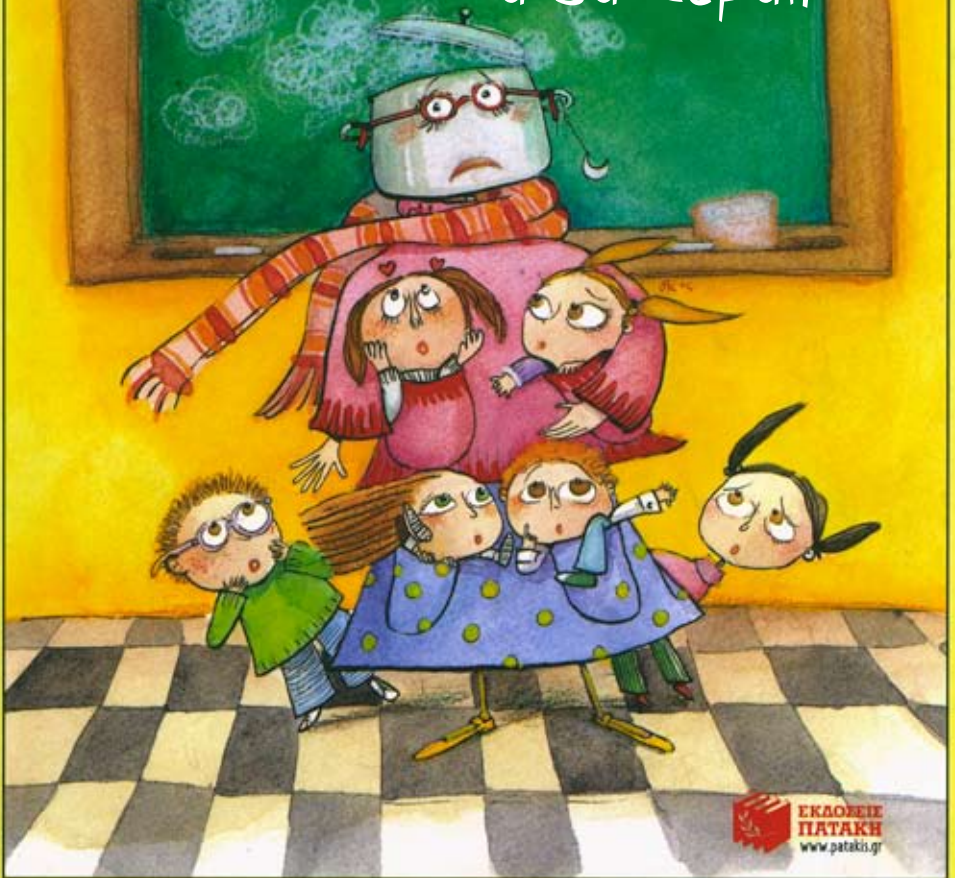




contemporary literature
for children and youth

Sophia Madouvalou

The Teacher
Whose Head Became
a Saucepan



THE TEACHER WHOSE HEAD BECAME A SAUCEPAN

The surreal story *The Teacher Whose Head Became a Saucepan* takes its title from a Greek expression meaning to reach a state of dizziness and exhaustion, with a throbbing head and inability to think clearly, eventually reaching a point where one is ready to explode. It is a metaphor often heard on the lips of teachers.

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*Off go the pupils, running in a crowd.
Who knows where?
Schoolbags bouncing on their backs
And everything inside them
-Pencils and notepads, books and paintings-
Falling in the street and getting lost.
The smell of fried potatoes, a child's smell,
Wafts among the camomile daisies
Till they reach the edge of town,
There where the sea and sky join up.
For one lonely moment
Sea and sky exchange a kiss.
Then one and one make blue.
And now, for the first time,
The pupils love all that they have seen
and passed more strongly.
They love everything,
And most of all their teacher.*

The Teacher
or
The Baggy Jumper

Mrs Vasso Halali isn't the only teacher who's ever felt her head was going to burst. She is, however, the tallest teacher whose head has suffered that fate.

Mrs Vasso is not only tall, she's also very thin -so thin that all the naughty children in her class could fit inside her baggy jumper.

Mrs Vasso Halali is beautiful, as well. Constellations of tiny stars twinkle in her eyes, ash-blond hair frames her face like untidy rays of sunlight and it is hard to say which are the pinker -her glasses or her happy face. Mrs Vasso has a half-moon smile upon her lips and the moon's other half is a jewel that dangles from one ear.

With the sun in her hair, the moon on her face, stars in her eyes and her head filled with ideas, she comes into the class with a smiling 'good morning' that embraces all her pupils.

