



BROMSGROVE SCHOOL

CREATIVE WRITING ANTHOLOGY
2021



***When I was one-and-twenty
I heard a wise man say,
“Give crowns and pounds and guineas
But not your heart away;
Give pearls away and rubies
But keep your fancy free.”
But I was one-and-twenty,
No use to talk to me.***

A. E. Housman A Shropshire Lad, XIII

The theme for this year’s Housman Verse competition was one that he frequently and wistfully returned to in his poetry - youth.

The entries in this collection contain many brave, personal and skilfully-wrought meditations on this theme; some have captured impressions which will instantly resonate with all of us, however far from youth we now feel! Some are very clearly chronicles of the current moment and its (hopefully) brief but memorable re-shaping of what youth means to many of our students.

The first piece, *reminder*, by Liza Vasilyeva, was chosen as the winner of the 2021 Housman Verse Prize. We are also indebted to Liza for providing the beautiful illustrations which adorn the collection.

My thanks also to another talented contributor, Lucia Goodwin, whose prose features in the second section of the anthology and who kindly edited the collection.

*Mr Paul Dinnen
Head of English*

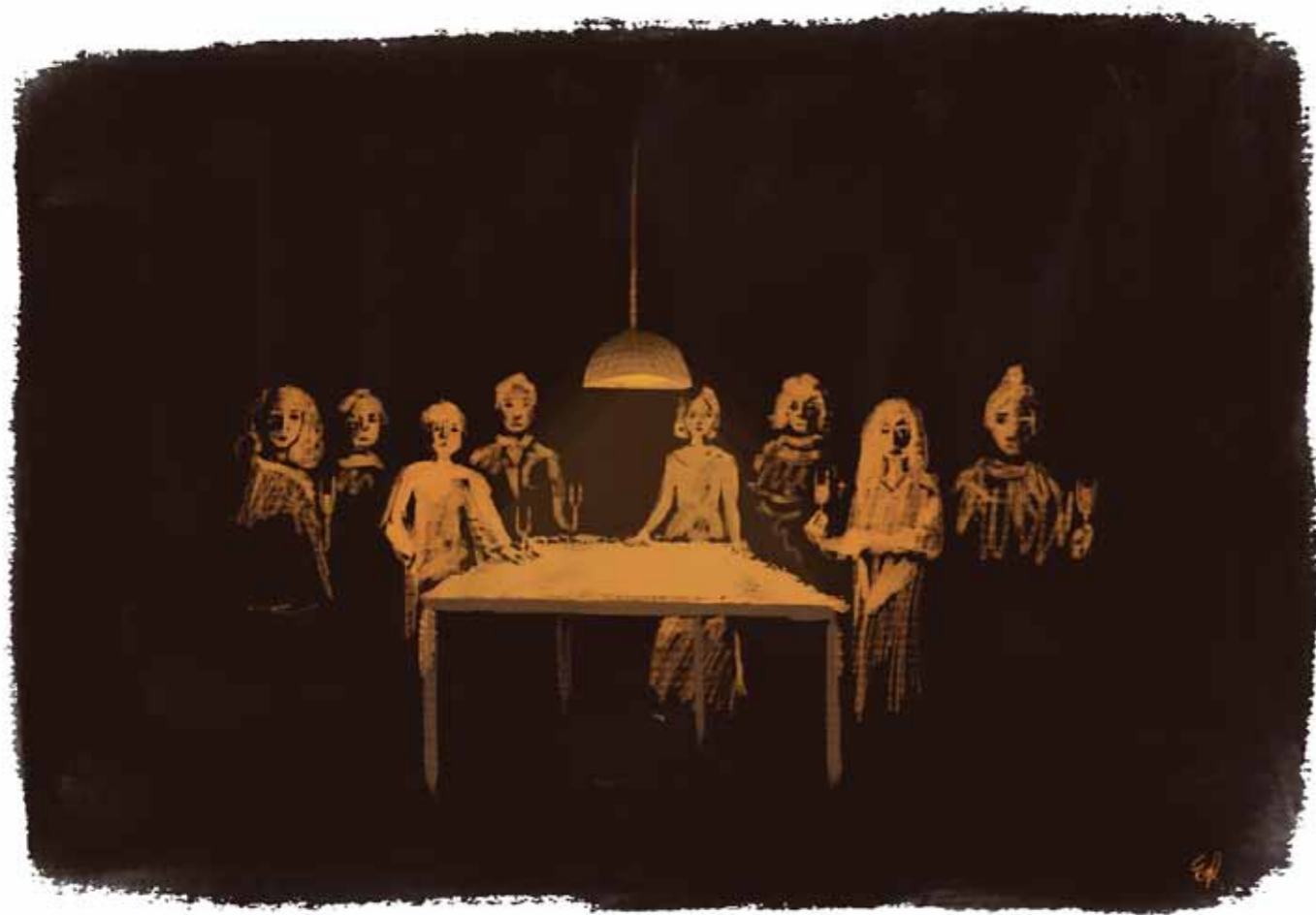
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reminder

