

FIRST PRIZE

Salvage Yard

The speaker's feedback repeats
your order in cracked static, that broken
echo's the most I've heard you say all drive.
When you're weeks between work
there's not much for us
to talk about.

At the drive-thru watching you dig
calloused fingers into cup-holder change,
paying with dimes so dirty
there's no ship, no queen,
just a grey sparkle in your greasy palm.

Drinking coffee out of cardboard and pulling
metallic relics, the spoils of twisted metal torn
from old, immobilized machines, harvested
from work sheds under
lacy cobweb beds.

Cold cast iron baking under the sun,
empty drums spilling gasoline
and thick red straps holding
scraps together. There are burnt out lanterns
between the rubble, black skeleton frames
making prisons of snapped metal bars
that hold in the debris.

We strip apart copper wires. A man in
tan coveralls smiles showing me
his gold-capped molars
and yellow incisors;
he whistles, but the sound is muted
under moving scrap. A rough
edge splits open your skin
and you lick the blood sticking
to your arm. I imagine it tastes metallic
like sucking razor blades.

We drive out rich with three-fifty in fresh bills.
You're staring as I put on lipstick;
you don't ask but I tell you
it's *Sweetheart Valentine*, shade two-oh-five.
I pucker up my pink pastel lips into an invisible kiss
and put my feet on your dash.
Under my shoes flakes of paint chips
and drywall colour your floor
like confetti.

by Elizabeth Andrews
Caledon, Ontario

SECOND PRIZE

This Is Just to Say

For the longest time I thought the city had raised me.
My territory expanding beyond the bend in the road
and over years becoming only the limit of my feet.
Eventually cross-streets became landmarks
and no longer boundaries.

I thought what made a man
was trying to flip the 9:50 west-bound train
with wishes stolen from the mall fountain.
At the time I did not notice that train
brought with it the unfettered dark
and wiped away the final rays of fading daylight.

This is just to say
that now, I remember everything.
That Dad drank cake mix, or something close to it,
every day since he was fifteen years old.
Black coffee was far too bitter
and he needed something
to let him climb into that truck cab
on mornings when his marrow
was made brittle and thick,
with frost.

I remember out of the two weeks a year which were his alone,
he took me early, with hands like granite pushed through a shredder,
and together we watched the forest sleep,
the earth drooling to the air while the lake spooned her curves.
Still, not even breathing.

I remember how Mother built us up,
she could not stand the sloth of your un-buttered sandwiches,
or my little lies about where my time had gone.
Somewhere between fighting the stained porcelain avalanche
that was our kitchen, and carefully packing the next week away
in our little red pails stacked side by side,
she found the time to tell us,
“Lift your skinny fists triumphant, like antennas to Heaven.”

I am ashamed I ever thought growing old was giving up,
believing every day was the same dream.
All I wish now is to follow the luminous trail
of streetlamp nightlights
all the way home.

by Ryan Hayden
Toronto, Ontario

THIRD PRIZE

A Sea of Black Balloons

Inside an art installation.

I practice the art of waiting
Standing here *dans cette file d'attente*
Staring at stories carved in grey concrete walls
Not listening to the ones spoken
Trying my best not to think of you
The slowness of this line
Makes it a useful exercise to pass the time
Until it's my turn over the threshold
Vers l'inconnu

(in this waiting line)

Black balloons fall towards me
But the weight of you not being there
Isn't drowning
So peaceful this synthetic sea
Light shines barely through metallic hues
Like swimming at night, not caring what you'll find
Hoping every stranger is you—but no, it's never you
Et je suis seule once more

(Into the unknown)

But this is a place to be alone
Et tout oublier . . . even you, but I can't
Alors, j'imagine que je dessine au feutre
The missing stars in the night sky
Tous mes souvenirs de toi en contradiction
Hiding somewhere between
Damp earth and pine trees,
Old paper books and ink,
Lost coffee cups and hastily written notes