The magic bag she always carries on her shoulder is crammed with all the surprises that await them. For Mrs Vasso Halali's mind is never idle. Ideas come and go at lightning speed. New ones arrive, old ones leave, while a few get stuck there fast and never know a moment's peace.

When an idea lodges in Mrs Vasso's head things become far from easy for this formidable teacher. This is what happened when the idea came to her that her pupils simply had to become the happiest most bubbly most creative and most responsible pupils in the school.

One half of this idea popped out of a soap bubble after lunch one day, while Mrs Vasso was doing the washing up. That's how most ideas come -when you least expect them. The other half was born at a conference while a Chinese teacher was saying that children are like open question marks when they first come to school and nothing more than full stops by the time they leave.

"A catastrophe!" Mrs Vasso thought out loud, and everybody turned to stare at her.

"A catastrophe! My children will be question marks when they first come to school, question marks they will remain and when they leave they will still be question marks!" she promised herself silently.

Her creative mind began to conjure up happy question marks, naughty question marks, brilliant question marks and question marks with colours, humour and imagination. That's the sort of children Mrs Vasso wanted her pupils to be -children with a clever heart and open mind.

There's never been another teacher in the history of education so loved by her pupils as Mrs Vasso Halali.

When she laughed, joy rippled out from her in waves that broke upon the children. And since joy cannot be hidden, in return her pupils showed their love in a thousand ways. They drew pictures of her on the blackboard, they wrote her tender little notes which they handed to her when the lesson ended, or they pulled at her skirt in the break to tell her breathlessly, "Oh, Miss, I love you so much, so very, very much. Even more than much!"

But just how much they loved her the pupils did not need words to demonstrate. It was enough to see how joyfully they went to school each morning and how their faces shone when they gazed into their teacher's eyes.

Mrs Halali would come skipping into class just like a little child, bringing joy and fresh surprises every day. She would straighten her red glasses on her nose, cast a careful look around to make sure no little face was hiding some unhappiness and only then would she open her bag, which her cat had scratched a thousand times. Her eyes would scan the room, looking for joy or sadness, while her fingers fumbled in her bag to find the programme for the day.

There are some people who seem to have been born to do the work they do. Mrs Vasso is one of them. Nature gave her the gift of understanding the language and the soul of children and she dedicated her life to playing her part in shaping them.

Those who have known her since she was a child remember that she wanted to become a teacher even when she was still playing with her dolls. A little teddy bear, a wooden horse, two lead soldiers, a rubber dog, one big doll, two small ones and her little brother were her first pupils. She taught them the songs she heard on the radio in 'Aunty Lena's Children's Hour', she read them fairy tales and ticked them off when they didn't do their drawings properly, exactly like her mother used to scold her.

If you're ever lucky enough to have Mrs Vasso Halali come into your class you will recognize her immediately. For Mrs Vasso carries within her a secret, one of those secrets that try as one might one can never conceal. How can one hide a great big child that loves life, still dreams and gets up to naughty tricks just like a little girl!

If your new teacher spins round the moment she comes into class and asks you how you like her new shoes, then it's probably Mrs Vasso standing there before you. If one her shoes has little red hearts embroidered on it and the other

bright yellow question marks, then you can be absolutely sure it's Mrs Vasso standing there before you: the sensitive, tender, impulsive and enthusiastic teacher whose poor head once became a saucepan.

The Pupils
or
The Fragrant Socks

...

The First Day
or
The Stupidity Detector

She wasn't crying with unhappiness or even over spilt milk. Mrs Vasso Halali was crying for sheer joy. During the summer her soul withers without her dear little devils, but when September comes she celebrates. Her 'happy pills' -that's what she calls her pupils- are returning to their desks, their holiday dreams still in their eyes, breathlessly sharing the adventures and little scandals of their summer, turning the class to turmoil with the hubbub of their voices, and already planning new escapes. Mrs Vasso greets them warmly.

"I've missed the awful racket you make, you little horrors," she says, summoning up her broadest smile.

"Twenty-six rackets times three months, that makes ... two thousand, three hundred and forty rackets," came Yannis Einstein, Zweistein, Dreistein's lightning calculation.

"I'm ready for twice as many 'smackers' shouted Chastized Chewing Gum, who would win hands down in any competition for blowing silent bubbles.

And now the whole class echoed with cries of “Smackers! Smackers!”

The smacker was an invention patented by Mrs Vasso, who loved original punishments, and it was not only her own favourite way of dealing with naughtiness but the pupils’ favourite as well.

