

# FIRST PRIZE

## The Grappler Inlet

the yearling rustles  
in the bushes  
to fill himself with salmon berries—  
and sneak a peek  
at the students  
studying whales  
in their neon life jackets  
and clunky hiking shoes.

in her tin-can hull,  
the *Barkley Star*  
takes us to the clouds—  
and the swells and tides—  
to listen to the *grooufs*  
and *aurgs*  
of the Steller sea lions,  
the splashes  
of the arcing orcas, and the  
booms  
of the breach.

yesterday  
i held hands with  
a sea urchin, and made a cemetery  
for the empty crab skeletons—  
so that i can remember  
the dead.

i came here broken—  
they told me it always rains here,  
but it never did.  
they shot a bear  
banger  
at the yearling—  
                  so he will learn to be afraid of us,  
                  to make sure he is not killed by us.  
on the pitted  
eighty-seven-kilometre road  
of clear cuts  
to Port Alberni,  
we finished our papers  
on *Moby Dick*,  
and i felt like the sky hawk  
that dropped  
from the stars  
gripped by Tashtego, hammered—  
angelically screaming with Satan because  
this place sunk me too—  
and the sea still rolls on too.

*by Sydney Thieneman*  
Victoria, British Columbia

# SECOND PRIZE

## **it was promising, until it wasn't**

the Cheshire moon claustrophobic in the clouds  
it takes a particular courage even to smile these days  
living on the knife edge of crisis and danger  
imprisoned by: if? what if? if i? and locked tight

there was a time when life hadn't begun to add losses  
or maybe it was a time when losses didn't prevail  
each moment an accumulation of the last  
it's a wonder anyone gets out of bed in the morning

the chilling stars brave the cold March eve  
illuminating a past that no longer survives  
only in winces and glimmers and withheld tears  
and whispers an encouraging continual regret

i don't like the night sky in March, or any other  
the expanse of possibility limited to what is seen  
laughing at how small what appears so huge is  
as the warm breeze contradicts the cold reality

born into this: her leaving and blaming the bottle  
him dying in loving arms without farewell  
her in fear of losing an autonomous identity  
he, because she took him away without remorse

he said and she said, her and him, it was love once  
and it was promising, until it wasn't  
love the exacting excuse to destroy everything  
in reflections sipped from a paper-bagged bottle

*by Andrew Lafleche*  
St. Catharines, Ontario

# THIRD PRIZE

## Thimbles and Thread

I find her alone eating a toasted sandwich  
sitting on the new La-Z-Boy  
she's watching Lidia Bastianich on the Food Network  
the house smells like wet cheese and old diapers

When I call her name and she sees the kids step into the foyer  
she looks at us takes a heavy second to remember  
then her crumb-cornered mouth explodes into a smile

Her long-term memory is vast and vibrant  
so that's where we go on this Tuesday afternoon  
I begin with thimbles ask her *plastic or metal?*  
we shift to thread she tells me #56 that's  
the best kind for her sewing machine she thinks  
it's on the back porch holding hope for use

We're all holding hope for her each in our own ways  
ways that are different and frustrating  
ways that are tearing us apart like a rip in a pretty skirt  
I think we'll never mend

She transports me across the ocean from Genova to Canada  
ten days on a grand ship tucked in the basement for the third class  
*But my friend and I, we snuck to first class and got lost in the hallways*  
her face is twenty again her eyes glassy with mischief  
*No, I was never scared everyone was so nice when we landed in Halifax*  
*I cried saying goodbye*  
then three days on the train to Windsor and four weeks later her wedding day  
did you know she made her wedding dress and two bridesmaids' dresses in four weeks?

She turns her face to mine  
smashing us into the present  
our eyes lock  
*I love you so much*  
she says fiercely

my heart bashes against my ribs  
reaching for her

*by Vanessa Shields*  
Windsor, Ontario

# HONOURABLE MENTION

## **on the discovery of shells**

we walk out  
across the tea-cream sand,  
across the widening  
swath of bare-ridged bottom to  
the tonguing rim of the tide-fallen sea,  
jigging erratic  
to the tune of its rumbling rush, grumbling retreat.  
going along and along the long inward curve  
of wind-carved, salted, wet-licked beach,  
reduced to particulate absurdity  
by the unbroken universe of sea and sky:  
and always and everywhere lie dry  
shells, the strewn halves shards, slivers  
of catastrophic thousands,  
of nursery-rhyming cockles,  
holy scallops,  
dully secular clams:  
and here and here,  
the astonishing whorled vault and curl of moon snails  
exuded shields of calcium and lustrous nacre,  
symmetry and secret  
breached in the shattering oneness of death;  
we move among them,  
heads bowed to the wind, inhaling incense of the oestrous sea,  
searchers  
armoured, manifest,  
undisclosed,  
uttering cries at our discoveries.

*by Robert Pritchard*

Richards Landing, Ontario

# HONOURABLE MENTION

## **Tree Stumps in Autumn Dusk**

In a mustard slum of late November light  
And slovenly halos of pearl and rust  
Scaffold stumps  
Recite a hemorrhaged loss  
Climbing quiet  
A severed weight of emptiness  
To another dusk.  
Halfway to heaven  
An oak  
Stabs  
Silence in the eye  
So abrupt  
The shadow half of nothing  
Denominates  
An ailing sky . . .