I turn 18 on a crisp October evening
stand shivering beneath the spilt glitter of stars
facing the world and its whispering

I'm suddenly very old
bowed beneath the glare of my own harsh lens
the singeing heat of expectations

in this moment
my future must lie before me
paved by recited mantra,
money success happiness

true adults
sternly warn me
of the diminishing entropy
that the slithering of age brings

I am a child amongst them
eight years old again
standing on the fringes of a dim dining room
as alien conversation bubbles in glass flutes

where they remind me of how young I am
I am their opposite
reflecting their tired pessimism
in wide-eyed innocence

in that innocence
wells the childish hatred of change
that watches youth
seep between my fingers

people drift back and forth
until they are gone entirely
melting into memories
and the silent laughter of pictures

I might see them again
might cross the street and onto their path
reminisce and laugh
yet we will both sit
smiles softly fading
and think on what we no longer have

No Such Type

There isn't such a thing,
As eternal youth.
You can look youthful,
Whilst having lost your youth.
You can look youthful,
Never having had your youth.
Youth can be corrupted,
Youth can be suffocated,
It can live out its course,
Uninterrupted
There is every type of Youth
And no such type at all
Live it while you have it,
As you can never have it all.

Nell S, LVI



The Child No Longer Lives

Joyous days, where everything entertains a curious spirit,
Can no longer satisfy a child past their prime point.
For, we endure a state of solipsism in which sonder moments are rare
And no prior days could have anticipated the plummet of our blissful simplicity.

Fooled to have heightened expectations of an affectionate atmosphere,
We recognise the opaque coating concealing the genuine beauty of this world.
No acts of restitution will reinstate our oblivious nature,
As this fever of uncertainty has surpassed our bygone glorious days.

Ruptures of trauma and deceit penetrate the virginity of the soul,
Until, a cavalier character is left with their happiness pending.
Minds become insentient during the transition from euphoria to disorientation,
Leaving plethoras of breathing anomalies who radiate numbness.

Misinterpretations, falsehoods and fabrications cloud the truth of human nature.
We are felled by the disintegration of the wedlock of childhood and innocence.
Nonchalant wandering, buoyant auras and unlimited imagination
Can no longer live when the veil of naivety falls.

Ruvimbo M, LIV





The Dragon

The raging dragon tore through the world
Engulfing its path in a current of wrath.
It left behind bare skeleton curls,
That stood silent, motionless, and rinsed in ash.

As the wind whistled wildly through the cracks,
They wavered in motion from side to side.
Each now insipid and stunned in their tracks,
Who looked upon the night with mortified eyes.

A trail of soulless grey rose gently from behind,
Concealing the slaughter with an enshrouding mist
That burnt with a deep fiery passion to blind
Whoever may come across its pugnacious hiss.

The dragon now leaped with ardent flames,
Howling in fury against its vulnerable prey.
Its body and scales danced wildly untamed,
Scorching all life in its colourful display.

Shrieks of children ripped through with horror,
As the dragon now neared their childhood escapes.
They looked upon in utter sheer terror
As their dreams reduced to nothing but decays.

The charming memories of summer days
Spent clamouring and adventuring in their wooden refuge
Now collapsed in a heat of ignited gray,
Reduced to nothing but fantasized youth.

The dragon now lay tranquil and calm,
Diminishing in temper as all life is crossed.
It drew itself away from urges to harm,
As nothing but ruins and ravage remained across.

Bowen C, UIV

Growing up

When I am older and wiser,
Will I change the world I live in.
Or watch it carry on around me,
Unable to raise my voice.