When some little devil had overstepped the mark Mrs Vasso could easily lose her temper. Sometimes she would get so angry that she’d love to beat the living daylights out of him, pull his ear off by the roots, pull all his hair out tuft by tuft and kick him out of the window like a football. But like every good teacher, Mrs Vasso Halali did none of all these things. She would count to ten to let her rage subside, then, calling on all her humour and imagination, she would storm up to the little monster and just when he was expecting to see stars she’d give him a great big tender kiss, a ‘smacker’, to teach the little rogue a lesson.

“Today there won’t be any smackers. I haven’t had time to get angry with you yet. Today it’s sweets,” said Mrs Vasso, waving a little bag tied with a red ribbon.

Whirligig, who never missed a chance to leave her desk (she’d have taken it with her everywhere she went if she could), shared the sweets out to the class, one each, and kept two for herself.

“One for me and one for my trouble,” she smiled, looking as if she had every right to treat herself.

Once the rush hour to put the wrappers in the waste bin had subsided, the boys had celebrated ten successful distance shots and twenty-six tongues had made sour-sweet friendships with the candy, came Mrs Vasso’s question: “Tell me, what do you feel when you’ve got a sweet inside your mouth?”

The Loving Laces, Costas and Eleni, agreed with one voice that what they felt was pleasure.

Sleepy-eyes and Hiccup talked about a sweet taste.

“It makes my tongue happy,” said Miss-Miss, “and from what I know...”

“I can’t tell what I feel unless I eat another sweet,” interrupted Sticky Tape, putting on an innocent air.

“Nor can I! Nor can I!” the whole class cried in unison.

“Do you want to learn a secret, a really big secret?” Mrs Halali asked.

“Yeeeeeeeees!” The children’s voices went through the ceiling like a road drill.

“Learning is like a sweet. It’s nice to feel it in your mouth, it leaves a pleasant taste behind and after that you want more and more.”

“Maybe, but I still prefer sweets to lessons,” piped up Silly Soprano, and he immediately burst out laughing.

“Flies are what I prefer,” said Catch Flies in the

Air, taking a tin from his pocket, "Come and see my Stupidity Detector."

Little by little interest moved from sweets to Catch Flies in the Air, the cleverest idler in the class, and a little group formed round him.

None of the other loot the children had brought into class from their summer holidays had half the appeal of the contents of the tin: a string smeared with honey and nasty little black prisoners stuck to it. Not even the bottle trap or the giant egg from Australia or the little sea horse in a glass jar aroused the interest and attention of the pupils as much as the flies glued to the string by honey.

Catch Flies in the Air had captured everyone's attention.

The girls' admiration expressed itself in sighs (only Toothpick stayed faithful to her fat friend Sausage). The boys were green with envy. They had seen so many fly papers in the holidays, all thick with flies, but had they ever thought to call them Stupidity Detectors? No!

Lightning, who owed her nickname to the clever ideas she came up with in a flash, proposed that they should start a fly farm for the study of stupidity when faced by honey.

"I thay we thould import thome Thpanith flieth for the experiment," mewed Miaou.

"Silly mice are all you can say anything about," Sleepy-eyes teased him.

"We've spent too much time on flies," said Einstein, Zweistein, Dreistein, whose own flies in the bottle trap had not enjoyed the same success. "They're dirty and annoying," he added.

Mrs Vasso, who so far had been watching the children without saying anything, now spoke in her turn.

"It's true that flies can be very irritating in the summer, and dangerously dirty, too. But they move so freely it's enough to make you envious. They fly fast, go wherever they want and can avoid you in a flash. So let's not call their weakness for honey plain stupidity. And don't forget, they're a very tasty snack.... (Ugh! Ugh! Came a chorus of disgusted sounds before she could finish what she had been saying)... for insects. Their role in the chain of life..."

"Oh no, it's sermon time," muttered Miss-Miss. And before Miss Vasso could continue he called out, "Miss, Miss, do flies dream in black and white or technicolour? Do they dream while they're flying towards the honey or only when they're landing on it?"

"Do they dream when they are soaring or when they're getting stuck, you mean," put in Pee-Pee, who had earned her name because she was always asking if she could go to the toilet.

"No, they dream when they're reading in the toilet," came a voice, and the whole class burst out laughing.

“I’ll ask a flyologist and let you know,” replied Miss Vasso, looking very serious, and she added, “Anyway, the dreams that humans have are coloured.”

“I’ll find the answer on the internet,” said Einstein, Zweistein, Dreistein.

“My dad says I shouldn’t dream, so I can concentrate on my lessons,” called out Shovel.