(And to forget everything)
(So, I imagine drawing in felt-tip marker)

(All my mismatched memories of you)

Here, I can be immune to the outside world
Creating my own for a half hour
Pretending jellyfish don't sting
Yet they do—all pretty things do
Et pourtant, je vois que tu n'es pas comme eux
Je découvre peu à peu
That you have a beautiful soul

(And yet, I see you aren't like them)
(I discover little by little)

I wade through static electricity
As I leave the Sea of Black Balloons behind
A weight lifts, and I understand this
Untangling myself from the last balloon
Je sais que
This untogetherness
Était une bonne chose, a means to grow

(I know that)

(Was a good thing)

by Larina Mietzker
Smiths Falls, Ontario

HONOURABLE MENTION

My love is . . .

My love is like bananas
harvested in St. Lucia:
exotic, sun-thirsty, hardy,
a plantation providing employment
to my every thought,
forcing my mind
to put out the sign:
“Went bananas.”

My love is like slipping on a peel,
toes arching towards the skies,
learning to walk vertically
while my lungs are gasping for air
from the surprise of the fall.

*How many banana peels later, I wonder,
did we come up with the expression
“Falling in love?”*

My love is hushed,
teeth silently piercing the flesh
stealthily, like a pair of sneakers
walking on a Venetian meandering alley
marked on no map
but offering breathtaking vistas.

My love is like peeling,
revealing with every falling strand
another part of me:
velvet skin, firm flesh
eagerly yielding to the bite.

My love is bold like an overripe fruit,
unafraid to show its brown age spots
rendered sweeter by the passing of time.

My love is slightly radioactive,
an equivalent dose of danger
meriting its own unit of measure,
but still grown in yellow clusters
heavy with mouth-watering goodness.

by Marcela Croitoru
Windsor, Ontario



HONOURABLE MENTION

Faces in All Places

I can't escape them. Souls,
trapped in everyday matter, reach out to me.

One peeks at me wearily from the folds of a tissue I raise to my nose, rendering me destined to drip. Another frowns, cemented in my walkway, accusing me daily.

A group of them have disguised themselves as hardware on my kitchen cabinets, they think I don't notice them. I suspect Weight Watchers.

Most troubling are the multitudes of species and races and personalities, calling out for help from the cobblestone tiles I had felt so clever for finding, as I sit helplessly on my toilet.

At times, I try to ignore them, I avert my eyes, busy myself. Other times, I take them in, amused. I readily share veggie and noodle soul-spottings in my soup, and I have no problem pointing out goofy, Picasso-like ones that appear gleeful, surprising me in public places. It depends on my mood, I guess.

I wonder, am I being called upon to release them? Do I have a special power I am not yet aware of that, if tapped into, could set them free? Or are they hanging out until the end of days, forged in earthly matter to remind us there are other worlds, or something more?

Perhaps they are there because there is no room in heaven, or maybe it is hell that is spilling over. Or perhaps, there is no heaven and no hell at all, and this is the best God could do, because, souls don't die, do they?

Forgive me for this one, but perhaps God is really just Charlie, or Betty, or some schmuck who got in over their head. The puppy-like eyes looking up at me from my ottoman tell me different.

*by Karen Sylvia Rockwell
Belle River, Ontario*

HONOURABLE MENTION

Character

I feel my temper rumbling
Like thunder on fast approaching clouds
While you stand, bold and resistant
Hurling chaos at the front lines of my discipline
Scattering troops of self-assurance
Leaving great craters in my authority

Then you strike a verbal match
Which you toss at my brittle wasteland of composure
Watching it flare
Fuelled by the wind of your defiant air
A fire so irate
That all the training of a lifetime cannot douse
Yet you remain, proofed
With a little plastic rake and a bucketful of water
And we are both about to be consumed

