



**Rhyme On**   
*Adult Poetry Writing Contest*

*2024 Anthology*



**LCPL**  
library.loudoun.gov

Thank you to our guest speaker:

**Danielle Badra**

Fairfax County Poet Laureate (2022-2024)

Thank you to our generous sponsor:

**Loudoun Library Foundation**

# Table of Contents

## **Free Verse Category:**

Winner: Laura Gentry, "Dancer's Song"	Page 4
Runner-up: Susanne Whitehouse, "Melt"	Page 6
Honorable Mention: Shruthika Sundar, "OCD"	Page 8
Honorable Mention: Paige Kisner, "Artist, Not Art"	Page 10
Honorable Mention: Heather Sullivan, "A Child's Song"	Page 11

## **Lyric Category:**

Winner: Charles Notley, "This Old House"	Page 15
Runner-up: Renee Kenny, "Beach Scene"	Page 17
Honorable Mention: Heather Ward, "Epic Loudoun County"	Page 18
Honorable Mention: Ming Autumns, "An Ode to Music"	Page 19
Honorable Mention: Carol McKinney, "Love Song"	Page 20

## **Poems that Rhyme Category:**

Winner: Conrad Geller, "Hurdy-Gurdy"	Page 22
Runner-up: Cara Eisenberg, "One Small Thing"	Page 23
Honorable Mention: Martin Bromser-Kloeden, "The Commuter's Rap"	Page 24
Honorable Mention: Erin-Amanda Shultz, "Entreaty"	Page 26
Honorable Mention: Sarah Sheikhnureldin, "Cacophony of the City"	Page 28

## **Spoken Word Category:**

Winner: Bakhtawar Chaudhary, "The Blind Eye"	Page 30
--	---------

## **Free Verse**

Winner: Laura Gentry, "Dancer's Song"

Runner-up: Susanne Whitehouse, "Melt"

Honorable Mention: Shrukthika Sundar, "OCD"

Honorable Mention: Paige Kisner, "Artist, Not Art"

Honorable Mention: Heather Sullivan, "A Child's Song"

## Dancer's Song

Laura Gentry

Her infancy  
has long since strayed, but for the faint  
recollection of each new sound.  
She's entered a room brimming with new  
encounters of hum and breath,  
and she longs for more.

She's four.  
The evolution of her energy echoes the  
shape of music.  
Soft fabrics from the closet embrace her tiny arms, she sways.  
She's ablaze.  
Secrets of the most monumental dance emerge.

She's six.  
Her mother is a goddess. Her body aloft, as graceful hips and shoulders burn memories of womanhood.  
Behind her, the little girl spins in fringe.  
Turning colors as vivid as her imaginary stage.  
She'll be a goddess one day.

She's eight.  
With direction, she pliés in the silhouette of a melody.  
From the stage, the symphony is familiar,  
but she's begun to hear it differently.  
Interpretation drips in glitter and satin.  
Notes reveal in geometric color.

She's twelve.  
Her anthem is a persistent loop, as she composes an alliance between her mind and her emotion.  
The challenge reflects from the surface.  
Her body, imperfect.  
The music, so perfect.  
The curtains are snuggly drawn.  
She is the only star in this show.

She's fourteen.  
She picks tunes that compliment the ballad in her head.  
She lights candles and dances in the flame.  
She's in love and he feels musical.  
She is alive.

The pretty words are hers to twirl in airy prospect.

She's sixteen.

The flame is out. It's dark.

She withdraws from prying songs, as they prod and stab with every agonizing verse.

Every melody is loss. Every shape is dust.

She longs to douse the memories and seek freedom in oblivion.

She steps off the stage to clutch the ground.

She's twenty-seven.

A woman stands, poised above a crowning crescendo.

She has given the world a brilliant gift.

Her new son will grow and love her.

He will value her nurture and prose.

He will match her gentle spirit and surprise her with unimaginable talent of vocals and string.

His life, a most beautiful instrument playing softly, forever on her mind.

She's thirty-eight.

She's found solace where she least expected.

She's found harmony in his eyes.

