destiny giving them a second chance, so they decided to fulfil the girl's wish and adopt her.

Melody had found the last piece of the puzzle and after all that time at the orphanage, she had finally got her well-deserved happy ending just in time for Christmas.





Pintilie Alexandra

clasa a XI-a, Colegiul Național
„Garabet Ibrăileanu” Iași




Little Wonderland

The creation of our kingdom Solaris is a story that none of the elders forget to recount every year at The Great Assembly. A hundred years ago, Aelia, The Chosen of the Sun, led a strong fight against The Ice Queen who wanted to shape the realm after her will in something cold and dark. Endowed by The Goddess herself, Aelia won through an astonishing strategy and ended The Cold War, banishing the queen and destroying forever her icy kingdom. Only a few know that her last breath was deeply buried in The Enchanted Forest and she hoped that, one day, her kingdom will be feared again. How do I know that you may be asking? Let's just say that I can make the sky grey and piles of snowflakes fall from it whenever I feel like it, but they know that too.

The Royal family took me when I was only five years old and since then I am their little secret. I tried to escape multiple times





but get caught because the guards were much faster, except now I have a new ally, their princess.

The first time Sofia came to me was seven years ago when, late in the night, she brought me a stolen muffin because she knew I didn't get much food. At first, we didn't talk much but as time passed by, she became my only friend and sneaks out every night to hang out with me. I knew her life wasn't easy either and that she was as much a prisoner as me.

One night she came to me in a hurry with a massive book in her hands, probably taken from The Royal Library.

“You won't believe what I had found today in the restricted area!” In the restricted area, you could find every book written by a rebel that was forbidden in the entire kingdom.

„This book tells the actual story of The Cold War. Look! Here it says that Aelia was next in line of the heirs of Solaris and soon she was going to be crowned as queen but the rumors brought to her attention a prophecy.”

“What Prophecy?”

„I'm glad you asked because I spent hours to unravel its meaning. The Ice Queen was willing to give up on her power for a new force to be born, a descendent. “

„What you're saying is that someone out there has the power to rebuild the Ice Kingdom?”


Sofia gave me an all-knowing look and gently told me „I think you're the descendent, the next queen of The Ice Kingdom.”

That night, everything changed. Now I had a purpose and a kingdom to rule, but first I had to be free. Sofia and I didn't have much time to plan but we knew that the best chance for me to escape was on the day of The Great Assembly because the guards are more needed in town. If our plan works I'll meet the rebels at the entry in The Enchanted Forest. Sofia informed them about my ancestry through a spy that owed to her. They were shocked at first, even tho some knew about the prophecy, but were willing to keep me safe.

Sofia had to be present with her family at the ceremony and last night I had to take my hardest goodbye, but I promised to come back for her.

The horns for the ceremony began to rumble in the entire kingdom and that was my signal. Without a second thought, I froze






the door's hinges and with all force pulled it out. I left the room and walk straight to the massive painting at the end of the hall and slowly remove it to find the entry in the secret tunnels. Sofia used them for years to sneak out and it was the safest and fastest way to escape. I rushed into the tunnel and at the end of it, I took a deep breath and opened the door. I started running and didn't stop until I saw the small group that was waiting for me to go rebuild our home, our little wonderland.

Matei Luchian-Nicolae


clasa a XI-a, Colegiul Național
„Garabet Ibrăileanu” Iași



Santassasin

It's a cold winter night. Wonder and anticipation palpable in the chilly air. This is supposed to be a night of happiness. But there will be no happiness tonight, only death, death delivered in a jolly and and cheery tone, death delivered by no other than him, the legendary Santassasin. That name, it strikes fear in the corrupt for Santassasin is an angel of death that delivers absolution to the powerful who abuse their power, those who are above justice are equal to everyone in the face of his long white beard smeared in the blood of evil. For the masses rejoice when they hear of his calling card, a piece of black coal for each kill. And the masses shall rejoice tonight as his list shall grow shorter by three names. Santiago Dominiques a notorious drug lord whose favourite execution method is his two dogs, Amari Tavon, an African warlord with a wooden complex in the middle of a savanna clearing and Jemma Smith, the president of the United States of America are the three names witch our cold killer shall deliver justice to.






A quaint log cabin sits alone in the woods, inside, a singular chimney and a table with four items on it. The first is a sledgehammer heavier than any other in the world, on the handle, an inscription reading „death only comes to those with will made in China”. The second, an unknown device with a small flame near coming out of it. The the third, an ordinary-looking present and the fourth, a dead pig.

A big fat man enters the cabin, he's wearing a bright red suit the colour of blood for no particular reason other than that of the cleaning costs. The hour nears as it's five minutes to midnight. Santassasin starts thinking about how he got here, his childhood. He suddenly realizes that he does not have time for a flashback so he takes out his cigar box and eats one of the cookies inside. He then places the four items in his sack, approaches the chimney thinking „three to go” and then enters it.

Santiago, the notorious drug-lord sits in his office, calmly as he obstructed every chimney in his mansion with a solid brick wall, he's confident no one can come for him, police? he's paid them off, the military? He's an „honorary” general in the army, the people? He owns and operates a „charity” organization. He's got absolute power and no one can stop him, or so he thinks. Suddenly, he hears a thumping sound coming from a wall in his office, „must be a rat” he nervously thinks. Little does he know Santassasin is behind that wall with a sledge hammer. With the force of a thousand reindeer, he raises the sledgehammer and, the handle brakes and the head falls off. Santa picks up the head, and with the force of a thousand reindeer pulverizes the wall in one fell swoop. Santiago is petrified in fear. Without any warning, Santassain fires a jet of flame from the unknown device, burning Santiago and turning him into a pile of coal. Santa walks back into the chimney thinking „one down,two to go”.

