

Writing about the beauty of poetry, its accessibility and endless possibilities of interpretation, Emily Dickinson wrote:

I dwell in Possibility –
A fairer House than Prose –
More numerous of Windows –
Superior...

And that is where our writing competition took off from. To dwell in the possibility of life, death, love, war, peace and everything in between. But, instead of limiting it to poetry, DS readers were also invited to challenge themselves by writing prose within 500 words. We are grateful for the multitude of submissions received and look forward to running more competitions in the future. Here are the winners of our first SLR writing competition in both categories. (Entries have been edited for formatting and grammatical purposes.) The panel of judges credited them for their originality, command of language, expression of thought and new perspectives.

Enjoy the read and Eid Mubarak!

MUNIZE MANZUR

WINNER (SHORT STORY)

Before We Ended Up As Birds

HASAN SHAHRIAR

The bus halted, spewed out a handful of people and resumed its journey. I thought of getting into this one, but just picturing myself in other people's sweat made me stop. I was in no hurry, and waiting for another bus was a better option.

In the meantime, the whole city was turning into birds. I wondered when I'd become one. Probably not anytime soon. My friend G had become one on the first day. I was there. I saw it. Felt the wind from his fluttering wings on my face. He squeaked in some alien language and joined the dreamers somewhere far from here. Far from Dhaka. Dhaka dreamed no more.

We had talked about this. Sonya and I. She was

adamant that sooner or later, people would throw away these devices that took them to an abyss deeper than any other, an abyss where there was light and one could meet up with their loved ones and lost ones.

Their marketing strategy was pretty damn good. People bought them off the racks. Those who couldn't afford it, stole. A device with which you could create your cosy little world, position the building blocks of everything wherever you wanted. One for me, please.

There was only one trouble: You could not dream anymore. No longer could you be in a place where you controlled nothing, yet remained in charge. The surrealism of playing cards inside a

matchbox with both the matchbox and you in your normal size would never be fathomable. Gadgets tidied up your dreams by binding sanity – like leaving your business card pasted upon the gift-wrap. Purple clear.

A city could take only so much. Sonya was probably right. Dhaka would recover, and those who had already flown far away as birds would come back de-transformed as humans. Genuine humans. That such a possibility existed was hope enough for me. Sonya and I would celebrate today. Who knew what was going to happen the next day? I might take off. A bus full of people swept past me. Mechanical wings appeared on its side, and while turning a corner, it took off. Even

transports were catching our disease now. Mental note: no more buses.

I started walking over to Sonya's. I was running late. She didn't mind me being late. She knew the condition out here. She was supposed to get her old record out from the storeroom. We were going to play the Beatles LPs. She had inherited some when an uncle passed away.

The guard let me into the building and I took the elevator to the third floor. I got off, and fished for the keys. Sonya had given me a set after the whole bird fiasco started happening. I didn't need it, though. The door was open.

I went inside and found a sparrow. It soared past me out the door.

1st RUNNER-UP (SHORT STORY)

Unsettling Realities

SADIA NUSRAT SIDDIQUE

You know, there was a possibility that I would've finished my story by now. And by "by now" I mean: 26th July. The deadline of this competition. At least, I am writing now, so I guess the possibility still lingers. Maybe I'll get something, anything done.

It's not like I don't have a plot in my head. I have toyed with several ideas. A dying girl in Gaza; a Bangladeshi boy who dies in a plane crash on the way to his Canadian lover; a teenage drug-addict who finds uncanny resemblances between a dealer and her deceased grandfather. Different stories focusing on the possibilities of what could be. All of them ended up pretty badly. Cancelled.

Empty-handed, I am forced to think, what is the reason for my sadness? Every plot I come up with has a sad ending. Why is that? Maybe I am messed up inside. Reality flows through my head and fills me with feelings I would rather ignore. Gaza, Syria, Ukraine. Macabre situations.

In my own country, people fight over silly football matches and die. Horribly stupid incidents. I can't choose a team. Neither in football, nor in war. They talk big about religion, politics, patriotism, the greater good; and the fact that I don't understand any of this increases my worry.

Sometimes I wonder: what if India and Pakistan declare war? What will happen to my country? How many people will die taking sides? What will happen to me if some fellow abducts me for not choosing a side that goes against humanity? Whose side will my people take, and what good will it do to me? All they seem to be doing is taking sides. Then they post and repost on social media, repeatedly. Oh, how productive!