Her biggest fan, he serenades her with the strength of one thousand orchestras and strums the strings resting in her soul with a gentle whisper.

He is love.

I'm forty-six.

I still navigate this room, brimming with lessons from my maturing improv.

I sing compassion, speckled with requiem on willing ears.

I see value in reminiscing the purest truth,  
eternally suspended in my unfolding stanza.

There's still time to dance.

## Melt

Susanne Whitehouse

When life was lollipops  
and swing sets  
and fireflies,  
from time to time,  
the world could be cruel.  
You would come running to me  
with tears spilling down  
over your splotchy red cheeks,  
unable to catch your breath.  
I would draw you into my lap,  
fold my arms around you  
and sway gently side to side,  
whispering  
that everything would be alright.  
I could feel your breathing  
begin to steady  
and your little body would relax  
and melt into mine.  
Spirits were lifted,  
tears dried,  
the corners of your mouth curled up  
as the light in your eyes returned.  
Now you are no longer that tiny child  
that I held on my lap.  
You are strong.  
You are independent.  
You are grown-up.  
But from time to time,  
the world can still be cruel.  
A bruised knee  
may be replaced with  
a bruised ego.  
Nightmares in the middle of the night  
may be replaced with  
nightmare bosses.  
Having your favorite toy break  
may be replaced with  
someone breaking your heart.  
For as strong as you are,  
as independent as you are,

as grown-up as you are,  
you may need a familiar place  
to come running to.  
Know that I will still be here.  
To listen.  
To hold you.  
To melt into.



## OCD

Shruthika Sundar

They say "You can tell a lot about a person by their hands."  
So, what does it say about me if mine are perpetually dry and cracked,  
With countless lines extending across their backs,  
Like patches of Earth never watered,  
Withered away under golden rays: burning, sizzling, scalding.

They declare "Actions speak louder than words,"  
I fear that the voices in my head are louder than my own.  
While they scream over each other, desperate to be heard,  
My own throat is dry, starved for words.

They contemplate "Which came first, the chicken or the egg?"  
Just like its grip on my mind is an endless loop, a riddle unsolved.  
While the chicken vainly chases its elusive start,  
My mind circles, trapped in its own art.  
Which came first, the compulsion or the fear that evolved?

They insist "Better safe than sorry."  
And so what if I am unable to resist the urge to wash, disinfect, or sterilize?  
My brain has exploded into a roaring menagerie.  
Except, instead of wild animals, I am the one being held captive,  
By none other than my own, recurring, painfully-vibrant thoughts.  
The elephant trumpets and the parrot squawks,  
And all I know how to do is stand here and watch.

They wonder "If a tree falls in the forest and nobody is around to hear it, does it still make a sound?"  
How hard must the trunk pummel the ground,  
How much dirt must come loose,  
How many branches must shatter,  
To be heard?

What about when the tree is me?  
How viciously must my hands bleed,  
How loud must the voices scream,  
How long must I plead,  
To be heard?

I see OCD everywhere, in every phrase and debate,  
Embedded in the fabric of my life, an inseparable trait.  
In the whispers of everyday speech, it hides its face,  
It lurks within each debate, every phrase, every case.

Still, let the sayings linger, the debates carry on,  
Like the tide that retreats but always returns,  
In the cycle of sayings, my mind churns.  
For in speaking them, finding my own voice,  
Amidst the endless repetition, is a semblance of choice.

In the cadence of compulsions, a rhythm so bleak,  
The echoes of my efforts are increasingly meek.  
Yet in this repetition, a truth quietly unfurls,  
My resilience whispers, in the repetition, it swirls

## **Artist, Not Art**

Paige Kisner

I am not your canvas  
For you to draw your vision upon—  
No cascading waterfall or  
Snowy capped mountains,  
Peaking in the distance,  
Begging to be visited.

I am not your statue  
To be formed by those paws—  
Those hands—that have molded many.  
Don't leave your fingerprints on me  
For I am not some origami figurine,  
Though my edges give papercuts and  
My folds are not open for exploration.