Amari, the African warlord sits alone in his wooden palace as he's extremely paranoid of a betrayal. He does not believe the stories of the „red fat man” who kills men and women like him and that is what brings about his undoing. Santassasin exits the chimney, burns down the palace with Amari inside and thinks „this is too easy”. He then realizes that there's only about 150 words left and he still hasn't killed Jemma, so he needs to hurry this along. „Two down, one to go.”





Jemma was in her top security bunker nicknamed „winter wonderland”, she made sure no chimneys were installed in its construction except for one, which was trapped to explode whenever it detected any sort of movement. Jemma knows she is on the list as she is planning on deploying nuclear weapons for a favourable outcome in a war. An explosion is heard. „The trap had worked” she thinks as she goes to check the trap area, blood and guts everywhere. She breathes a sigh of relief, she can finally rest easy knowing that jolly assassin is dead. As she returns to her office and sits down to sign some papers, she realizes that her pen is missing and she reaches under the desk to find it. What she finds instead is still speculated to this day, analysis of her office after the explosion suggests foreign materials included cardboard, wrapping paper, coal and c4.”Three down.”

Safronii Elena

clasa a XII-a, Liceul Teoretic
„Al.I.Cuza” Iași




It's a New Winter!

It's a New Year! It's a New Life!

Winter does not need the colours of the rainbow to make us happy, but it offers us something without which the human soul would not withstand the cold season – hope! And who would we be without hope, without faith that miracles really happen?

The magic of winter cannot be compared with anything else, when the hands of the clock reach 00:00 on December 31st, the pulse slows down, and our lives get a „restart” button. Winter is a magical realm because here we are masters of the notion of time, as if we





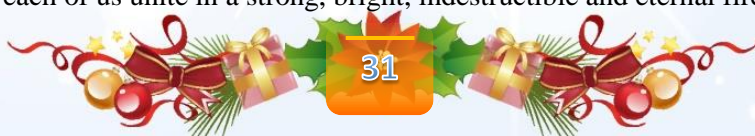
bring time back and start a new life, it's as if you were reborn from the ashes, like the Phoenix bird, every time more beautiful and stronger. And the luxury of dreaming and changing and everyone allows it, even adults, who expect miracles in their childish soul, with the hope that next year will be better than the previous one. The most beautiful thing on earth is the possibility to allow yourself to dream and hope, without hope the human soul is lost.


I caught myself thinking that only in winter I can afford myself to change, as if I were tearing a dirty sheet of ink from the book of my life and starting to write on a white one, and at that moment I thought „I have forgiven myself for everything I did, now my soul is as immaculate and pure as the snow outside. I will insist on keeping it that way”.

The most complicated way is self-knowledge, and the people around us help us understand who we really are. Winter is the catalyst that makes us take a step forward, to say such sincere phrases as: „I love you”, „I would like you to be with me always”. Winter unites souls, calms hearts, helps us forget about wounds and have the courage to surpass our sorrows, because we have to be strong enough to forgive.

Winter gives us the opportunity to realize how much family means to us. I personally had the opportunity to spend the New Year with my father and see with the naked eye the sadness in his eyes because my mother was not next to him, but at the same time happiness as he had me and he was not alone. I realized then that it was amazing what a single ray of light could do with the human soul. This winter will be different: it will unite the puzzle of our family, because it will never be complete if a piece is missing. This winter, the deepest prayers will be heard so that no one will be alone for the holidays. Because thousands of stars in the sky will never be enough, if you don't have someone who loves you and whom you deeply love.

This winter I want to go home for the holidays, knock on the door and say „Hello, father! Here I am!”, and from the kitchen to hear the voice of my mother and sisters arguing about cakes, and my father to answer: „welcome home, my daughter!”, then allow myself to be hugged by them all, feeling how the candles burning in the soul of each of us unite in a strong, bright, indestructible and eternal fire.





Winter is a magical realm, where all evil is forgotten, where we feel safe, where we feel better, where we feel able to love, or fall in love! In winter, the pains seem to be less, as it annihilates them, and it puts us under the anaesthesia of the happiness that comes from within.

Homsî Lara Beatrice


clasa a XI-a, Colegiul Național
„Vasile Alecsandri” Iași



Stuck in a Christmas Time Loop

In the hustle and bustle of the streets lined with lights for Christmas, a little girl was sitting on the cold ground. She noticed the joy on the faces of the people who were looking forward to returning home to greet the family with gifts and smiles. She looked at these scenes years in a row and she ended up enjoying them too, even if she didn't have the opportunity to physically transpose there, but only with the thought. However, she had a premonition that events repeat themselves in a loop of time because she only experienced Christmas and it is the only thing that she can remember. One day a gentle old woman leaned over and greeted her. It was unusual for her and she was happy, but at the same time, there was a strange feeling for her. Something happened that shouldn't have happened. The lady told her to follow her. They arrived at an old-fashioned house, made of wood, and inside were lighted candles and a small, beautifully decorated Christmas tree. The woman gave her a book. She began to flip through it curiously, trying not to bend the thin pages. The girl told her that she didn't learn how to read, and the old woman offered to share with her the following story:





Once upon a time, there was a little girl named Neve. She had an angelic face and she always wore the most beautiful dresses. Her parents always bought her everything she wanted. The most beautiful moments were in the period of Christmas. Then she received most gifts and she liked to compare the number of gifts she received with those of her friends, who received much less than her each year. She was never grateful and never felt compassion for other people. Every time she saw a poor man – chilled on the streets beautifully decorated with various lights – she proudly flaunted her dress and the bags full of toys and sweets ...

