

FIRST PRIZE

Where Were You When the Truth Came Out?

Where were you when the truth came out?

I was sitting on the porch and my lemonade was warm.
My nostrils flared with the fumes of change and the chimneys mailed smoked messages.
The airways filled my head with static;
the concentration worsened.
And I believed the one belief that havened in the blur.

You couldn't see the street that day.
Thickened crowds peopled the mottled curbs and smoke roses billowed from angry breaths.
The citizens hung their arms down, and reaching to their children's faces
covered eyes, lips, ears.
See no . . . speak no . . . hear no . . .
They couldn't even mutter the word.
This is how thick the truth had lozenged: frightened viscous throats.

I was thinking about a piece of song from a decade some time past.
And worm-holing through my brain it spread its words in sectioned lobes
from left to right.
It found what it was looking for, all right;
pried open the private chambers reserved for hidden thoughts
to plant a hardy seed of mischief.

Skies maroon- and purple-streaked rolled in from the left.
But even with a feat this quick, fingerprints were still visible,
the edges coated in shedding cells indicating
a truth of the fabricated nature.
Such is the reality, sometimes,
of the powers that be.

by Elizabeth Emond-Stevenson

Toronto, Ontario



SECOND PRIZE

Alternative Scenarios for a Missing Fighter Pilot

A purple heart flew overseas
blue air mail. Personal effects:
a record of Bing Crosby's *I Can't Begin
to Tell You*, a picture of Cyril with his arm
around his mother and another of Cyril circled
in brothers, a letter stating the particulars
of my uncle's death—the discovered remains
of a fighter jet, a missing ejection seat. No

skeletal remains were located. Granddad swears
Cyril's drinkin' whiskey, an old man somewhere. He leans
back, sighing in the chair he won in the local lottery.
My gran smiles and lowers her eyes, putting Cyril's
heart back in the cabinet with the pictures, the record.
I believe my grandfather and see Uncle Cyril drinking spirits
under guzzled neon. Or

posing for Hans Hartung in his industrial apartment with draughty windows.
Later on, they curl like cats under Hartung's moth-eaten
blue blanket and smoke Indian tobacco,
the war on their lips reliving the time together
in the bombed-out church.

I imagine, as a bit player in the French theatre,
his eyes circled in mascara to add drama, or pushing
a grocery cart with a boozy wheel.

No, Granddad says, he's alive. He's got some French girl
on his arm. Cyril met her at the movie house, had blue
eyes on her like a Siberian.

Cyril walks the dingy Paris streets passing a songbird singing
in the rain, collecting coins in a spit bucket.
At night he goes to Le Gemy.

I think about you missing
your mother's meals on a scratching
army cot. I think about the white cross
that marks the grave your skeleton escaped.

by Matthew Walsh
Toronto, Ontario



THIRD PRIZE

Scrimshaw Woods

Hoary sands: a panic bleached white;
Long has it been since ocean's might
Lapped at their shores, now dry as bone,
The scrimshaw woods and barren stone.

These timeless alabaster trees,
Carved with tales from the Great Disease,
Tacit life gone from this scorched land,
The scrimshaw woods, alone they stand.

Green is but a memory now,
Long lost from last porcelain bough;
Ages have spanned since moon did rise,
The scrimshaw woods saw Earth's demise.

The wind whips 'round their ivory forms,
Beaten smooth by the fitful storms;
Rain has left this forgotten place,
The scrimshaw woods, in silent grace.

They bare plaguing, untold stories,
Obelisks of limestone quarries;
What was once beast of blood and breath,
These scrimshaw woods, cherished by death.

The Great Whale's skull, its mocking gaze,
Eerie stare accuses the haze,
Who stole the ocean and the waves?
These scrimshaw woods mark final graves.

But there among the sand and dust,
By searing sun of crimson rust,
A memento of years gone past,
Scrimshaw woods, apocalypse cast.

One emerald shoot withstands all odds,
Each penance of the pagan gods;
Fragile leaves tremble through the gale,
'Round scrimshaw woods and life's last grail.

by Sarah Gutzmann

North Vancouver, British Columbia



HONOURABLE MENTION

Final Visitation

When I came in
The second time

His white shirt was lifted
Exposing chest

White with life and age
Grey and black hair

Dappling the surface
Like weeds on rippled skin sea

I could see his heart beat
Vibrating his chest cavity

Like a deep drum bass
Rattling the rubber rings

Of an old exposed speaker
His arms were spread out

Beside him on the bed
Bearing an invisible

Cross of mortal pain
Morphine bliss swaddling him

In itches a thousand spiders
Couldn't create

I wanted to bend into him
Kiss his dry wavering skin

But I didn't have the courage
Instead I took his purple hand

In mine palm on palm
I poured my love into him

It's all I knew how to do

by Vanessa Shields
Windsor, Ontario



HONOURABLE MENTION

Bound

The moon's wept pitch
tangles in the country stars,
seeps through hills
and holds forest silent.