My body is an artwork, a masterpiece,  
Yes.  
And while wish there was  
A "please do not touch" sign hanging from  
My neck, some days  
There is no museum for me  
And  
I am not on display.

## **A Child's Song**

Heather Sullivan

Every child is born  
With a song in their heart.  
Every breath, every cry, every tear  
Adds an instrumental note  
To the song of their life.

At first, the music is directed  
Solely by external conductors:  
Situations, circumstances, people.  
Some people add tunes of tenderness,  
While others inflict strains of suffering.

When a child gets older,  
They start penning the verses:  
Thoughts and perspectives, choices and actions.  
And their chorus expresses  
Their experience of the world.

The content of the chorus  
Is supplied by external sources:  
Situations, circumstances, people.  
Some people deliver lyrics of love,  
While others contribute chords of cruelty.

As a child grows,  
Their song should grow, too:  
Louder, stronger, braver, bolder.  
Their voice should be encouraged  
As they create and sing new verses.

But some children's songs are muffled,  
Their words stifled, their tempo halted.  
Neglect, abuse, trauma, and evil  
All interrupt the beat of their song.  
Some children's songs are silenced forever.

But if there's still a beat  
(No matter how faint),  
If there's still a voice

(No matter how strangled),  
Their song can yet be revived.

Every child is born  
With a song in their heart.  
Every breath, every cry, every tear  
Adds an instrumental note  
To the song of their life.

At first, the music is directed  
Solely by external conductors:  
Situations, circumstances, people.  
Some people add tunes of tenderness,  
While others inflict strains of suffering.

When a child gets older,  
They start penning the verses:  
Thoughts and perspectives, choices and actions.  
And their chorus expresses  
Their experience of the world.

The content of the chorus  
Is supplied by external sources:  
Situations, circumstances, people.  
Some people deliver lyrics of love,  
While others contribute chords of cruelty.

As a child grows,  
Their song should grow, too:  
Louder, stronger, braver, bolder.  
Their voice should be encouraged  
As they create and sing new verses.

But some children's songs are muffled,  
Their words stifled, their tempo halted.  
Neglect, abuse, trauma, and evil  
All interrupt the beat of their song.  
Some children's songs are silenced forever.

But if there's still a beat  
(No matter how faint),  
If there's still a voice  
(No matter how strangled),  
Their song can yet be revived.

Love can reignite the melody  
And pen a new refrain, declaring:  
Hope renewed, victory over defeat!  
Love can compose a chorus of healing;  
Hear it resound throughout the world!

These new stanzas of a child's song  
Can re-spark the songs of others.  
Notes of healing, life, joy, and peace  
Reverberate, blend, and harmonize  
In an eternal symphony of hope.

## **Lyric**

Winner: Charles Notley, "This Old House"

Runner-up: Renee Kenny, "Beach Scene"

Honorable Mention: Heather Ward, "Epic Loudoun County"

Honorable Mention: Ming Autumns, "An Ode to Music"

Honorable Mention: Carol McKinney, "Love Song"

## **This Old House**

Charles Notley

On yonder mountain, lives a mansion.  
Born when the iron horse was new.  
She takes you back, to old conventions,  
When the loco whistle blew.

This old house won't live beyond tomorrow.  
A wrecking ball will tear her from our view.  
But this old house will live forever,  
In this song I give to you.

A pebbled lane finds its way up to the ridgeline,  
Arched in ancient juniper and pine.  
And there, between the orchard and the gardens:  
A stately home, caressed with ivy vine.

This old house is a poem of untold stories,  
From her rafters to the bottom of the well:  
One verse of faith, the next of glories,  
But this old house can never tell.

On her slate roof, are ranks of angels,  
Standing guard, to protect the souls below.  
Their golden wings reach out to gather,  
Winter's snow and icy flows.

This old house has been a friend to weary travelers.  
Her open door, her only crime.  
We'll say "Hello" and then we'll leave her.  
'Till we meet, in another time.

This old house has cared for generations.  
Was always there in fortune and decline.  
This old house helped build a nation.  
This old house, that once was mine.

Her great stone walls, are like a mother,  
In whose arms the child is shielded from all foe.  
They kept us cool in days of summer;  
They kept us warm when it turned cold.