“If you want to dream without neglecting your lessons, I suggest you work while you are dreaming,” said Mrs Vasso.

“Fine! Then tonight I’ll go to bed without doing my homework, and when I wake up it’ll all be done,” cried Ono, who never missed a chance to tease the other pupils.

“I’ll sleep with the physics book in my arms,” laughed Hiccup, “and when I wake up I’ll be Newton!”

“I had a lovely dream last night,” said Sleepy-eyes. “I saw the Virgin Mary in my sleep. ‘Angeliki,’ she told me, ‘don’t go to school in the morning.’ Too bad my mother doesn’t believe in dreams,” she sighed.

“It’s you lot need the stupidity detector!” came the voice of Catch Flies in the Air over the laughter and teasing which now filled the classroom.

“As far as I know, there’s no one stupid in this class,” said Mrs Vasso, who all this time had been following the misunderstanding with a smile on her face.

“Anyone who doesn’t understand is a fly in honey,” went on Catch Flies in the Air, as if he hadn’t heard her. “Only an idiot can’t tell the difference between the daydreams Shovel’s dad was talking about and the dreams we have at night”

“Children, are you dreaming in broad daylight?” asked Mrs Vasso, bringing the class back to order. “Let’s see your eyes.”

The class was divided into two: into the eyes that dream and the eyes that don’t dream.

“It seems to me that half your eyes are telling fibs,” said Mrs Vasso, and her own eyes twinkled.

One by one she looked the children in the eyes. Theirs looked back at her, some with laughing sparks and flashes and others with little trembling flames that were poised to hide..

“I promise you that every day we shall go for walks along the footpaths of the mind and soul. I shall teach you all to dream while you are working.”

“The best dream’s when school’s over,” Say Not a Word interrupted her.

And hardly had he spoken when the bell rang. The first day at school had ended.

The Second day
or
Why I Don't Like My Teacher

The subject of the year's first essay, written in white chalk on the blackboard, left all the pupils speechless.

"Why I Don't Like My Teacher, Mrs Vasso read out loud and with a smile she added, "It doesn't matter whether it's a lady teacher or a man."

"I smell a nasty trip to the headmaster's office," muttered Stroller.

"Dead easy!" chortled Tall Tales, who if he'd been Pinocchio would have had a nose a mile long.

"You can write whatever you want, but without putting your names on your papers. Think of the teachers you've had till now. Remember what you didn't like about the way they treated you and write it down. As soon as you've finished we'll read the essays out in class. We'll shuffle the papers and each child will read what one of his anonymous classmates has written."

A general sharpening of pencils followed and the pupils set to with a will. Only Whirligig sat there staring at the ceiling.

“Why don’t you have a think and write?” asked Mrs Vassou, coming quietly up behind her.

“I *am* thinking, but I just don’t know what to write. I’ve always had good teachers and I loved them all.”

“All right, then think of what you wouldn’t like your teacher to do, or imagine a bad teacher.”

“I don’t like my teacher because very often he won’t let me leave the class to go to the toilet when I want to,” cried Pee-Pee, who was well known for her frequent visits to the lavatory.

The whole class shook with laughter.

Mrs Vasso brought them back to order saying, “If I can find out what you think, it’ll help me to become a better teacher.” Then she sat down at her desk and opened her magic bag.

Some of the busily bent heads were casting furtive glances at the next door essay in search of an idea. Some of them kept their eyes glued on their papers and didn’t move at all until the hour was up. Others would look down at their paper and then up at the ceiling, as if inspiration would come to them from the heavens. Only one head stayed upright, with a pencil balanced between upper lip and nose like a moustache, and that was because its owner had finished in just one minute.

Whichever pupil that particular paper fell to would read: ‘I don’t like any teachers! I haven’t

got anything personal against them - I just hate school!!!” And all the class would know that the one who had written that was Ono, for under the row of exclamation marks he had written his name in big fat letters: Ono.

The DONT’S piled up.

‘I don’t like my teacher when he’s got it in for me but treats the other children really nicely.’ Whirligig read out, and she agreed with the pupil who had written it.

‘I don’t like my teacher because when I do something naughty he shouts at me and makes me frightened.’

“You’re telling me! He frightens me as well,” whispered Sticky Tape. “Once I was so scared I wet my pants.”

Nobody laughed.

‘I don’t like my teacher because he talkth to me ath if I weren’t a human being, too,’ read Miaou.

“Miaou, miaou,” mewed Pest.

‘I don’t like my teacher because when something’s not fair and I try to defend myself, he says I’m talking back and being cheeky. That’s so unfair it really chokes me,’ Lollipop read out.