Sealed away,
the stoked coals
of our pressed flesh
know dark, like this,
is rare.

by Ryan Hayden
Toronto, Ontario



HONOURABLE MENTION

Nightmare Rationale

When beset by nightmare dreams,
are we possessed, as it seems,
or transported to a place,
like a far-off land or space,
where “strange” is well suited,
our presence not disputed?

Scenes darting before our eyes
afford us no great surprise;
though delusory their content,
we accept them without dissent,
with no understanding sought.
As for logic? Not a thought!

Though impossible the scene,
persons long gone are met and seen,
but we’ve no time to think—
they disappear within a blink!
Be they judicious or absurd,
we’ll remember every word,

until fearful, we awaken,
to find memories are taken,
supplanted by dire dread
of events milling in our head,
that imply ill for future days.
Such are a nightmare’s ways!

by Denis Barter (82 years)
Havelock, Ontario



HONOURABLE MENTION

One Daughter's Mother

Soft sunlight and swirling dust
In a room filled with songs from a faraway land
Mother's voice is light and robust
I lift a pudgy fingered hand to my lips
"Sssshhh!" I demand . . .
Just because I can

Maybe the cells were still healthy back then

Escape from brutality
To a flat filled with dreams, hope, and apprehension
Mother's goal is totality
I shrug it all away, shielding my bruised soul
"Go!" she demands . . .
Just because she can

Maybe the cancer started to develop now

Hard work and lonely freedom
In a life of simple success and lurking danger
Mother's selections aren't random
I live and lust and go my own selfish way
"Me!" I demand . . .
Just because I am

It shows itself as an unrelenting lump

An operation takes place
The outlook is promising, the future looks bright
Mother's life continues apace
I take notice and vow to call once a week
"Die!" it demands . . .
Just because it can

The cancer spreads, first to the bones

The prognosis is dire
For a woman too young to die, too sick to live
Mother's strong spirit starts to tire
I visit more often to talk and bring food
"Help," she whimpers . . .
Just because she's sick

Next . . . to the liver

A darkened room, a rare breath
In the hospital where I was born, Mama dies
Mother's silenced forever by death
I wail in sorrow, lost love, and sad relief

“Help!” I scream . . .
Just because she can’t

Goodbye, Ma

by Melanie Flores
Toronto, Ontario



HONOURABLE MENTION

Apple Cider

The first drip
drop
of rain on a tin-can roof
reminds you that
you are not alone tonight

*{but maybe you
should be since you suck
the soul out of every cell}*

The willow wisp honeysuckles perched
pristinely on your cracked dresser

*{the one he slammed you
against and whispered
you are n o t h i n g}*

and when their shadows
flicker against the windowpane
you remember
you will never be completely alone

*{you don't know if you
should be hysterical or
comforted by this truth}*

The smell of aged books that haven't
stretched their spines in months
because you don't want
to lose that precious scent

*{it tastes like steaming
apple cider burning every
nerve in your tongue
and you can't get enough}*

and when you crack your angels
open and rearrange them
with the demons on the
neighbouring shelf, don't forget they were all
angels before you touched them

So put on your daisy dress
dance in the Pompeii leaves
write a limerick about the boy
who slipped into the sea that August morning after you let him touch you
and how he never came home but don't let him see your
seagull tears because once he catches you in
the seaweed and daisy petals
he'll never let you go

*{maybe that's what you've
wanted all along but
you just keep that thought to
yourself—right, hon?}*

by Robyn Tocker
Regina, Saskatchewan



HONOURABLE MENTION

Infractus

I wonder where the stars went
Perhaps eaten by the moon, or simply absorbed into darkness
Maybe they're screaming, silently pleading to shine
or perhaps they just don't want to

I never knew sand could be so cold
Rushing between my fingers, chasing salt water

Look, there she is, waiting on the melting black beach

Those hateful lovely pearls, falling from my eyes like so many wasted glances
Enough to thread a necklace to choke me to death

Come, come and see—she bought those beads you gave her

A chain of white lies and pretty promises accented by tattered golden thread
And when it breaks
anyone can pick it up and drop it into a pool of nothing

Hook, line, and sink 'er, to the bottom of the ocean if you can

To stand at the edge of insanity and loose pages
(covered in everything and nothing and the loneliness in between)
Scattered to the indifferent currents
silently screaming into the nothing
stagnating where my heart used to be

Where only the dark water will hear her, a million faceless shadows smiling in the black

Wishing I'd thought to bring a flashlight
Instead of cold blank paper and two empty pens
to compose wordless sonnets sung to soulless shadows

Don't get the wrong idea . . . smiles aren't always smiling

My heart should have known (a long time ago) that words only go so far
and invisible ink isn't binding, no matter how many times you write it

But she doesn't know that, so be careful

I wonder
where I left that fragile possession
I wonder
if it's lost forever

The pressure's strong down here, she might break

Or maybe that's just what
blankness
Feels like

Shatter into thousands of pieces

The poster child of apathy
perched on the edge of antipathy
Waiting for (a reason for everything) nothing

Shards left only for the fishes

They say it's safer down here

To melt into black nothing

Don't worry

And shine no longer

It doesn't hurt

You should go to the surface now

Don't worry. . . .