My own scars, from such third-degree burns
Begin to itch
And I remember the sorrows of the after-fire
Glimpse the guilt around the corner
Waiting to reprimand me
While my maturity slinks off to nurse its wounds
Leaving my self-control alone to take the blame

Emotions pass
Like flash storms
And I am drenched in my own complexions
And self-reflections

So I turn away from a Pyrrhic victory
Defeated
Though not all is lost
For I never wanted to hurt you
And your spirit remains unbroken

by Miwa Hiroe
Valemount, British Columbia



HONOURABLE MENTION

Enchantment

it is your dew-dampened bare feet on a lawn
in early morning, your palm tickled by grass
warming in the sun, a scent of orange peel mingling
with a fragrance of trellised roses by the garage

a swing hung from a sturdy bough, overhead a canopy
of green leaves and a fringe of light

it is your verandah at noon,
you seated licking a frozen popsicle,
(its icy-ness running down your chin) or a wedge
of blueberry pie, purple sweetness on fingertips

a bicycle you ride everywhere, and in the afternoon,
lounge in a chair or hammock, curled like a cat,
reading, shaded by lilac, the lovely heat settled
on your shoulders, believing because of the breeze
you have all the time in the world

it is the thrum and clatter of push mowers,
in-line bladers whizzing past in a sway of absolute ease,
the warm air abuzz with cicadas, a butterfly pausing
for the red of a dahlia pinwheel, wings fanning the flower,
gliding over a sprawl of gardens

a sandy shore or sloped riverbank, you dive
into the water, a shimmering slickness over your body,
your own hidden place of tangled appetites and languor

it is lovers on a blanket lying shamelessly close
or a late afternoon stroll, you holding someone's hand,
thinking nothing of importance and saying little,
enjoying the carelessness, the cooling air

evenings lit by bright backyard lanterns,
fireflies winking among trees and a parade of stars
marching across the floor of heaven,
young women who saunter by in cotton dresses laughing
in the blue-metal dusk, while dandelion seeds adrift
with fluff rise, and blow away

by Jayelle Bond
Steinbach, Manitoba



HONOURABLE MENTION

Still River

When the moon
does not fall on the river,
darkness blankets
the water
silence hears only
the paddling oars
slow boat
and my hand
caressing the surface
hoping to unveil
its ebony smooth skin
echoing the breath
of the night
and the absent moon.

Fisherman's trained ear
enlightens the sound of silence,
shocking our reverie
over the quiet rowing
and the boat glide
carrying us towards the light
the fisherman beams upon us
making sure he is the only one
to capture the soul of the still river.

by Svetlana Miskovic

Windsor, Ontario



HONOURABLE MENTION

Premonition

The sound of twisting metal
screams in my ears.
The scent of burning rubber
fills my nose.

Shards of glass
sting my face my hands my arms
piercing my skin.

My head and neck are forced sharply,
redirecting my gaze to the side window.

I watch the wheat,
golden shining gently bending
allowing the breeze to have its way.

The sunshine encases me
in its tight hug.
A loud *snap!* Then darkness.

“Mom!”
a child screams.

I jolt upright! Gasping,
as though I had just plunged into cold water.
Finally, air finds my lungs.

I pull the vehicle to the side of the road.
It rolls to a
slow relentless stop.

When I am brave enough,
I look around—
nothing no one silence.

I sigh deeply.

With newly heightened alertness
I continue on.
A calmness fills me
as I realize urgency
does not get me places.

Further down the road
blue and amber lights
flash with importance.

As I draw near to the lineup of vehicles
the wail of the sirens becomes closer.
I can see glimpses of the accident
that has the traffic stopped.

I redirect my gaze to the side window.

I watch the wheat,
golden shining gently bending,
allowing the breeze to have its way.