“It’s my turn now!” cried Sleepy-eyes, hardly able to wait. ‘I don’t like my teacher because he treats me like a thing and not a person.’

‘I don’t like my teacher when he orders me to do something instead of asking me politely,’ Macaroni Mummy’s boy read out in a loud voice, and he picked his nose to show that he agreed.

‘I don’t like my teacher because he makes the lessons very boring, and when I yawn he sends me out,’ read Catch Flies in the Air when his turn came.

“That reminds us of someone that we know,” said the Loving Laces together.

‘I don’t like my teacher because he teaches things that don’t interest me,’ Pest continued.

“My mummy says that’s not the teacher’s fault, because it’s the ministry of education that decides what must be taught,” said Not a Word, whose mother was a teacher.

Putting on a frightened voice, Miss-Miss read out, ‘I don’t like my teacher because when I make a mistake he makes fun of me, and then I get frightened and never dare speak in case I get it wrong again.’

“How can I like a teacher when he isn’t kind and doesn’t understand me when I have a problem? How, how, how?” cried Silly Soprano, his voice rising to a crescendo.

‘I don’t like my teacher because when I misbehave he pulls my hair and it hurts.’

“Owww!” shrieked Spinach as Smartass in the desk behind tugged at his hair.

‘I don’t like my teacher because he isn’t fair. He doesn’t treat all the pupils the same way. There are some that he lets off and some he doesn’t,’ read out Chastized Chewing Gum in a complaining voice.

After Chewing Gum it was Not a Word’s turn, but what he read out was ‘Why I Like My Teacher’.

“That’s completely off the subject.”

‘I like my teacher because she speaks very gently to the children, so they don’t get scared. She’s got big ears and eyes, so she doesn’t miss anything that’s going on around her. She’s got an even bigger heart so she can really feel for the children, and a big mouth so she can give them her broadest smile.

I like my teacher because she always says sorry if she’s unfair without meaning to be.

When she wants me to do something she asks politely and doesn’t just tell me to do it.

You don’t have to ask to leave the class if you want to go to the toilet, you just go out.

And you can even take the toilet reader along with you.

I like my teacher because her lessons are never boring.

I like my teacher because she’s got a great sense of humour.’

“Whoever wrote that only forgot to pin the teacher’s photo on the paper,” commented Ono.

“What goes ‘miaou, miaou’ on the roof tiles?”

“Mrs Vasso in a black cat’s fur,” laughed Lightning.

“Mrs Vasso would never wear a fur,” said Not a Word, whose father was enthusiastic about protecting the environment.

“Thank you for your kind words, children,” said Mrs Vasso, blushing like a beetroot, and she asked Trip-up to continue.

“In my dreams I see a wicked teacher who is using a huge spoon to try and feed me knowledge I’m not interested in. I can’t digest it and it gives me stomach ache, and after that I can’t move. Nobody asks me what I want to learn,” read Trip-up.

“I don’t like my teacher because he sets me tests -to see what I know, or so he says,” read Einstein, Zweistein, Dreistein when his turn came.

“I like Mrs Vasso because she gives us lots of mock tests first and teaches us little tricks to help us all do well,” said Shovel.

“I hate tests,” said Sleepy-eyes with a grimace.

“Tests are like training for a race. They exercise our brains and get us over the finish line,” said Mrs Vasso. “Let’s go on.”

“I don’t like my teacher because he never looks cheerful. He’s always got a long face, as if everything is someone else’s fault,” read one of the Loving Laces, and the other one continued, “I

don’t like my teacher because I’m afraid of him.”

“I don’t like my teacher because he enjoys his power over us,” read Hiccup.

“Miss, there’s nothing written here,” said Lightning when it was her turn to read. “There’s just a drawing.”

The paper was circulated round the class with lots of laughs and murmuring. The idea of pupils sitting at their desks with televisions where their heads should be amused the children immensely.

“I’ve always had good teachers, but my grandad told me he had a teacher who almost pulled his ears off when he misbehaved, and if he hadn’t done his homework he’d give him ten strokes on each hand with a cane.”

“That used to happen in schools in the old days,” said Mrs Vasso, “when they believed that being beaten made you a better person.”

“Spare the rod and spoil the child!” cried Chastized Chewing Gum. “I’ve seen a film about it on the telly.”

“With lots of slapping,” added Ono.

“I prefer our Miss’s smackers,” laughed Silly Soprano.

“My daddy slaps me when I get on his nerves. And then he says he’s sorry, that he was just in a bad temper and he took it out on me. Because that’s what *his* dad used to do.”

“Is there anyone who hasn’t read yet?” asked Mrs Halali.