Like a martlet soaring the skies,
Can't touch the earth.
silenced by those,
Who think they are in control.

Entangled in a web of lies,
False promises from those around me.
Telling me I can do it ,
Smiling with teeth gritted.

I am still young, fearless and free,
Time is on my side.
Will I be victorious in my adulthood,
The head on collision with uncertainty.

Ice melts, fires burn,
Backs are turned to danger.
Terra mater is weary with age,
The waters of life have run dry.

With youth comes the blanket of ignorance,
A shield from pain, fear, madness.
As I leave my childhood behind,
Will I be thrust out from under the covers.



Children are protected,
Fragile minds, gentle hands.
Hidden by secrets and love,
Till adulthood comes searching.

Striding deep into the unknown,
I turn to face the future.
My infancy behind me,
hopes, dreams, aspirations in my grasp.

The journey, a mountainous task,
Hands flail, legs falter.
I stumble and fall at the finish,
Will I ever get there.

Memories of childhood adventures,
Filling my head and my heart.
Wishing I could grow down .
Go back to the safety of youth.



Modern Youth

The days feel the same,
we're wasting away.
But how can I complain,
as thousands die today?

A yearning for normalcy,
which fades into fear.
A desire to be free,
as it's been a whole year.

Physically stronger,
but mentally weaker.
We're young no longer,
as the days get bleaker.

Forced to face our fears,
remaining compliant.
As we lose our youthful years,
we're framed as defiant.

But here's the truth,
we're increasingly fragile.
A struggling youth,
in a perpetual exile.

Our youth stolen from us,
deprived of true life.
Silent as others are worse,
battling internal strife.

Sixteen.
Seventeen.
Tomorrow I'll be eighteen.

Farewell to childhood,
forced to grow up.
Our youth gone for good.
Please make it stop.

Dasha B, UVI

Red

I placed the knife in his hand
As tender tears trickled down my cheeks
He dug deep into my heart
But this is not yet the best part.
My blood blemished the beauty that was him
And stained his perfect porcelain skin
But this made me happy
Because red was his favourite colour
And I was in love with him madly.

I sank the blade softly,
sinking into her heart
Blood slipped like velvet snakes
Down her somber smooth parts.
She smiled with agony
Tears melted with blood
Her limbs went limp
Her eyes began to shine
Red was not her favourite colour
But it was mine.

Libby W, V



Youth Poem

Going through the stages of life can be pretty challenging
However, remember your Youth will come and go
your stress, routine and school life may fade
but your freedom amounts will also change
being a minority can be rather annoying
but being an adult is worse
this is because taking care of a minority is an actual curse
you don't know what's around the corner
So, savour these stages of life
as they only ever come once in your life
youth will shape who you are from child to teen
the pressure of exams may get to you
Nevertheless, it's part of your youth too
sitting in an office may sound luxurious
but in reality, you want to be playing in a park
So, make the most of this underestimated experience
as it will rapidly come to an end!

Arwa P, LIV



Smiling

Youth, like poetry
Can be short and yet still sweet
Enjoy it smiling.

Nik G, UVI



Summer 2006

We stare at each other: me and her
albeit through a photograph:
distanced by the changes that 15 summers have brought.

Jealous am I
of those round brown eyes
widened with the naïve innocence of youth,
glistening, gleaming with unfettered joy.

Confused is she
by the longing hidden behind my eyes,
the longing for a much simpler time:
for the distinct scent of play-doh and
that forgotten feeling of frolicking

-freely-
through meadows; green grass between my toes,
wholeheartedly absorbed by the splendour of:

Summer 2006.

That sweetly smiling girl in that so distant picture
used colourful crayons

-bubblegum pink and boysenberry purple-
to create new worlds; new friends.

Would she be disheartened by the pen,
the one black

-plain black-

pen that has replaced the vibrant shades of my childhood?
The pen which writes essays: long essays and even longer essays
commenting on the dystopian world that
that sweetly smiling girl in that so distant picture
could not have foreseen.

The pen which did not exist in summer 2006.

But at what point did it change? Surely it was after 2009
when my eyes stopped looking like hers and started looking like mine?
At what age did I stop wanting to be older and start wanting to be younger?

At what age did I start wearing worry and fear as opposed to
frilly yellow dresses?