I don't know. Anything can happen nowadays. There are so many possibilities. The inundating realities or its modified versions make me realize one simple truth: I don't matter. Neither do the people. Everything is one big plot of something that we'll probably never get to know. Maybe we'll keep doing what we do best – taking sides, loving without reason, fighting over stupid reasons, dying like cockroaches. Meaningful life, meaningless death. Can anyone fault my stories for having sad endings? Life is like that!

If I don't matter, then what I write doesn't matter either. Then whether I win this competition or not is irrelevant to my existence, which in itself is meaningless. If I don't matter, what does? I'll stop writing and go watch "Hirok Rajar Deshey" again. Get my fill of it. While I exist. Because, as you and I both know, anything can happen nowadays.

2nd RUNNER-UP (SHORT STORY)

Dream The Impossible

TAMIM MOSTAFA

A little drizzle, then it was windy again. Another gloomy night of the mushy monsoon. The night was still young. The sky was cloudy. I sat, atop the roof. The momentary drizzle had pushed me inside for a while, but I came back out as soon as it stopped.

It was very dark as it was yet another blackout-hour, a regular phenomenon for the dwellers of Dhaka City. I walked around. With my earphones firmly plugged in, I tuned in to the twelve strings magic of John Butler and some beautifully compiled pieces of 'The Corrs'. My curious eyes followed the movement of the hustling clouds. As meddling as ever, they were playing with my romance of the full moon, occupying the route between my eyes and her. I stood in sweet melancholy, which the clouds resembled so perfectly. As if the glowing moon represented what I could be, and the dark gloomy clouds stood for my present self. I wondered if I could erase all those clouds at will and redeem the luminescent moon!

I started praying fervently for the clouds to move away and let the moon shine again. But there was no sign of that happening. The clouds were too many in number, too heavy. They

moved across the moon, following the direction of the breeze. Resolutely, I kept on wishing the seemingly endless clump of clouds would move away. My mind fixated with unyielding determination as I stared at them.

I started to believe that they would move away, those clouds. They'd have to go away right then, right at the moment I wanted them to! Moments passed by...seconds, minutes, maybe even hours...who knew? Who cared?! I didn't bother counting them. I kept on staring at the stubborn clouds.

I persisted and I don't know after how long, the moment finally came. The clouds started to spill away, making way for the majestic moon. Slowly they moved away and the heavenly full moon came out. It felt like something out of this world, something which couldn't be expressed in words. I felt like the Almighty had blessed me with a glimpse of His Grace. At that moment I understood the meaning of being alive. I felt like I could sweep away all the dark clouds from my life! I understood that although you can't really stop the clouds from covering you up, you've got the power to sweep them away just as well. All you need to do is to believe it.

WINNER (POETRY)

CHANCE

Hedin Kader

What if?
I dive, I die
I survive.
What if?

The next in line
Is all one gets.
Tragedy of all -
A trip to the mall.

What if,
There's love?
What if,

There's laser shooting doves?

The ifs, the chances
All one desires.

Myths live

In children and blooming flowers.

What if

Words remain silent?

What if

Silence breaks with a glance?

Imagine there's you and I

And all that you want.

I am the slave I was

And you the price.

What if

Roses fade and spikes bloom?

What if

Your kiss is my doom?

Dolphins, kittens,

And flying unicorns.

Shiny wrappers,

And valleys of naked bosoms.

To hide in firm blossoms,

To reside in those petals

And be sung to

In your recitals.

Flown in ashes

So shall it be.

Free of chances?

Not meant to be...

1st RUNNER-UP (POETRY)

POSSIBILITY POSSIBILITY

Tausif

He believed in the tiniest possibility,
To her it was impossible,
His grip was so tight,
For her it was intolerable.

She requested, she consoled, she shouted,
Said 'they' would never agree,
He urged, he pleaded, he begged,
Said there was always a possibility.

She was the practical one,
She was the realist,
He dreamt in daylight,
He was the idealist.

She decided their time had come,
For him it was unbearable,
She was mentally ready,
His pain was insufferable.

Time went on with fake smiles and cold hearts,
But true love is everlasting; never loses durability,
He knew she had stopped believing,
But for him there was always a possibility.

2nd RUNNER-UP (POETRY)

Abu Tarek Md Tahsin

Possibility starts with you and me,
Possibility means us.
Possibility is the light in your eyes
That shines through my heart.

Possibility is all those that
We have overcome,
And all those that we will,
Possibility is you and me
Living as Us.

