

FIRST PRIZE

Voices

If golden deserts don't spell the warmth
 I cannot think what does
Not the flaming forests, not the fiery mass
 Of land left to our protective hands
 Sent up in flames like rings of fire
And in my stomach, something shivers
 As the snow begins to fall
 My throat is parched
 My lips are closed
 My tongue is hungry
Licking snowflakes from the sky, burning icebergs from the sea
 The terror of
 Earthquakes trembling
My anger blossoming so fast you can barely hear it

But

 If you tried
 If you whispered
If you lowered your voice to the sound of rivers
 If you lay in the grass and just smelled it
 You would know

 The screaming doesn't solve it
 That knowledge doesn't come from
Books, cities, sky-high office buildings

It comes from me

 The tremors of the mountains
 The moans of grasses
The voice you can't hear from your seats of power
 The voice that sets your forests aflame
 Greenery, my gentle soul
 But you provoked it

by Jane Coates (Grade Nine)
Tantramar Regional High School
Sackville, New Brunswick

FIRST PRIZE

Dear Tio

Dear Tio,

I'm sorry

I refused to learn Portuguese.
Your rasping voice, strained from the years of smoking,
Was one I could never communicate with—

A missed opportunity.

I'm sorry

That I was afraid of the tubes that slithered into the hole in your throat
And the ones injected in your arms.
I would always avert my gaze
When I should have been tracing over and memorizing
All the details of your appearance—

A missed opportunity.

I'm sorry

About how often I forget
And spend my days blissfully when I should be
Reminiscing about you—

A missed opportunity.

Now, I stay mesmerized at the photo.
My sister and I contort our faces into a beaming smile
While sitting on a hospital bed beside you.
You appear cadaverous from the illness, clad in a dull blue gown.
You are tangled in the tubes I was so fearful of,
Which tethered you to cumbersome hospital equipment
And to the final three days of your remaining life.
If only I could have seen you more those last few days—

A missed opportunity.

I refuse to miss another opportunity.

Every day, I try to learn a bit of Portuguese,
So when I ascend to Heaven, I can finally talk to you.

We all miss you,
Samantha.

by Samantha Melo-Centanni (Grade Ten)
Marshall McLuhan Catholic Secondary School
Toronto, Ontario

FIRST PRIZE

Melanocyte

My complexion is an art
That you're able to tell apart.
A masterpiece
That holds its peace.

My cutis drowns in melanin,
Submerges in brown sugar and cinnamon.
Naturally sun-kissed,
It's hard to resist.

My skin radiates in the dark night
And brings a feeling of delight.
It detains an enchanting beauty
But releases an unpleasant history.
Yet, it shines and still appears to portray my story.

My skin is an instant glow.
On a rainy day, it is my rainbow.
It shimmers in the sunlight,
Where my honey-coloured skin glows bright.

My pigmentation is a diamond,
In the eyes of those who are not frightened.
It is so precious
That others find themselves jealous.

My chocolate skin is gold.
Its beauty is relentless, so I've been told.
It glimmers golden honey,
Wherever it's sunny.

My skin sweats melanin,
By chance.
I honour it,
By choice.

by Kyara Blaise (Grade Eleven)
Villa Sainte-Marcelline
Montréal, Québec

FIRST PRIZE

Let You Down

I'll fill myself to the brim
spilling over edges, corners of my eyes
seeping through raw fingertips
I'll build a fortress from dust
work dawn to dusk, moon to morning
till the ache in my limbs is all I know
I'll undo myself completely
one strand at a time, unravelling
tearing true, deeper than skin
I'll empty the entire sky
pluck midnight stars, shatter moonbeams
charred hands to smother the sun
I'll go anywhere and everywhere
reweave the world, give up my heart
before I ever let you down

by Ana Mara (Grade Twelve)
G.W. Graham Secondary School
Chilliwack, British Columbia

SECOND PRIZE

Racing with the Rain

I stare out the passenger window,
and I watch the rain slide down.
Racers at the ready,
I choose mine.
He is bigger than the rest.

The race begins,
and already,
he is almost at the finish line.
He is far ahead of the others,
but then, I watch him pause,
as if he's taking a break.
It's almost as though he already knows
that he will win.

I watch him
out of the corner of my eye.
The others slide down the pane
right ahead of mine.
Finally, I watch him slide
into last place.

I sigh,
as the car
travels through the rain.
I choose another raindrop
and place my bets.

by Autumn Morgan (Grade Nine)
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SECOND PRIZE

We Live

We live in the dark,
In more ways than one.
We live without knowing
We're missing the sun.
It's there glowing bright,
But we turn away.
We'd rather fall in the night
Than dance in the day.

We lie in the dark,
Saying we're fine,
Taking the ashes
And saying they shine.
Our souls are not broken,
Our feet are not cold,
Our hands are not frozen
With nothing to hold.