She won't be here when you get back

by Maria Rosvick
Crossfield, Alberta



HONOURABLE MENTION

Stealing the Bases

You took the phrase literally, as you
entered the rough diamond in which we
gathered for our makeshift effort at
America's favourite game in a
small Canadian town.

You three were all much bigger than the
seven of us, your double digits adding up to about
as much as all of our single digits put together.
Your voices had deepened just in time to
ring fearful in our soft ears.

We stood frozen as the heckling jeers you shot
flew swiftly, like your feet as you ran at
our basemen, and grabbed the oversized
beanbags we had so cleverly
converted for the event.

You were just about to the gate when
I called out to you that you
missed a base. I laughed and howled and
cajoled at your incompetence. You
stopped and looked at me.

I picked up the forgotten dusty bag and
ran in your direction, my heart
beating fast, fear and ferocity pumping like my
skinny legs as I rushed forward, bean bag
extended towards you.

"Didn't you want the full set?" I asked. "Hey,
where are you going?" I yelled after you as you
threw your loot to the ground and turned
away. "Aw, come on, steal the bases, won't you?" I
pleaded after your shrinking shadows.

What happened? Did I steal your fun?

by Karen Sylvia Rockwell
Belle River, Ontario



HONOURABLE MENTION

Marched Mute

When your favourite song has been on repeat for almost a week
because nothing sounds quite like it.

When my last meal
was a TV dinner for one.

When your dog has a new brand of kibble
because I don't know where you shopped.

When seventeen shades of hair dye
make me grit my machismo
whether they're bottles or wounding crowns.

Whistles are for pretty girls,
but I can't whistle.

Answers don't answer,
because no matter what it is,
it's wrong.

That truck breaking you,
and you crawling back together . . .
that made sense.

But when you finally could stand again,
why did you walk away?

by Eaan DeClerck
Red Deer, Alberta



HONOURABLE MENTION

Remember

Flaming metal tears at blackened skies,
Scrambling bodies churning blood-soaked dirt into macabre mire.
Soldiers' hearts yearn to love,
Beg to find peace,
Cry for fellow man.
Flesh is torn asunder
As bullets pluck life from chest.

Silence roars in moments of respite,
Moans waft through the stench
Of metal and gore and sweat.
What have we done?
Horror sifts through mind and settles upon soul.

And the gun is lifted again,
Trigger is pulled for the millionth time.
Another patch of ground is torn
From the fingers of greedy politicians.

Soil fought over,
Yet not the dirt that warrants scarring conflict.
It is the innocent who cry to be set free
From the hand of the dictator
Who would see them silent slaves.

The soldier soldiers on,
Pulling the trigger
More and more.
Wading through the blood and the sweat and the muck,
Pushing into the pit of hatred,
Wounding hearts of those who,
In another time, were neighbours.

Bombs drop,
Screams pierce.
Breathing ceases,
Bodies lie still.
War ends
Eventually,
At cost.

And, for a short while, we grip peace with starving hands and hearts.
We guard it close,
Tell our children,
Our children's children
The cost,
The price of rent minds and souls of those who stood firm
Against evil tides—
Relentless tides.

We tell them war will return,
That evil is not the real villain,
That the thief which steals memory of evil
Is our true tyrant.

We tell them to remember.

by Donna Fawcett
St. Marys, Ontario



HONOURABLE MENTION

At Tea

Wallace Stevens suggests the experience or feeling of being civilized is presented symbolically in tea—Wikipedia entry.

You sit across from me
with fingers drumming the table,
as if it's not enough
that a universe lies between us
in this little steaming kettle.

My statements turn to sighs
as you look at me askance;
your silent but telling gaze
is the teaspoon that stirs my heart.

I read the dregs,
these has-been leaves,
as if they were the words
that vanished from my tongue,
like the haze of that rooibos
you so happen to love.

With words and worlds unsaid,
what would I give to be
the delicate china cup
that touches your lips
in every scalding sip?

For KND, because rejection is much better than regret.

by Christian Ylagan
Edmonton, Alberta