At what age did the façade of happiness replace the raw delight I see
in her smile,

the way the desire to be a politician
clouded the dream of being a princess?

FURTHER SELECTED WRITING

But, maybe
-just maybe-
like there are still glowing red cheeks submerged
under the false pretence of a flawless, foundation-blurred, complexion:
maybe I shouldn't look at that girl as a stranger.
For, maybe
-just maybe-
she too exists
simply submerged under layers of societal oppression.

Perhaps it's time for 15 more years of change.
Not the change that might leave future me
emptily, confusedly, despairingly
staring at photographs taken now;
but the change that rekindles the child-like love and the fiery passions
that 'grown-ups' are not allowed to exhibit:
the emotions that only children are allowed to display;
the feelings I want once more, that I did once feel
-all that time ago-
in summer 2006.

Jessica R, UVI

When Lockdown Ends

One way or another...

The Talisman

Captain's Log

Quiet

Speak the Language

When Lockdown Ends

When lockdown ends on my street:

1. David steps outside and feels the air on his unshaven face, the whispering trees, the evaporating rain. Suddenly, however, he feels overwhelming sense of lightness. He notices his arms rising above his head. His feet peel from the pavement. Too late, he realises he has forgotten how to remain earthbound without a roof over his head. Slipping through the grips of humankind, he drifts away, vanishing, vanishing.
2. To Susan, the streets seem eerily quiet. Picket fences hang ajar. SUVs snuggle amongst the dust in double garages. Sprinklers spout their whirring jets on unenjoyed grasses. The scene lies sleeping, quiet. Susan tentatively peers into the apartments, houses, bungalows. Here are the people – cooking dinner, watching TV, doing yoga. She knocks, smiles, waves. They turn, blink, nod, and return to their business. Susan walks once down the street, turns, sighs, and, bored, returns to the house.
3. Andy, overcome with excitement, rushes into the road, and instantly run over by a car. A trailing dressing gown belt lies plastered to the asphalt. Mrs Abernathy, who had been watching through a gap in the curtains, touches her fingers to her forehead, breast, left, then right shoulder, before firmly shutting the blinds and returning to her knitting. She was right all along - it was not yet safe to venture out.
4. Jason opens the door and immediately knows, beyond a shadow of a doubt, that he is living in his own version of The Truman Show. This perfection, however, is betrayed by one small detail: there are too many rabbits.
5. Margot, who has become accustomed to her new routine, decides that she just won't.
6. The instant her parents fall asleep, Anna clammers down the trellis, and sprints into the lane, her gauzy nightdress glowing like some ethereal orb. They collide in a forceful, passionate, desperate embrace. Mrs Cleverly, who waters her plants to deal with the insomnia, simply shrugs. It isn't anything this hasn't seen before. Perhaps it is that latter thought, and not the act itself, she wonders, that makes her smile as she falls asleep.
7. Maria, admittedly, feels anxious. She decides to assess the situation before making a judgement on the situation. First, she writes all the things that have changed and all the things that have not. It takes years. She draws graphs. The study becomes her life's work. Once finished, she feels comforted in the knowledge that she was right all along.
8. You open the door early in the morning. It is the day after the summer solstice, and the watery sunlight splashes onto the front porch. At first, everything seems quiet. You hesitate. Then, you hear a faint, cheerful humming, punctuated by a short clip. Your next-door neighbour is pruning her roses. Across the way, the divorced mom across the street is rushing her seven-year-old out the door with a PB-and-J. You are surprised, but, after a moment's reflection, concludes that perhaps it is not really that surprising, and rush to help the divorced mum carry a package to the door.



One way or another...

The lights flicker. The faint glow of the filament bulb illuminates the cold, bare, concrete box I inhabit. A box designed in every way to keep me in, to keep me from escaping. But I will leave. One way or another. In the corner of the box, there is a metal bowl with a hole in it – a toilet apparently but personally I don't see the resemblance. High up on the opposite wall, almost at ceiling height, there is a clock, whose ticks and bounces force time forwards, giving some sense of structure to my otherwise empty days. Along the same wall is a slab of cold steel with a small rectangular hatch in the centre of it. This is for food and water. Twice a day, at 08:00 and 18:00 precisely, the hatch screeches open, followed by a piercing black eye and then finally some sort of nourishment. Every day without fail. Every day for three years.