We die in the dark,
But still some move on,
Living in light
When we think that they're gone.
But they've not forgotten,
They're thinking of you,
Calling your name,
Hoping you'll come home too.

by Abigail Leclair (Grade Ten)
Brentwood College School
Mill Bay, British Columbia

SECOND PRIZE

Change the World

I see posters saying, “You’re perfect,” and the next saying, “Lose some weight.”
I hear, “Society is so accepting these days” and then I hear the hate.
I’m told the air is fresh outside as I breathe in cigarette smoke
And that my body is my own as I feel an unwanted poke.

I’m told that “mental health matters,” and then I experience the stigma,
But if I’m diagnosed with a mental illness, I’m treated as an enigma.
People say, “Embrace your talents,” but if I do, I’m too proud;
And if I express an opinion, I’m told I’m being too loud.

They say I have to save the world as they litter on the ground
And, “Women are treated very well,” as I’m catcalled by a hound.
Society says, “We’re all equal,” but minorities are often neglected.
We say that we support the poor, but they ask for help and are rejected.

Society influences a lot of things, such as how I live and breathe,
How I manage to heal my pain, and how I choose to grieve,
What I eat each day, where I go, and how I act.
They tell me their opinions, but they treat them like stone-cold facts.

If no one is willing to help me, if no one is willing to try,
If only I can answer the plea, if only I hear our planet’s cry,
If I’m told I have to save the world, how am I supposed to start?
Do I give up and let others try, or do I reach for their heart?

Do I continue to hate the world and let it stay the same?
Or do I jump in and try to fight, hoping I win the game?
So now I ask society, please give it to me straight:
“Do I try to change the world I know, or do I continue to hate?”

by Eliana Alexandroff (Grade Eleven)
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Toronto, Ontario

SECOND PRIZE

hopeless romantic

i am a hopeless romantic.
i fall in love too easily.
i fall for strangers on the subway
or the barista at the coffee shop where i write this,
so even though you
are not the person who will love me back,
i will fall for someone else,
and maybe they will love me.

and so every love song will be about them,
and i will picture my future with them,
and i will want to dance with them in the kitchen,
and maybe,
one day, i will marry them,
and finally,
i won't feel
as if i am a hopeless romantic.
i will just be
a romantic.

by Paige Kelly (Grade Twelve)
King City Secondary School
King City, Ontario

THIRD PRIZE

Legacy

You rip hope from our breath
And poison our future.
You blame us of theft
And demand a cure.

You request understanding
And make it into a show.
We're tired of waiting
But unable to grow.

Our thoughts are like a late November night:
Dark, empty, with an incurable silence.
We live in a new world of fight or flight,
And we are unable to find an alliance.

How dare you turn to us
And turn away from people's fate?
How dare you make us the centre of this fuss
And pretend that these nations are great?

You shatter all our hopes and dreams,
And our cries for help still resonate.
We'll just have to wait, it seems—
Wait and wait for our sun to detonate.

by Kamiya Dion (Grade Nine)
Académie Ste-Agathe
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THIRD PRIZE

Wither

I stand at the edge
Of the Earth's cliffs.
The glowing mantle
Echoes
Of the void.

The tunnel is hollow
And empty
With darkness.
Dust spirals slowly,
Cold and still.

Heavy clouds float past,
The jagged crag
Masked
By draping vines
And icy mist.

Mistral bleeds
Through cracks of rubble
Of ancient fossils
Lost
Through time.

by Zhong Tan (Grade Ten)
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Chilliwack, British Columbia

THIRD PRIZE

Broken Silence

I close my eyes
And

I tell them
They have no power over me.
I tell them
I don't dress for them.
I will not be called fruitless
Nor a fool.
I am not an object,
A prize to be won.

I tell them,
People make mistakes.
We fall,
We fail,
We lose our way,
But still we get back up.
I tell them,
Do not overlook triumph to see defeat.
Accept my missteps, don't mock them.

I want to say yes to bearers of elation,
Magic, and meaning,
Friendship, exhilaration,
Love.
And I could—

But it seems words have dented me.
I am broken, bruised, and tired.
With my missing bolts and rusted frame,
I am reminded that boats with holes
Sink.

So, when I
Open my eyes,
I don't utter a word.

by Ava Burtis (Grade Eleven)
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THIRD PRIZE

the impediment of distance

I built a home for myself
within your words
within the soft touches miles away

but this home, the walls are too white,
the sun cracks through the windows in the morning too early
the bed is too soft, full of possibility

have I sold myself away before having done anything?
have I chipped away at possibilities, skipping to the mortgage before I could pay the rent?

I want to live in golden baths
with dark hallways and closed doors
I want to discover what hides behind each
I want to knock cautiously, see what waits for me

I don't want a home where the dinner table has already been set, where the bed is made
each morning

I want a home that belongs to me

not us

and for that I'm sorry

by Sierra Kiss (Grade Twelve)
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