„I would like to live her life for just a moment... I'm sorry I interrupted you, but lately I've been thinking of an idea and I've been riddled with doubts. It is said that God does not give us more than we can bear, but given the situation I have been in for years...”, she said with tears in her eyes, interrupting the continuation of the story.

„Eilidh, I'm back to change your story,” the old woman replied in a gentle voice. „Everything that represents Neve in that story, you are in this current story. I chose to take you away from what you were and decided to introduce you somewhere where you can open your eyes. I wanted you to feel what you weren't willing to understand. I decided to change the end of your story.”


The girl was shocked to hear the woman's words. She no longer knew who she was as an individual, where its existence began, and how long it could go on. Her thoughts about the days being the same turned out to be true.

„I don't quite understand,” Eilidh whispers. „Can you change my destiny as you wish? I thought that every man was endowed with free will, but your explanations call into question more than they already were. I understand I'm in a story. Are readers present right now? Are they still human?”

„Eilidh, I can confirm every question, because you drew the right conclusions. I am convinced that this whole situation is overwhelming for you. I'm here to pave the way for something better. You can create your own story, but only this time, so choose wisely. Now is the time, after you have opened your eyes, to choose a better path.”

„I am really complicated by this situation and my thoughts are innumerable. At this point, though, I'd like to forget about the






existential questions that grip me right now, and I'd like to create my own story," Eilidh said in a slightly trembling voice.

In the end, the old woman kept her promise and transposed Eilidh into the story of her choice. And so, Eilidh now has a loving family, spending every winter evening in front of the fireplace in their small and modest house, friends with whom she goes sledding, and also the spirit of Christmas.



**Moşneagu Evelina-
Georgiana**

clasa a X-a, Colegiul Național
„Garabet Ibrăileanu” Iași




Winter Story

Remember, remember
The ninth of December
The brutality, the battle that has been forgot
And I don't know any reason why these should ever be forgotten.

The ninth of December, a day known by many people like the international day of anti-corruption, a day of freedom, of equality, of life.

On that day, all humanity should celebrate their freedom, their chance at life, their happiness about that day, about that month of the year, the Christmas spirit, the first snowflake that's calling out for his brothers to be near him and the beautiful stories that December has made for us.

The little children share with us the wonderful feeling that Winter is bringing to us all. Winter is not looking at pure traditions, our colour, our past, our future or our daily routine; Winter is looking



in our eyes when she, the beautiful lady of ice, talks to us and is telling us so many stories, that actually are lessons for us, hints for ourselves when we continue our journey through life and time.

Through ice and fire,
The children admire
The beautiful stories about this journey
That is our single key
To the place where everybody wants to be.

And the reason why I chose to write about the ninth of December is that I think that all people should be equal and that all people should love.

Equality is one of the human rights that gives people hope, it gives freedom and it gives more credibility of the idea that dreams come true. There are some stories that Winter brings us about people who escaped death in an illogical way, near Christmas.

Love is one of the precious feelings that a living being can ever feel. This is the source of art, music, maths, physics, psychology and more importantly of life.

One should know love
And other shall know equality
And together shall learn to move
Discovering life's simplicity
Progressing on the same road
Having different past, looking to the future
The road having no fog
And being more easy to evade the torture
Of life, truth to the past days.
And we all shall remember the lost lives.





David Cristina Elena

clasa a XII-a, Colegiul Național
„Ștefan cel Mare” Hârlău




Winter Wonderland

Wars always sparked the earth terrifyingly. Terrorized by their own transience, people got to push one another in deathjaws, seeking to ensure immortality through power and comfort. But people are weak, the Universe expects them to fall prey to their instincts. Alas, the only thing that no one ever expected was that such noble and wonderful entities as The Seasons fell prey to the temptation of their own inferior reflexes.

It was one of the frostiest years of the last century. At that time Winter relentlessly walked around over the lands before Summer's arrival and started again even before Fall. She glowed frozen breezes and blinding grins everywhere, stepping with the grace of a ballerina, frostbiting the ground with her every move and her frozen train killed every breathe of life behind her. Actually she wasn't even stepping, she seemed to levitate, so soft was she, elegantly swaying





both her sweet bohemian face and her senseless white hair, delicately sweeping her elegant back, while daring hairstrands threw themselves in the northern downwind, fearlessly dancing on the rhythms of Clayderman's sonnet. Her figure had the glow of the winter sunshine and her eyes, colour of the howlite, with dark traces of the sleepy chernoziom from under her soft garment smiled.


People worshipped her passage, overwhelmed by her grace and beauty, a queen of over realms so beautiful and yet so scary. And her sisters? Well, they were rotten with jealousy. Every reign day, their anger was growing up and each look, full of tears and love, Father Time was embracing Winter with, hate poisoned their souls. Only Fall, born right after Summer, knowing the place and gait of every small creature on Earth, admired the great performance of Winter, the youthfulness of Summer and the calm of Spring.