I lie on my bed every night looking above me, examining the blankness of my surroundings. Like every other night fantasizing, planning, meticulously plotting my escape. I will leave. I must. One way or another.

PLAN A

I check the clock, 17:59 exactly. I reach up to the bulb. I yank it down and smash it on the floor. I pick up the largest piece and put it to my wrist. I wait. I wait for the unmistakable screech of the hatch and the glint of the piercing, black eye. All I am looking for is that second. That second where the guard, stunned by the horror of the thought of what he thinks I am about to do to myself, in contradiction to his instruction, heroically opens the door in an attempt to save my life. In that act of courage, the poor man has indeed saved me, but not in the way in which he intended. In one motion, I stand up and rush, plunging the shard of the bulb deep into his carotid artery. I grab the door, making sure it doesn't close as the guard falls to the floor, the blood pulsating from the wound in his neck with every heartbeat. I swing the door open. The effort is exhausting on my malnourished body as I see light at the end of the corridor. The first light I have seen in three years. The first natural light, I should say. I run. I run towards the door at the end of this long corridor. To the light. To the window I so desperately long for in my dreams. I escape.

PLAN B

I check the clock, 17:59 exactly. I reach up to the bulb. I yank it down and smash it on the floor. I pick up the largest piece and put it to my wrist. I cut. I wait. The blood pulsating out of me with every heartbeat. I close my eyes and wait. I escape.

I will leave this place. One way or the other.

Fred H, Vth

The Talisman

When the television has droned on too long, and all the downstairs lights have been switched off but one, sometimes my aunt will begin to talk about her growing up. It is not in a preaching way, like how parents wag their fingers and lift their voices and tell you how much hardship they endured "in their day". Rather, her words feel pulled from a dark, reflective well. I think she feels that, when our daily fumbblings have quietened and my uncle has gone to sleep, it is finally someone else's turn to listen.

She sometimes speaks of playing Mangala in the kampong. I can always tell when she is about to do this, as her forefingers reach unconsciously towards the pad of her thumbs, motioning as if dropping the pebbles into snug homes in the dirt. She smiles as she recalls the hugging warmth and the mingling smells of ocean and fried shrimp.

In the periphery of the scene, her sister – my mother - squats barefoot over a cracked trench latrine, trying not to breathe. She watches with curiosity as they sprout; the glistening bodies of cockroaches, like obscene sucked sweets. I can see them now, writhing in the corner of my aunt's darkened eyes. But then she simply jerks her head, and I can almost see the little girl turning away, returning to warmth and the fried shrimp and fingers, drop, drop, dropping each shining pebble, hoping their homes of dirt do not get burned.

Other times she speaks of the coconut trees. She would climb and he would break them open. They would sit, together, on the white sand and fill themselves with sweet flesh and walk back with cracked soles and bleeding fingers and full bellies.

She tells these and other stories with a near-constant nasal hum so common of Cantonese. When she came here, and chatted with mothers of my friends she would, periodically, stick mid-note: a stuck vinyl that, no matter her efforts, could never run smooth. I realise now that it was probably for this reason that the teachers said a maid had come to pick me up from school one day. I think, at the time, I just thought they were just stupid.

It is these stories that I think of now as I wait at the side of the stage. Polished and primped – heels, dress, rose to the right, scarf covering my English shoulders – I can feel it pulsing between my thumb and forefinger. When I was born, she took the talisman to the temple to have it blessed. It looks like nothing much, really. A small, glass oval, framed in a metal edge, with a small gold-painted piece of clay, I think, inside. It even has a little clip for safekeeping – my aunt is nothing if not practical – and one would not be wrong to mistake it for a slightly eclectic keyring, picked up in a quaint souvenir shop.

Yet, as my name is called, I can feel the weight that it holds. The weight that followed me into my exams, interviews, my year three dance recital. The weight of incensed mist; of tree-tied pleas; of whispered hopes of a girl under muggy air, dropping stones into hollowed homes. I am borne by it, up the stairs, along the stage, out of the marquee, out of the grounds, away, away, the beautiful "nnng" filling the shocked emptiness in my head. And if I break it, if I squeeze too hard, out of fear or excitement or confusion or hopelessness or naiveté, if it cracks now - will I fall?