(O' my Lord, how did they know?)

In a dusty parlor corner,  
Stands a clock shipped from some distant Scottish shore.  
She told the tides, and ticked the minutes,  
But chimes the hours, nevermore.  
A spiral stair, just off the foyer,  
Ascends part way to Heaven's Pearly Gate.  
Just pray St. Peter don't mistake you for a lawyer,  
Or you're doomed, to the other fate!

This old house still rings with old time music!  
The grand piano always filled the hall.  
What good can come of more rehearsing?  
There'll be no guests for Monday's ball.

This old house, still reels with peels of laughter!  
She still cries, from years of tears and pain.  
This old house will meet disaster,  
With these simple few refrains.

This old house has put a stop to speculation.  
She's said 'Goodbye!' to troubles at her eaves.  
There'll be an end to endless borrows:  
No more begging, no more thieves.

This old house won't live beyond tomorrow.  
She'll close her blinds this final night and then,  
That wrecking ball will do its duty,  
And her life will come to end.

This old house will enter the Hereafter.  
No wrecking ball can bend her iron will.  
This old house will live forever.  
This old house upon a hill.

Yes, this old house will live forever and forever!  
Her purple iris will *always* sparkle in the dew!  
This old house won't mind the weather.  
This old house now lives in you!

## Beach Scene

Renee Kenny

Vermillion burning sunset,  
Ruby glowing crabs,  
Sunburnt children dancing and  
Splashing as they stab--

With shovels, digging, bailing.  
Denim cresting waves,  
The evening winds exhaling  
Crimson clouds away.

White brushstrokes on the water,  
Dappled moonlit sand,  
Waves crawling upon the beach--  
Each a ghostly hand.

A silver moon, a yellow sun;  
The artist rests, his canvas done.

## **Epic Loudoun County**

Heather Ward

In Loudoun's vast expanse of green,  
Where tulip farms paint scenes serene,  
Nature's song, both bold and fine,  
Echoes through the rolling vine.

Lyrics whisper through the trees,  
Carried by the gentle breeze,  
From petting zoos to tranquil farms,  
Loudoun's charm has boundless charms.

Gruto's soft serve, a sweet refrain,  
Melts away each care and pain,  
With fireworks at Salamanders' sight,  
Brightening up the darkest night.

Oh, Loudoun, where melodies blend,  
Nature's symphony, without end,  
In this place of harmony,  
Loudoun's song calls out to me.

## **An Ode to Music**

Ming Autumns

To the music that I listen to on repeat  
I thank you for your beauty and grace  
For the way you make hardships disappear  
And for helping me through the hard times I've had to face

To the music that held my hand since childhood  
Those moments when I struggled to pick up my pen  
When I began to feel lost or astray  
I know I can count on you to bring me peace once again

To the music that held me when I felt all alone  
With no one to comfort me or anyone to turn to  
You never abandoned me or left  
And after you sing to me, I can begin anew

To the music that echoes in my ears all day and all night  
Your very existence brings me great inspiration  
You may not have known it until now  
But you bring about a state of utter jubilation

I revel in your sound  
And while you do not possess any limbs  
We shall dance hand in hand  
Until a new day begins

## **Love Song**

Carol McKinney

Play our favorite song  
the one we loved to dance to  
hold me close again.

## **Poems that Rhyme**

Winner: Conrad Geller, "Hurdy-Gurdy"

Runner-up: Cara Eisenberg, "One Small Thing"

Honorable Mention: Martin Bromser-Kloeden, "The Commuter's Rap"

Honorable Mention: Erin-Amanda Schulz, "Entreaty"

Honorable Mention: Sarah Sheikhnureldin, "Cacophony of the City"

## **Hurdy-Gurdy**

Conrad Geller

I still hear the hurdy-gurdy when the day is getting dark  
in the narrow streets of Boston and the walkway in the park.  
Deep sounds are in my stomach and the high ones in my ears,  
the rhythms for the nickels in those old, remembered years.