But Spring and Summer couldn't accept Winter's power, neither her beauty and happiness reigning over the land. For them, she was too high, too worthy, too fair. People had been loving her since the beginning of the time, children always waited for her with rosy cheeks and freezing noses, with sleds at starting line. Writers bowed poems at her feet and musicians extraordinary poems, the whole humanity seemed sunk into her romanticism and harmony and deepened into a sweet hibernation every time.

Smoldering in suppressed hard feelings, the two sisters decided to fool people and turn them against Winter.

Spring loathed the love Winter's animals offered her and the eagerness with which they were waiting for her. So, at the time Winter was blossoming embroidery of ice on windows, Spring sneaked into the animal's nest and encouraged them to go out and play. Once outside into the dead cold, in front of the unfamiliar landscape of winter, many frail creatures perished and the rest got sorely sick. When she saw the effect of her selfishness, Spring started weeping, grieved. Although her act saddened Winter, she offered Spring her whole love and warmth and guided her to Father Time to ask for help. He was angry, but, at Winter's suggestions, she melted as a snowflake on the tongue and went. Then, together, they gathered all the dead animals around and after instilling life into them again, they turned them back into their nest until warm time would come back.





Summer's most bitter pain was that people might forget the sweetness of her fruits and prefer the Winter's sour sweetness of citruses. Determined to remind them Winter's betrayal, Summer let suddenly ripe some strawberries from a frostbitten plant in front of the amazed people, a yellow watermelon and some little sour cherries. But when she wanted to pick them and offer them to them and Father Time, the fruits slowly died. Fearing Father Time's anger, she asked for Winters help. Winter warmly embraced Summer, carressed her vibrating green hair and told her how important for the plants was to pass through all the riping phases for sweet fruits. Summer's hate suddenly disappeared.

Never again did envy and meanness eat the sister's hearts after that episode! They were born to care, love and cherish land, every one in her way to bring life, health and happiness to creatures of the Earth and so they did!

**Caradința Amalia
Gabriela**

clasa a X-a, Liceul Tehnologic Economic
de Turism, Corp B




„Miracle”

Winter is not always as some think, it is not cold if you have a good and warm soul, it is not harsh if you are gentle with all beings in the world and it is not long if you have someone to spend your time with. Here I will tell the story of a little girl who lived in a hut, on top of a mountain, with her grandparents.

Her mother passed away on Christmas morning and her father had left her, being too careless in the family they had. The girl's name was Lily and her name was given to her by her grandmother. Lily spent most of her time near the house and when she could, she






would go to the forest where she would write poems and read even if it was cold. Her friends were the trees and snowflakes she held in her hands and began to cry thinking they were her mother's tears. The flakes were cold ... as was the wind ... For Lily, Christmas had no charm as she did not believe in miracles and did not want to believe.

There were only five days until Eve and the girl's grandparents were busy preparing the food and their home. Lily helped them by bringing ingredients and while she was doing nothing she sat in her room next to the stove with the teddy bear given to her by her grandfather when she was a little baby. Looking out of the window, she saw that the snow was getting heavier and thicker, making a thick layer of snow all over the top of the mountain and in the forest. The little girl left the teddy bear on the bed and dressed with warm clothes, taking a fur coat and some crocheted gloves from her grandmother. Opening the door of the house with difficulty she ran towards the forest seeing among the trees the flakes that settled wherever you looked. Suddenly a cry began to be heard from a distance ... It was an albino deer crying because it was injured in one leg. Lily, worried, sat down on the snow next to him and began to caress his head so she could calm him down. While passing by, the girl's grandfather took the young deer in his arms and took him home to the stable where the horses were and took care of his leg. The buck was calm, feeling that the souls of these people were good and he had nothing to fear– Lily ran into the house and took a blanket and some pillows and went back to the stable to take care of the baby deer. Blinking from his big eyes, the deer analysed the little girl from head to toe and then put his head on her lap asleep. The stable wasn't a good place to sleep, but wanting to spend more time with the non-speaking being in the woods, Lily fell asleep and stayed there until the next day.

Lily and the albino deer became good friends in the five days until Christmas Eve and the girl's grandmother took care to heal the non-speaker's leg by feeding him with oatmeal and ripe apples. They stayed together all winter and when spring came, the deer, which had become an adult by now, said goodbye to the welcoming family and run to the forest where it belonged. While watching her friend leave, Lily said to her grandparents: “This Christmas, I first believed in miracles ...!” When the grandparents heard this, they took Lily in






their arms and kissed her on the cheeks. The years have passed since then and next to the girl's house lived many forest creatures, even the family of the albino deer that she had taken care of when she was a child.

Verdes Ilinca Letiția

clasa a X-a, Colegiul National
„Garabet Ibrăileanu” Iași




Winter Wonderland

In a town where neither the snow could ever endure to fall nor the time pass, there lived a little girl named Karla. Karla was one of the kindest and sweetest little girl, always looking after her family, trying not to dissapoint them. With an angelic face, big blue eyes that were matching her favourite princess dress, a small mouth which only had good things to say and blonde curly hair, she stood out from her naughty older brothers.

Every year as the holidays approached, the citizens became grumpier, more irascible, making the magic of Christmas very difficult to enjoy. But Karla was more excited than ever because it seemed like the stories her grandmother read to her night after night, came true. Tall trees, weighed down by snow, looked like silhouettes dancing in the shadows of the night, Christmas lights turned the city into a real Winter Wonderland, and she could finally be the snow maiden with her endless snowflake dress, her blonde hair falling in waves, and her ice crystal wand, making everyone believe in the magic of Christmas again.