Lucia G, UVI

Captain's Log

Day 2178 since I woke up from hibernation:

We are commencing our journey back home from Kepler 452b. Though the planet had exhibited no signs of life, we discovered one object of interest during our investigation. It is a moist, pod-like object, with a slightly stagnant smell to it. Currently, 'Endeavour' is in optimal conditions for her journey home, although several crewmates have reported a strange smell coming from the vents onboard. I will send Commander Smith to investigate.

Day 2179:

Already I am counting down the days until I finally get back to Earth, finally back to my friends and finally back to my Rosie. The last time I saw her was around seven Earth years ago, I think (days were so strange here on Kepler 452b). Only days to go till I see her again. All is in an ideal state aboard 'Endeavour', but Commander Smith is complaining of a headache; this sometimes occurs after coming out of hibernation and he will be taking bed rest.

Day 2180:

Grave news. Commanders Milton and Samwell have been discovered deceased in the lower engine and upper engine, respectively. They were both discovered with multiple knife wounds in their torsos, and it has been confirmed that they died of blood loss. They were both brave, curious, and kind people, whose presence among the crew will be sorely missed. No one except the crew is onboard the ship. No one. Unless whatever was in that pod that we picked up survived. The pod was hollow on the inside when we opened it, and it was filled with a reeking, rancid and apparently radioactive liquid. The head scientist said that this liquid closely resembles amniotic fluid, which is strange. They have a theory that something could have been inside the pod, but we found it empty.

Day 2181:

Over the space of the last 24 hours there has been a tragic total of three more deaths aboard 'Endeavour'. Each body was found in a different area of the ship, and there is no trace of any suspicious activity or clues found on any of the security cameras. I refuse to believe that one of my crew members is behind these deaths, but there is no other way that they could have happened; all of the dead crew members were in perfect health.

And that's not all.

The head scientist has determined what type of pod we picked up on Kepler 62f. After scanning through thousands of classified files, they concluded that the pod belonged to a rare and dangerous type of parasite.

The 'Imposter' parasite is a malevolent organism that lives in its host's brain. It gains control of the brain in a symbiotic way. What it does with the host while it is under its control is much more horrifying. The 'Imposter' parasite turns the host into a cold-blooded killer. A killer that enjoys the killing. If there is an 'Imposter' parasite on the ship, we need to find it.

Fast.

Day 2182:

I was woken by a strange sound coming from the air vent. Terrified, I shone my torch into the shadows before recoiling in fright. Commander Smith was crawling through the vent covered in blood. Hands trembling, I reached up and triggered the alarm to call an emergency meeting.

No one came except for Commander Smith. He was clean now and he put up a flawless façade of confusion, appearing as if he had just been woken up by the screeching of the alarm. I used the excuse that I had accidentally set off the alarm and he walked away, almost robotically, dismissing me and accepting my excuse.

And that's when I found them. Or what was left of them. By 'them' I mean my crewmates, my team, my family in space. They were piled up on top of each other like toys a child has grown bored of next to a vent on the navigation deck. I gulped. Something was crawling out of the vent next to the bodies. Once his legs were free of the vent, Commander Smith straightened out and looked at me, smiling. I looked deep into the laughing eyes of what was once my crewmate, but was now a corrupted monster.

Extract from 'The Sun' 12th October 3018:

NASA has reported loss of contact with investigative spaceship 'Endeavour' after receiving an alert that the ship had collided with an asteroid. No name for the asteroid has been given by NASA but scientists think it is likely to be the 433 Eros asteroid. There were no survivors.

KApTinS LOg

dAy 1 AfTEr THEY tRiED tO kiLL US.

Lily R, UIV

Quiet

the house empties out again
the sieve's holes yawn

but it's different this time
the panic that thickened our blood
and raged the corridors
has been thankfully substituted
by a muted but contented defeat

we have accepted
we have conceded
we head out into the night
never to return to this life again

Liza V, UVI

Speak the Language

noises floated through the room
everyone responded
so i followed
seems like i understand too

сидеть тихо, теперь встать
сейчас немного подождать
писать не получается
так что нарисую картинку
может им понравится

sit quietly, now stand up
now wait a little bit
I can't really write
so I'll draw a picture
maybe they'll like it

speaking the language of actions
улыбка значит да
the noises didn't make sense, but
учитель в кресле значит стори тайм

a smile means yes
teacher in the chair means
story time

Polina O, Vth



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