“Me,” said Sticky Tape, putting up his hand. “I don’t like my teacher because he never says please or thank you. It’s always “Take this to the office! Clean the blackboard!””

The last to read was Spinach: ‘My mother used to think she was stupid because a teacher used to treat her as if she was an idiot.’

“And you, Miss, why didn’t you like your teacher?” Sausage asked.

“For all the reasons that you’ve written -and a few more besides. Because he insulted me in front of my classmates when I’d done something bad; because he never said “well done” when I’d done something good; because...”

“Who do you think’s a good teacher?” Hiccup interrupted her.

“A good teacher is one who doesn’t just demand respect from his pupils but shows that he respects them, too. A good teacher is one who can win over even the naughtiest and most disobedient pupil by showing love.”

“My mum says there’s no such thing as a bad pupil -only bad teachers. A good pupil will be good with any teacher. It’s the bad pupil who shows you which teachers are the good ones,” said Not a Word, whose mother taught in the high school.

“A good teacher...”

Just then the bell rang to remind them it was break time.

“A good teacher is one who doesn’t steal minutes from her pupils’ break,” laughed Mrs Vasso, opening the door.

The Timetable
or
The Toilet Book
...

The Headmaster
or
And Walls Have Ears
...

Twenty-five Times Five

or

A Hundred and Twenty-five Rackets

...

The Saucepan

or

The Pupils Were Left Speechless

They saw it and couldn't believe their eyes.

On Monday morning, instead of Mrs Vasso's shining and enthusiastic face, the door opened and a big blackened saucepan came into view. Faced by a cooking pot that looked at them reproachfully through red spectacles, the class were lost for words. For a moment or two they sat there motionless, paralyzed with fear. The shouting and the laughter stopped as if by magic and a deadly silence fell upon the class.

Only the baggy jumper with its huge pockets for putting naughty children in reminded them of their teacher. What they saw before them was a saucepan wearing glasses that resembled hers.

Whether by instinct or out of embarrassment, the children pretended they hadn't noticed the strange change. They wished their teacher a good week, just like every Monday morning, as if nothing out of the ordinary were going on. But when they had

recovered from their shock they began to take a close look at the saucepan.

Planted on Mrs Vasso's elegant long neck, a huge cooking pot, three times bigger than the head it had supported till last Friday, was looking down on them through half-closed eyes.

Where the rounded top of her head had been there was now a big flat lid with a knob sticking out of its middle.

The children all rubbed their eyes and looked again. There was no doubt about it: what they saw before them was a saucepan.

The teacher raised her saucepan and looked at them again. At first her eyes seemed sad and disappointed, then suddenly they flashed with rage.

The children were terrified, but dying with curiosity as well.

"Do you think she's playing a trick on us and it's only a disguise?" The pupils looked at one another questioningly, hoping to find out how this could have happened.

In the moments that followed, twenty-six pairs of bulging eyes blinked several times in case they were making some mistake. And when they realized that their teacher's head had indeed become a saucepan, twenty-six hearts began to beat like kettle drums.

Pest plucked up courage and asked, "Miss,

what's happened to you?"

"I'm yet another teacher whose head's become a saucepan," she replied and sat down at her desk.

The curious faces of the pupils crowded round her, unwilling to believe what they were seeing.

Stroller covered his eyes with his hands.

Sleepy-eyes pointed panic-stricken at the saucepan.

Ono let out a little cry.

Silly Soprano uttered a nervous laugh and then burst into tears.

Whirligig took to her heels and Pee-pee ran off to the toilet.

The Loving Laces started sobbing.

"Oh dear, what have we done to our teacher?" said Not a Word. And to show it was none of his doing he added, "A class like you, it's just what you deserve."

"I can't stand this sight another moment!" cried Hiccup, putting a book in front of his face.

"This is what happens when materials reach breaking point," said Catch Flies in the Air, who'd heard the expression from his father, an engineer.

The rest of the children stayed glued in their seats, frightened out of their wits.

"Do you reckon it's some kind of epidemic?"

"Are you satisfied now, are you satisfied?" repeated Not a Word, who was normally very quiet. And he went on, "It seems to me we've

all been monsters. She wasn't born like this, it's we who've done it to her. All our screams and shrieking have pierced her head like needles. It's all our fault!"

"Sometimes even monsters feel ashamed," added Tall Tales.

"Hey, what's this? Are we going to turn the classroom into a courthouse to see who is to blame and who is not?" protested Lightning.

No one in the class could bear to look at the saucepan for long. They'd glance at it for a moment then turn their eyes elsewhere.