The days passed and Christmas was approaching so Karla kept asking what gifts Santa would bring, making lists over lists,





adding and cutting names of toys, asking her siblings how Christmas and Santa Claus were born. In a family where the faith of Christmas was almost non-existent, Karla found solace in her grandmother's arms. Her grandma was a person for whom stories meant truly living life. He also passed on to Karla this passion and belief in stories that would help her get through life more easily. The night before Christmas, after her grandmother read her a story about Santa's mission, Karla set out to change the mentality of her family and make everyone believe in the magic of Christmas. As soon as the idea came to her, Karla checked her piggy bank and seeing that she didn't have enough money, she went to her grandmother and asked her:

„Why don't some people believe in Santa? Mom, dad, my brothers. It makes me so sad, granny.”

„Oh, my dear. Because they have not yet understood that people feed on stories. No one can be happy if they do not believe in something.”

„I want to make everyone believe in the magic of Christmas. Will you help me?”

„Let's do this!”

The plan was pretty easy. While her parents were at work, her siblings at school or in town, she and her grandmother were to arrange the whole house. The Christmas decorations were in the attic, the Christmas tree was already bought, but the most important were the gifts. The girl and her grandma went shopping together. After the gifts were bought and beautifully wrapped, they put them under the tree and all they had to do then was wait for the family to return home. But what Karla didn't know was that her grandmother was preparing a special gift for her, her gift from Santa. [When the parents returned, they were amazed at how beautiful everything was:](#)

„Wow! What happened here? It's magical!” her mom exclaimed.

„Merry Christmas, everyone!” Karla said, laughing.


„Can we open the gifts, dad?” said her brothers.

„What gifts? I ... we... didn't buy any gifts.

„Santa brought everyone a gift!” shouted Karla.

The children rejoiced, sang carols and the evening ended with their grandmother's story about the magic of Christmas. Karla received such a beautiful letter from Santa, which ended like this:






A child will never be sad. Every adult becomes sad when he forgets to listen to the child in him. Happy Holidays, Karla!

That night even the stars shone brighter, even Christmas was more beautiful when people believed in the same stories.

Dobre Daria

clasa a XI-a, Colegiul National
„Garabet Ibrăileanu” Iași




Dear Santa,

I find myself writing to you again...

Dou you remember the first time I wrote to you? No? Fine, I'll remind you. I was six years old when my mother told me that I can write anything to a man with an icy beard and white locks that lives in a toy factory at the North Pole. The feeling of joy and curiosity encompasses me even now, although the years have passed, in my soul the story has not changed. For me, you are still the same enchanted person from the charming winter story.

I strongly believe that you really exist and that you have the power to rejoice any child's soul and to bring the smile and joy of the winter holidays in every family. From the first snowflake, your waiting brings impatience and delight at the same time. With the thought of the gifts that you put under the Christmas tree every year, we are waiting for you to celebrate on the Christmas Eve and to recite our beautiful poems to you, as well as emotions and vibrations in our voice.

It is amazing how you have lived in each of us for so long and in all the stories and enchantment of the winter holidays. You bring every year the wonderful, in our homes. I will never forget the joy of



the morning in which we, together with our parents, open the gifts we received from you, in harmony with the crackling sound of fire and the carols that resound throughout the house.

I also remember with great pleasure how I told my friends with great joy about the gifts I received from you, from the North Pole. And now after the years have passed and although I have grown up and am becoming an adult, I am experiencing the same feeling of joy, of impatience with the thought that this year you will be here on Christmas Eve.

Santa Claus with your white snowy beard, nothing has changed in my soul, regardless of age. You exist, I know for sure, and I want to tell you that I am waiting for you with the same enthusiasm as when I was a child. The delight already embraces me and makes me share the joy with each person around me. I realised how important it is to spend time with my family and to cherish every moment around them.

I recently noticed that what you told me in my childhood is true. Do you remember? You really made me realize that no dreams are too big and no dreamer is too small. And I am grateful to you for that.

I will share with my children everything you passed on to me in my beautiful childhood.

Oh! I almost forgot to tell you what I want this Christmas. I thought a lot about this and... Santa, you should bring me and my family blessings and happiness. That's all I ask for.

I will never forget you and I know you will not forget me either.


Best regards,
Daria





Cozmei Bianca Andreea

clasa a XI-a, Liceul Teoretic
„Dimitrie Cantemir” Iași




Winter Ball Marquise

When I was little, I didn't understand why no one in my family loved Elizabeth Marpollo. Grandmother represented for more than half of Europe a role model in everyday life: a fashion designer who brought to life the oldest traditions of the world's cultures through her clothes, from the beautiful corsets adorned with pearls and crystals from England from the nineteenth century to the gold-threaded jumpsuits of India or, my favorites, the Japanese kimonos that covered your neck to your ankles in a shade of black so pigmented that you got lost in the shadows. For the „fashion marquise” as the press called Elizabeth (because of her noble title), there was only art and color in the world.

My parents never let me visit her officially, but as a teenager I discovered that my grandmother and I shared the same passion for the spotlight on the podium and started participating in various events organized by fashion houses such as Dior, Fendi, Valentino, Burberry or Dolce & Gabbana with my own creations, unofficially Elizabeth and I shared the same places.