The hurdy-gurdy man, I guess, was silenced long ago.  
The box he lugged is broken, The nickels spent. I know.  
But the memories of beauty last, though times are out of tune,  
like the yearning in my spirit for the lilacs and the moon.

## One Small Thing

Cara Eisenberg

No explaining my complaining  
over one small thing  
Shattered, heart battered  
'cause the phone wouldn't ring

And I know that it's foolish  
It won't do no good  
And I know I'm reacting  
far more than I should

But I'm crushed like berries  
I guess I'm in a jam  
'cause I shouldn't be hurt  
But I am

It's surprising how energizing  
is one small kiss  
Now I'm steaming; it's demeaning  
to be treated like this

Though it's counter-productive  
because anger's destructive  
and it's not a big deal  
I can't help what I feel!

Yes, I'm boiling like soup  
I guess I'm in a stew  
For I shouldn't care  
But I do



## **The Commuter's Rap**

Martin Bromser-Kloeden

*(Start the beat)*

Try'in to get home long past quitting time  
You gotta go slow cause the streets covered in slime

Water piper, sewer pipe what does it matter  
Soon enough your new car is covered in splatter

*(Chorus)*

I really hate commuting, its messed my mind  
I find getting peace and rest hard to find

You finally hit the freeway and you going fast  
Then you realize you forgot to get some gas

You look down at the near empty fuel gauge  
As your mind fills up with a lot of road rage

Maybe you can make it to the station nearby  
You not really sure but you gonna have to try

You get to the pumps but all the regulars dry  
So you fill-up with premium at a price that makes you cry

*(Chorus)*

I really hate commuting, its messed my mind  
I find getting peace and rest hard to find

As you turn into your driveway, you start to feel sublime  
Soon you'll be on the couch with some mighty fine wine

Your wife is in the doorway looking sort of amiss  
You walk toward her to cure that with a big kiss

But then she stands back and you land a wet miss  
As you recover you hear say with a little hiss

Boss just called and said you gotta go back

Some sort of critical error in the server backstack

*(Chorus)*

I really hate commuting, its messed my mind  
I find getting peace and rest hard to find

You turnaround and look at your filthy new car  
Wondering if you should just head to the nearest bar

As you sit in the still warm seat and turn the key  
*(rap slow)* That's when it hits you, commuting is not for me

## Entreaty

Erin-Amanda Schulz

They say the silence is deafening  
When you are all alone,  
But then it's only more so  
When you're here with me at home.

I don't want to fight with you.  
I don't to cry.  
Please talk to me,  
And work with me  
So we can stop  
Just getting by.

Right now we are staccato—  
Somehow out of joint.  
One day I hope that we can live  
In musical counterpoint.

I know it won't be easy.  
I know it won't be fast.  
But together we can build that bridge—  
Write a melody that will last.

Then hopefully, with luck,  
Together we might grow  
A mutual understanding—  
A slow and steady tempo.

I hope you know I love you,  
Even when we don't agree—  
Though sometimes it feels like chaos  
And harsh cacophony.

I hope you know I miss you,  
Even when you're next to me—  
The silence a slow progression,  
A prelude to a dissonant key.

I hope you know I'll fight for you,  
And everything we share.

I hope you know I think our love,  
Our souls,  
Our story—  
It's worth it  
Even when we err.

So please talk to me  
Make plain to me  
The cadence of your heart.  
Please don't let this tortured silence  
Keep us far apart.

## **Cacophony of the City**

Sarah Sheikhnureldin

Footsteps drum on the sidewalk following a rhythmic beat  
Melodic chimes of gossip skip through the crowd  
Hums of monotone drilling into the concrete  
Discordant honks and screeches of traffic clamored loud

A man's voice booms over the symphony preaching his ideals  
Jarring crescendo of incoming sirens and flashing lights  
Steady staccato of clicking heels  
Chants of a crowd demanding their rights

Rumbles and roars from the subway' bassline  
Clinking of cutlery and the chime of wine glasses  
Beeping metronome signals to cross the dashed-line  
A cacophony of noise pollution made by the masses