"First time I've seen a saucepan with a miserable face," said Whirligig.

"What'll happen if I go and lift the lid?" asked Trip-up, who was standing next to him.

"Nothing. At the most you'll find some bean soup," said Sausage, who was always dreaming about food. "That saucepan makes me feel like a nice big plate of bean soup."

Stroller, who was always daring, went up to Mrs Vasso. The teacher's threatening look was not enough to deter him.

"What do you want?" she glared..

"Well, I want that is, I would like....I'm itching with curiosity!" And with that he slipped behind the desk where she was sitting, climbed up on her chair back and lifted the lid of the saucepan. He hardly had time to raise it before a cloud of angry

steam filled the classroom. Frightened, Stroller hastily replaced the lid and moved away.

Mrs Vasso Halali's eyes misted over with invisible tears. But all the angry steam she had released into the class gave her some relief.

"Dear oh Dear! Miss Vasso's really angry!"

"What shall we do now?" enquired the Loving Laces, huddled up together in the back row.

"Something that might warm her heart," suggested Chastized Chewing Gum.

The last thing the children had wanted to do was to make their teacher so angry this would happen but the new way she'd been teaching them, following the instructions of the headmaster and the ministry of education, had turned them into real little devils.

In contrast, the lesson that followed today was the quietest of the year. The whole class was transformed into little lambs with fleece as white as snow.

For the first two hours of school they couldn't stop looking curiously at the saucepan.

"I don't believe it. It can't be happening. It's just too much for me to swallow."

Although the Best Buddies tried screwing up their eyes in the hope their teacher's head would appear once more, all they could see was a saucepan full of steaming rage, ready to explode.

The bell for break came like an oasis in the

desert for Mrs Vasso's pupils.

For once they didn't come rushing out of the classroom like a whirlwind. As soon as their teacher left the class, carrying the saucepan on her shoulders, they all gathered round Catch Flies in the Air, who was the first to find his voice again.

"We had a hand in putting that saucepan there," he admitted.

"We're all guilty," agreed Pee-pee.

"So what do we do now? We've absolutely got to find some way of doing something," declared Einstein, Zweistein, Dreistein, who had appointed himself president of the emergency council.

Mrs Vasso's pupils proved to have no end of bright ideas.

"I say we should undo what we've done. That is, we should all think what we've done to turn our teacher's head into a saucepan and then we should do the opposite so we can turn it back again," suggested Chastized Chewing Gum.

All of them except for Ono, who wanted his teacher's head to stay a saucepan, agreed that this was a good idea.

"That thaucepan can hold all our love," said Miaou, "but first we must empty it of all the thilly things we've done."

"What we need here is a fairy with a magic wand," said Whirligig.

"No, what's needed here is a big thick cane for

all of us," said Not a Word.

"The only thing that might help us is our brains," said Hiccup. "Let's put them to work and meet again in the evening when we've had a think."

"Miss Vasso told us that brains alone are not enough," objected Whirligig. "Without a clever heart as well you can't achieve anything in life." But no one took any notice of her.

"We have to decide what we're going to do," said Catch Flies in the Air in an anxious tone.

"There's no way we can change our teacher back to what she was," sniffed the Best Buddies, and then they burst out crying.

"I've got an idea! Let's dress up as angels!" Pest suggested.

"Little devils can't suddenly turn themselves into angels," Catch Flies in the Air retorted, "but they can make suggestions. I say we should split up into groups and come up with ideas for a plan of action. The naughty pupils can be in one group, the quiet ones in another group, the bad pupils in another and the good ones in yet another."

"I don't agree," protested Pest. "What if someone's a good pupil but naughty and another one's a bad pupil but doesn't cause any trouble. What will they do then?"

"They'll have to be in two groups and think twice as hard."

For the first time, Miss-Miss, who knew

everything, didn't have a word to say. But that didn't last for long because he suddenly shouted out in an excited voice, "I've got it! I've got it! I have an idea, but we must act quickly."

"Your ideas are usually full of holes," said Tall Tales teasingly.

"Even an idea full of holes may come in useful," retorted Miss-Miss, dismissing the comment. "I've thought of what to do to return Miss Vasso's head to normal."

"What? What?" cried twenty-five voices all at once.

"We'll hypnotize her."

For a moment there was silence and then a buzz of voices in reaction to his proposal.

He explained he'd seen a programme on television where a person looked at somebody so that he sent him off to sleep, then after he woke up again he told him what to do. And he did it.

"My dad thays some people get married rather like that. And then they wake up and they don't know what they've done," said Miaou.