That's when I understood where the aversion came from: the world my grandmother lived in was capricious. The position of marquise had occupied them in their youth for so long that she neglected her children emotionally. But with me, she had been a completely different person: sweet, always on a phone call away if I needed any advice, caressing me and filling me with gifts and attention. But most of all she was my mentor. Every day, hour by hour, she taught me to be a queen of art. She taught me not only fashion, but also geogra-



phy, history, literature. She was preparing me to take her place one day. She had promised me.

I was the only one in the family who loved my grandmother, and I was the only one at her funeral. Her only regret was that she did not have the opportunity to have a family as long as she fought with the elite of society, as long as she earned her respect. When I left flowers for her at the grave, I promised that I would not repeat her mistakes. Now I am in the heart of frozen winter Paris. The Ice Ball, the celebration of all modern nobles on Christmas Eve, is about to begin. Soon I had to go down the stairs of the white marble mansion to the banquet hall with the rest of the newcomers who were presented to the company as in ancient times and sign the documents that would have officially made me Marquise and owner of the fashion house Marpollo.

The heads of the influential families had nothing to add in this regard, but their heirs hated me. They did not want an „intruder” among their status. And they had a plan: they were going to flood me in a mountain of feathers when I reached the end of the stairs. Pair it with my black swan suit, a black satin floor-length dress and feather patterns sewn with onyx stones. I had found out about their attempt by pure chance when I was walking through the mansion of emotions. Instead, I decided to prepare something for them.

„On this wonderful Christmas Eve, I have prepared a present for you!” I said loud and clear into the microphone when I reached the bottom of the stairs. Come and take it, heirs!

They were all confused, they didn't understand why I wasn't covered in a fountain of feathers, but I had escaped the trap. When they came to me, I presented them with a series of wreaths made especially by me. They quickly came to put the wonderful jewelry on their heads, but as they touched their hair, they broke into a dust that covered their clothes. At first I read anger in their eyes, but then they realized that in fact the dust shone like diamonds and complimented their outfits, turning them into spheres of light, and I knew that I had impressed them and that I had won the game. I had avenged myself as beautifully as they could with their smiles.





Gall Maria

clasa a IX-a, Colegiul Național
„Costache Negruzzi” Iași



A new beginning

“Dear Santa,

I know it's just the beginning of November, but I've been waiting a year for this moment and I can't postpone it for even one day. My mother told me that your elves start work early on so they can finish it in time, so I thought that if I sent this letter earlier, they would be able to have my gift ready. It's been three years since I started writing to you and for just as long I have had only one wish for Christmas. You're the only one who knows what I want, so I won't go into too much detail and I'll say it plainly: I would really like a sister. I hope you can bring me this gift, because it means much more than the toy boxes I have. I look forward to seeing you again!


Sincerely, Luke”

Happier than ever, Luke walked down the street with the letter in his hand to Santa's holiday village where he had the opportunity to hand it to him personally. Once there, he goes to him and offers it while winking, then goes home. The days passed and December was getting closer and closer. It was the last day of November, and Luke had just come home from school. His parents told him to go to his room where he would find a surprise. The floor was full of presents. Trying to grab a box from the floor, Luke noticed a note then read it.

“My dear Luke,

As soon as you left my holiday village, I started reading your letter. For days I worked with the elves to try to find a way to pro-





cure what you desire, but we have failed. I don't think we're ready for something so big. Children your age are far too absorbed in technology to think of such things. Some don't even believe in my existence anymore, which makes me think that I failed my mission and that I'm not good enough for this position anymore. I didn't want to ruin everyone's Christmas, so I decided to share the presents now, and then retire.

With the most sincere regrets, Santa Claus”

Luke started to cry and went out into the street. He felt it was all his fault. Not long after, the boy saw a man handing out newspapers. On the first page was the announcement for the resignation of Santa Claus. Now it was all official. A few lines below it was written that he had been invited to a show where he would explain everything live. Luke grabbed a newspaper and gathered his three best friends at his house. He nervously slammed it on the table then rhetorically and quite loudly asked them what that was.

“A newspaper.”, said Cindy.

“You're wrong! Santa Claus has announced his resignation!” cried Luke.

“Well, what can we do? The decision was announced all over the world.” announces Sarah.

“Not everything is lost yet. Tonight he'll give an interview in the building next to us.”

“What exactly do you want us to do? How do we convince him?” asks Oliver.


Luke explained the plan to everyone. A few hours later the show started and not long after, the kids suddenly entered the show. Luke moved on until he entered the frame, then went to Santa and showed him an album full of pictures from each year he came with gifts to him and his friends.

The smiles on the children's faces seemed to convince Santa, but he announced that it was too late and that nothing could make him change his mind.

As soon as the show ended, Santa took Luke in the backstage and placed his hat on his head, leaving only his nose and mouth visible.

“I haven't seen a person as involved as you for a long time, it's clear that you have something special. It's your turn to take my






place. You'll be an excellent Santa." said Santa Claus while the boy was arranging his hat.

Luke adapted very quickly to the new job. However, just like Santa was helped, the boy needed a reliable person, so a year later Olivia, his younger sister, appeared.

Enache Mariana Alexandra

clasa a XI-a, Liceul
cu Program Sportiv Iași




The last Christmas

While at night she was hurrying to cover the city earlier than usual, and the windows covered in white robes lit by colored cellar lights, Elisa watched the neighborhood with curiosity.