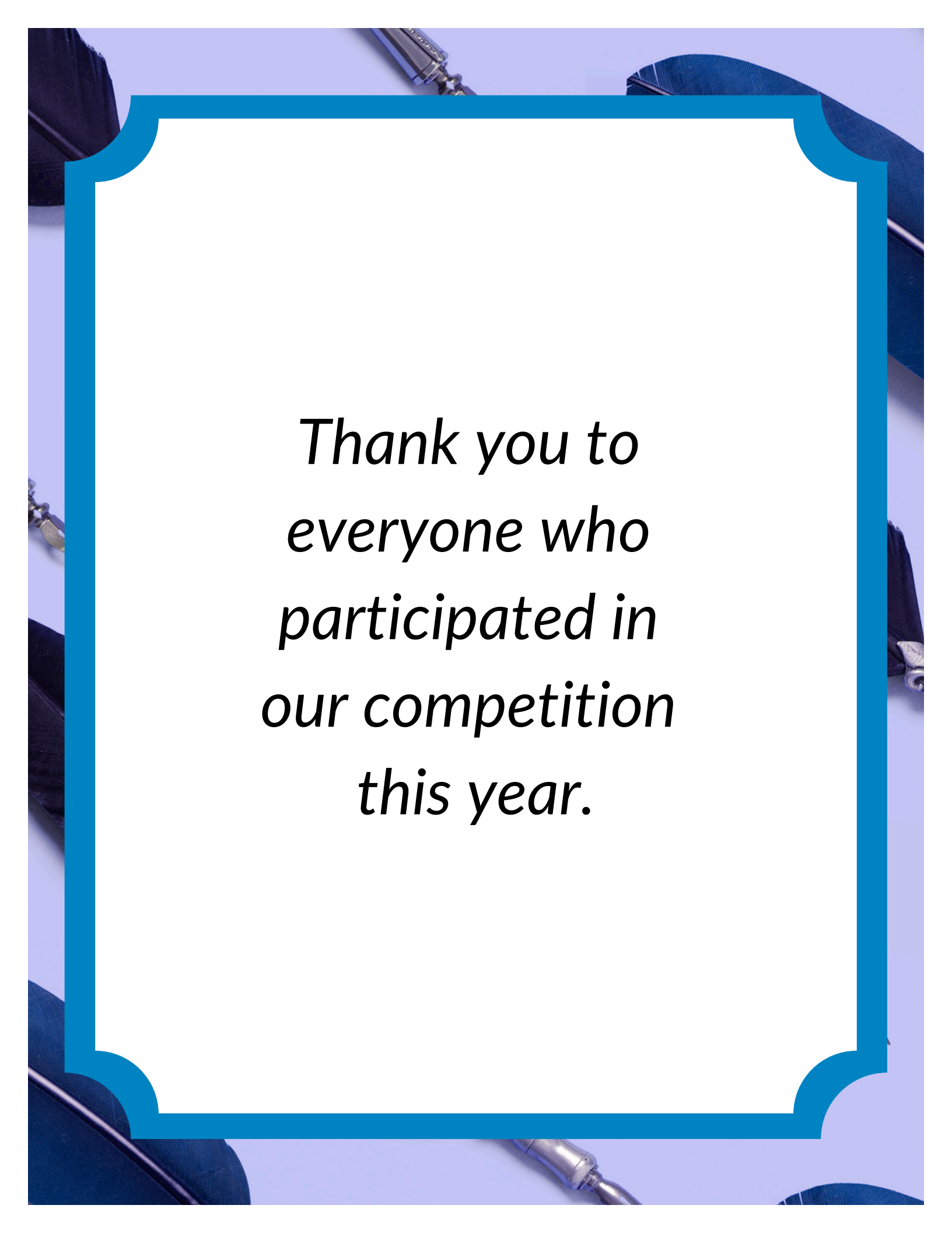
## **Spoken Word:**

Winner: Bakhtawar Chaudhary, "The Blind Eye"

## **The Blind Eye**

Bakhtawar Chaudhary

YouTube Link: <https://youtu.be/dT5rS75AECw>



*Thank you to  
everyone who  
participated in  
our competition  
this year.*