"And how are we going to do it? How are we going to make Miss Vasso fall asleep?" asked Silly Soprano. "Is it easy?"

"Very easy."

"Are you sure?"

"Quite sure. Absolutely sure."

"It's not dangerous? Let's say we we send her off to sleep. Are you sure she will wake up again?"

"You don't think they'll send us to prison?" asked Shovel anxiously.

Once the idea that Mrs Vasso would prove impossible to wake and they'd all be sent to jail had been dismissed, the Best Buddies asked again, "And how are we going to do it?"

"With our eyes. As soon as she comes into the class we'll look into her eyes and keep saying to ourselves, 'Relax, I want you to relax.' And the moment she falls asleep I'll tell her, 'Immediately you wake up, ask your head to return to normal.'"

"And ask her to love us again." said the first of the Two Loving Laces.

"And to go back to teaching us the way she used to," said the second, completing the first one's thought.

The children were all so eager for Mrs Vasso's head to return to normal that they decided to follow Miss-Miss's plan without giving it much thought.

"But what if the plan fails?" Sleepy-eyes asked anxiously.

"It won't fail," Miss-Miss answered confidently.

Next morning the plan was put into action.

"Get ready!" shouted Stroller, who was keeping a lookout at the door.

The children held their breath. The only sound that could be heard was the teacher's footsteps in

the corridor, growing louder as she approached the classroom. The moment to put their plan into effect had come.

Never before had so many squinting eyeballs been gathered in one classroom. In their effort to keep their gaze fixed on their teacher's eyes, the children ended up cross-eyed.

Mrs Vasso took off her red spectacles, gave them a wipe and laid them on her desk.

The children's faces dropped. This was something they hadn't reckoned on. Without her glasses their teacher couldn't see any further than the end of her nose, and so their attempt to hypnotize her would be doomed to failure. As if sensing their anxiety, Mrs Vasso put them on again. The whole class breathed a sigh of relief.

"Her head is in our hands," whispered one of the two Best Buddies.

"In our eyes, you mean," the other corrected him.

Instead of continuing to write the exercises they had left unfinished in the previous hour, the pupils focused their gaze upon their teacher's eyes, in the hope that it would send her off to sleep.

Mrs Vasso looked at their faces absent-mindedly, as if she was collecting her thoughts.

The children skewered her with their piercing gaze, focusing their looks on her with hypnotic

intensity. So many eyes were fixed on her that Mrs Vasso was unable to resist. She yawned twice then slumped and froze like a statue that had been anaesthetized.

Fear clutched at Hiccup's heart. "She hasn't died, has she?" he gulped.

"Do you reckon she'll come back to life?" asked Shovel, hardly daring to breathe.

In utter silence, the class waited to see what would happen next. They didn't have to wait very long. Nobody had foreseen that at the very moment their teacher was falling off to sleep Chastized Chewing Gum would swallow -what else?- a wad of bubble gum.

First she coughed, then her face turned red and her eyes bulged out of her head. From deep down in her throat there came a rasping sound like someone trying hard to clear their throat, then a loud choking cough followed by another and another.

"What's the matter, dear, would you like a sweet?" asked Mrs Vasso, suddenly waking up. She left her desk and went over to Chastized Chewing Gum. "Bring a little water, somebody," she said.

Chewing Gum finally managed to clear her throat, then burst out crying. What hope did they have of hypnotizing Mrs Vasso now, she wondered.

At the sight of the red-cheeked saucepan with its downturned mouth Silly Soprano let out a half-

stifled laugh which spread to the whole class.

“Quiet, quiet!” shouted Catch Flies in the Air, the children’s natural leader in every emergency situation.”Right now we need to think what we can do,” he whispered to his neighbour.

When school was over, the children agreed to meet that afternoon at Whirligig’s house so they could decide about organizing another plan of action.

Clever Hearts

or

All Twenty-six Were Splendid

...

Operation Onion
or
All Twenty-six Were Splendid
...

The Teacher's Fate
or
All Twenty-six Were Splendid
...

Let Bygones Be Bygones

or

A Never-ending Story

...



Sophia Madouvalou

The Teacher Whose Head Became a Saucepan



When an idea lodges in Mrs Vasso's head things become far from easy for this formidable teacher. This is what happened when the idea came to her that her pupils simply had to become **the happiest most bubbly most creative and most responsible pupils in the school.**

What happened and the shiny and enthusiastic face of the teacher became a big blackened saucepan looking through red spectacles? Why her wonderful students were turned into little devils? What role played the stupidity detector, the headmaster and the onion operation?

For children 10+

...and all those who dream that education can become an imaginative and humorous adventure.

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