But today at 47 have moved to a new family. A tall, serious man, a delicate woman, but who seemed strong, and among them was a boy, a handsome teenager, a little bit withdrawn from his family. Elisa seemed interested and continued to watch them all night. Nothing out of the ordinary so far, they installed rather quickly, then they had dinner, and in the end each, and continued the evening separately, a little strange though, they seemed like strangers.

On Christmas morning, Elisa heard a scream. Immediately, she took the camera that watched them until then, to see if she found any clues. She had a feeling that everything was heard from the 47 house. When the camera stopped there she saw a woman on the floor, and her hands slid out of the window as though asking for help. Elisa, right away, frightened, called the police, but the rather long procedure irritated her and decided to intervene on her own. When she opened the door, a cold wave pushed her and stopped her. What I didn't say to you is that Elisa has a disease, called agorapho-



bia, which prevents her from leaving her home and which is manifested by panic attacks caused by fear of open, public spaces. But something has made Elisa face this moment of panic. She had almost managed to cross the alleyway, when suddenly everything turned white.

When she woke up, she was in a hospital ward surrounded by three people. She got scared and started to stir, and her assistant administered a calming. One of the three people was a policeman and tried to ask Elisa a few questions. She was still in shock and she repeated continuously, „She needs help! She needs help!”.

They let her calm down and didn't insist:

„Do you really think she did it?” Ask the doctor

„We don't think so, we're sure. Such manifestations can often be encountered when medicinal products are mixed with alcohol. We believe that Mrs Elisa's neighbour only greeted her from the window, and she imagined she would be in danger because she was discovered, so she decided to attack her.”

„I think you're telling me about a movie..”

Elisa heard it all and had a panic attack again. In such moments as this, Elisa was thinking only of her little girl building a snowman a few years ago and singing winter songs she had learned at school. Elisa always hoped her little girl would get her better, and her wish for Christmas was for her little one more time.

Even when she felt it to be the last minutes of her life, she heard her daughter's voice singing „Christmas tree!”. She opened her eyes and two tears slipped down her pale face, and as she looked at her daughter, Elisa began to sing beside her.

Two months later, Elisa lived with her daughter, Chloe, again. Elisa went on a regular course in therapy and could almost twice a week leave the house without panic attacks. Her life was changed as she expected with Chloe's help, but not only. She wanted that Christmas not to be the last.

Love has helped her to see that life is worth living. Live your life and be grateful for it!





Chifor Natalia

clasa a IX-a, Colegiul Tehnic
C.F. "Unirea", Pascani



Winter Magic opens hearts

As Rachel Cohn said, "I love snow for the same reason I love Christmas. It brings people together while time stands still" and I totally agree with his quotation.

Christmas means something else for every person on the planet. Every person perceives this beautiful holiday differently, based on their everyday life. A child can think that Christmas is all about Santa, fairies, pixies, elves and trolls, whereas a grown-up can think that it is a totally waste of money.


Anyway, I think that the most important thing on this beautiful feast is to be with the people you love. Christmas is the holiday when we should be all together and we should share our happiness with the others. Moreover, we should be kinder and help the ones in need. Right now, in this very moment of my life, this special period is all about the feelings that we share. Winter and its holidays provoke reactions that reach right back to childhood.

Of course, others might think differently, so I decided to ask my family „What does Christmas mean to you?”.

My dad told me that he thinks this holiday means a waste of money but he likes that we are all together and the fact that we see our grandparents. He is an adult so it's quite logical that he thinks about money, they all do, because this are the problems when you are a grown-up.

My sister, who is ten, told me that for her it means that she can play in the snow and she can watch Christmas movies. She is little and she is still excited about simple things. Life is more beauti-





ful when you watch it from the perspective of a child, it's a purer angle of seeing things and thus it would ease the way we deal with everyday life, which sometimes can be really tough.

My mom told me that she thinks that this celebration is the perfect moment for us to be together and just be happy and relax because we are in vacation. She loves Christmas because we are all home and we make puzzles or watch movies.

My friends told me that they love Christmas holiday because we don't go to school, we can meet outdoors and play with snow and then we go to a restaurant and have hot chocolate. They said that they see their relatives who came home for holidays, some of them see their parents who work abroad, and when all these things happen, we all feel the magic! The magic of winter!

In addition, it is the moment when people see their dreams come true, they are close to their families and joy is all around, just like in a fairytale which is set in Winter Wonderland.

We may think that every person finds a little bit of happiness on this time of the year, even if they don't feel it. The happiness is contagious, like a happy-flu I might say, everyone has the same symptoms: lots of smiles, unexplainable long-term joy and a lot of love to share.


As we get older, the way we used to feel Christmas can start to fade. We may feel too old for some childhood rituals; by reliving some traditions we used to have, Christmas magic will flood our spirit and we all will be swept up in the mystery of Winter Wonderland, where snow turns





Schipor Maria-Eliza

clasa a X-a, Liceul Teoretic de Informatică
„Grigore Moisil” Iași



Winter Wonderland


It's 9th January 2021 and the light of the sunrise passes through the frozen glass and illuminates a little part of Charlie's Blake room. It's Sunday. The last day of the winter holiday and Charlie wakes up and starts playing on his phone while listening to music. It's a normal day for him, nothing special, as his whole holiday was. He doesn't care that tomorrow is his 17th birthday or that tomorrow he will come back to school. The one thing that he wants is to spend all his day in his bedroom, without being disturbed by others. Unfortunately, like all his wishes, it doesn't happen. His mother opens the door and downs the curtains.

-Good morning, sweetie! she says, as she comes next Charlie's bed and kisses him on his forehead. How did you sleep?