The sunshine encases me
in its tight hug
sending a shiver up the back of my neck.

by Eileen Reese
Hague, Saskatchewan



HONOURABLE MENTION

The Ballerinas

The little girl opened the big book
So many wallpaper pictures to see
Her finger pointed to the ballerinas
Hundreds, dancing in rows of pink perfection

Smiling symmetry on satin toes
Happy, bright, black-lashed eyes
Dressed in tiny, puffy veiled triangles
She loved them

At dinnertime
When she heard the car tires crackle over driveway stones
The sound of ice cubes dropping, clinking in glass
And when the loud, mean voices came
She would return to the ballerinas

They still smiled
They still danced

by Wendy Morison
Dundas, Ontario



HONOURABLE MENTION

The Last Day

The year was an absolute whirlwind,
And I fell into it headfirst
From the very first day until our last.
Autumn came too soon for us,
But we delved into it together
For the first time in years.

Morning, afternoon, and evening kisses
Filled my every weekday,
Living back where we had found each other
And found out the meaning
Of the best and worst of timing.

We lounged under the pine tree,
Your arm on me, my head in your lap
On the last day of summer wind
Even though it was October.
More than anyone you hated poetry,
But you read it to me anyway.

Winter brought nights of uncertainty
Because I was falling in love
At the same time of year
When all I'd known was losing it,
And I couldn't face that again;
I couldn't lose what we'd made.

But then came nights of reassurance
Tucked perfectly underneath your arm
And falling asleep beside you,
Spending Christmas by your side,
And I saw my future before my eyes
For the very first time.

And I fell more in love in Ottawa
When we were the only ones alive,
And the world, for once, was silent.
And I had something to hold onto
For the rest of the coming days
I spent wanting to run back.

And when April came too quickly,
The spring afternoon's rain
Fell from my eyes instead
Because somehow, the clouds cleared
And I wondered if I hid them,
Or if they're our new best kept secret.

On my drive home, the sun shone
Across the glowing county sky
With its brilliant April rays
A bright gold behind me, and I wondered
If it meant the best were on the way
Or if they were now behind us.

by Angelica Lachance
Amherstburg, Ontario



HONOURABLE MENTION

Crow Burial Ground

No death of speeches
Or dark utterance of stone
Just a feather
Hung
In a headdress of snow
Scribbling invisible
Like a vagrant saviour of bones
On the last scaffold
Alone

And the half a skull said nothing
In half its idiot smile
Not even a cough
Nor the lapse of half its jaw bemoaned
The scraps
Of scarecrow-shedding skin
Eaten raw
By whispers
And the soft descending of snow

High on sticks
The warrior now still
Cannot resist
Even the call of crows
Though his spears once felled the hills

Whistling now
Through windows of his ribs
Only
The wind
His newfound flesh
Insists . . .

Like the requiem of a wish

by Richard Grace (67 years)
Toronto, Ontario



HONOURABLE MENTION

Patrick's Arms of Steel

Newfoundland cod fisherman,
patron of the “Golden Arches,”
A man and joker,
a booming presence.
This “once in a while” man
pushed his way
into our circle one day.
Our lilting laughter had
lured him in to source the frivolity.

“Why is the guy up in
the tree with a briefcase?”
“I don’t know.”
“He’s the branch manager!”
We swayed with gales of laughter
as Patrick spun his yarns
with threads of awe
while silkily slipping in
shows of strength: “Feel my arm!”
We poked, we prodded—
no mark could we make.

Like flies, we were drawn into
the web of his steely embrace.
He removed his cap.
His “once upon a time”
ocean-drenched and
salted face struck me silent.
He stood unusually quiet;
soft brown eyes belied his tough veneer.
God told Patrick where to go,
what to do each day.
The peacekeeper of this McDonald’s
settled fights, never started them.

We looked for him over
the winter months.
“Where is Patrick?”
In bits and buzzes
the news trickled down,
no fish tales were these;
Patrick had died in March.

Sipping coffee, I press fingers of one hand
into the hardness of the table top,
close my eyes and remember . . .
Patrick’s arms of steel.

by Francesca Burton (68 years)
Windsor, Ontario