-Alright...

-Great! Now, wash your face and come to eat.

His mother leaves and Charlie gets up of his bed. As he rises, his features can be seen illuminated by the morning light. The boy is not so different by others. He has a normal height and weight for a 17-year-old teenager and an ordinary face, which made him very easy to get lost in a crowd. But there's something strange about his eyes, because they don't shine like they used to. It is said that the eyes are the mirror of the soul and in Charlie's case his eyes were full of sadness and depression. Nothing made sense anymore... The food was tasteless, the nights were sleepless and he no longer felt the joy of living his life. He had many dreams that he tried to fulfill, but he was always stopped by someone who told him that he would nev-




er succeed in becoming someone important. With each attempt, Charlie began to lose his self-confidence, which made him, eventually, to give up. Thus, his life began to be monotonous, doing the same things every day. Charlie got used to the fact that he wasn't meant to have great accomplishments, but there was still a thing that he desired the most. He wanted to have someone who cares about him and understands him, someone that will stay by his side whenever he needs.

The day passes fast, without anything special happening, and the morning comes again. Charlie wakes up, changes, eats and then goes to school. He gets there at the usual hour and starts listening to music. His friends haven't arrived yet, so Charlie has nothing left to do except waiting for them. He totally forgets it's his birthday and it seems that everyone did. His friends arrive one by one, but Charlie ignores them, as the music he listens to is more interesting than the insignificant discussions his friends have. For the rest of the day he stays in his bench with his headphones in his ears, without talking to anybody or anybody talking to him, making Charlie believe he has some fake and careless friends.

After class he leaves, without saying a word and goes to the bus station. He waits there for a while, but nothing seems to come, so he decides to walk home. He thinks that this walk will help him to clean his thoughts. As he walks through the cold, distant crowd, he feels how the music he listens captures him and makes him feel relaxed. He no longer thought about his life or his need for love, as the melodious sounds and the reassuring words sent his mind to another world. A world where he could be anything he wanted, without being criticized by others. Being absorbed in that dream world, he doesn't notice that the very same bus that takes him home every day was speeding towards him. Charlie is then hit hard and the only things that he hears are some screams and voices that fade slowly.

He wakes up in his house again, but it doesn't look the same as he remembered. Then he sees a little boy sleeping nested in his bed. The door opens and Charlie's mother enters with his father, both looking much younger. Charlie realizes that the child was himself and this day was his 8th birthday. He then melancholy remembers those moments when his life was full of joy and dreams. This memory also begins to disappear and Charlie is now in a hospital





room. He is struck by an unimaginable pain in his whole body. He sees some tear-eyed people that he knows he saw before, but he doesn't know where. Suddenly, he is struck by an even stronger pain in his head and begins to hear some loud noises that are fading.

A tear runs over his face, as he dies with his family gathered around him, heading to a new land, the Wonderland.

Agape Vlad-Alexandru

clasa a X-a, Liceul Teoretic
„Lascăr Rosetti” Răducăneni




The child of Clause

There was once a world; A world like ours, but not quite so. A world where only those who fight for happiness can have it. In this world we have a town unlike any other. Here, unhappiness runs vivid. Through these streets, people roam without a purpose, spending their years looking for a purpose. To them, the world is as black and white as the snow that covers the land and the coal that burns to heat their homes. It's not all like that though, as there is an exception to this darkness; There was Emilia.

Emilia lived knowing that there was more to her existence. She knew that if she looked for it, she could find a purpose, a reason to live and to die. One night, Emilia was looking out of her window when she discovered it: A lone star, flying across the darkness of the sky looking for its own purpose. Searching for someone to make it special, and allow it to leave its mark on the world. And then it found her. Emilia spent every night looking at this lone wanderer, hoping that she would get to speak to it in the future. She knew the star was watching back, looking over her and protecting her, guiding her with its light. Every time their eyes met, her stomach would feel light,





giving her the only excitement she ever felt. Then this feeling grew into something bigger, brighter, something that would give colour to the world.

It was on Christmas morning that Emilia decided to leave the world to live with the star; but not before the star could leave its mark. A mark it shared with Emilia, a mark born from Emilia. A mark that was a child. The townspeople found the child neatly covered with Emilia's robes, not crying nor dirty. They knew from the beginning that something about this child was different, that this tiny blessing was special in one way or another. They all decided to call this child Claus, and a family from the town offered to raise him.

Claus grew up being told he was special. From the moment he was taken into his foster parents' home, he had been treated as one of their own. In their home, he always felt wanted and liked; However, he knew he was meant for something bigger. He didn't know it, but he felt the same way his late mother had years ago. From an early age, Claus had a recurring dream in which a strange man was telling him to "Help them". He never really knew what he meant, but for some strange reason he felt comfortable around the man, like he could talk to him for hours. Something about him seemed to comfort Claus. It wasn't

until Claus was an adult that the man identified himself as Claus' father, and more importantly, that he wanted Claus to change things. Claus had never realised it, but he spread joy wherever he went. His new family wasn't that nice for no reason, they have been affected by him for all the years he was with them. Claus felt intense pain hearing that his family was only being nice to him because he forced them to, but he knew how to make up for it.

YEARS LATER

The town of Centerville has been preparing for this for a long time. The children have been practising carols for hours. The smell of cinnamon fills the air. The snow is still piling up on the frozen soil. Santa is almost here; and he can't wait to give everyone the happiness they deserve.







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