As if this epitaph of absence  
So epitomized  
Might salvage something  
From the rancid half light  
Of a jaundiced eye

Something  
From the laboured foreboding  
Of a winter sky  
For such an exultation  
Of simple oak  
So compromised

If only in regret  
Perhaps  
Some afterthought denied

Or slipshod chance of “maybe”  
From an emaciated sky

*by Richard Grace*  
Toronto, Ontario

# HONOURABLE MENTION

## **When I Miss You**

You only miss me when you're drunk  
but I miss you when I'm drowning  
in the scent of green tea  
that I fell in love with back that autumn  
yet I still can't stand the taste of.

And I miss you when I'm lost  
in the corners of university libraries  
taking in the smell of aged  
and dusty book jackets  
that are longing for human touch.

And I miss you when I'm standing  
under street-side spotlights  
in January snowstorms  
watching snowflakes dance in darkness  
and waiting for you to kiss me  
for the very first time again.

And I miss all of your catchphrases  
that I laughed at without understanding  
and then later came to love  
through every single eye roll  
that accompanied your every punch line.

And I miss you when I see  
the most brilliant of blues  
the world has to offer  
that can still not match your eyes  
that I can still see when I close mine.

Years have passed and you  
only find me at the bottom  
of a bottle of whiskey  
but I find your memory  
everywhere.

*by Angelica Lachance*  
Windsor, Ontario

# HONOURABLE MENTION

## Homeless

On my journey to finding myself,  
I  
Stumbled upon a sea of foreign cultures  
And began to drown.

“Oil and water don’t mix.”  
The face of my heavy-smoking,  
Demonic grade eight science teacher sometimes  
Blends  
In with those of the “popular kids,”  
And for reasons I can’t explain,  
They haunt me still.

“Go home.”

With weights attached to my limbs,  
I had no choice  
But to be the water, glued to the bottom;  
I had no right to  
Assimilate  
Because, apparently, 9/11 was my fault.  
And so were the droughts in Africa,  
The earthquakes of Haiti,  
And the bruises around my eyes.

My therapist thinks I struggle with  
Identity,  
And maybe it was the clothes  
In the trunk of my car  
That tipped her off.  
Or maybe it was the fact I don’t  
Have a driver’s licence nor  
A destination, and that her waiting room  
Has become my bed.

I work fourteen hours a day to dull the  
Pain,  
And if there were more hours in a day,  
I’d spend them working—  
Money is the ultimate form of comfort  
For a detached soul.

The face of my grandfather  
Escapes my memory,  
Yet he appears in my dreams constantly.  
“Why did you not cry for me?”  
“I don’t deserve to mourn your loss.”  
“Why do you not cherish our memories?”  
“Because being with you felt like home.”

I am one of “The Outsiders,”  
Drowning under a layer of grease.  
But we will never mix;  
I will forever be  
Homeless.

*by Batool Rayyan*  
Surrey, British Columbia



# HONOURABLE MENTION

## Home

Foam licked my ankles  
And sea spray kissed my face.  
I heard the ocean calling me  
To a far-off place.

With sand stuck to sandals,  
The gulls screamed overhead.  
The waves crashed around me.  
I'll whisper what they said.

They said, "This is your home,  
And Sea Girls speak the truth.  
If you stay with us forever,  
You'll have eternal youth."

I thought about their offer  
To make the ocean my new home.  
The sun slipped past horizons;  
Sandy miles I did roam.

I think I'd like it forever,  
In this place that never dies.  
I think I'd be at peace here,  
In the place where my heart lies.

The moon shone on the water,  
Dazzling the night.  
So, I kicked off my shoes and bottoms  
And walked straight into the light.

Maids wrapped me in their waters  
And made silver of my hair.  
They clothed me in their curtains  
Of woven stardust from the air.

I swallowed in the Sea Noise  
And danced to its beat  
Of waves that crashed on shores,  
Whose waters I'd soon meet.

I'd like to live forever  
In this place I'd make my own,  
For forever is a while—  
But not so long when you're *home*.

*by Raphaela Pavlakos*  
Mississauga, Ontario

# HONOURABLE MENTION

## **Vacancy**

I am a home  
with cracks along  
the walls and  
holes in the roof.  
With broken-down,  
rusty locks and  
smashed windows  
that no longer look  
like mosaics.  
My heart has collected  
layers of dust because  
no one stays long enough  
to take care of it.  
But why would they?  
I cannot be the  
shelter they need.

*by Nicole Abas*  
Vancouver, British Columbia

# HONOURABLE MENTION

## **imp**

There is a small  
grey monster who  
slavers on my left shoulder,  
gobbling up inspiration  
and spitting out sense,  
and I don't have the heart  
to swat him away.

He muses and peruses  
the words he sees,  
pointing tiny talons  
at subject-verb disagreements  
and awkward phrasing  
and the tritest of clichés.

Sometimes I shout at him  
to be quiet and leave me alone,  
and he sullenly slinks back, grumbling  
into the hollow of my collarbone  
and tapping his claws  
until I let him out again.

He's a necessity, you see—  
there will always be essays,  
stories, poems, emails—  
and no one knows  
better than him  
where to break a line in two  
and when to mend it whole again.  
My monster thrives on revision,  
picking apart precarious prose and  
knocking the bits into place  
until they're constructed sturdily enough  
to weather the harshest critical storm.

The glint in his eyes:  
so eager to fix me,  
the brute,  
and it hurts when his nails  
dig into my skin.  
He cackles with every corrected word.

But I love my little pet.  
Without him,  
those subjects and verbs would  
continue to quarrel  
until the neighbours complain.

*by Katherine S. Palakovic*  
Hamilton, Ontario

# HONOURABLE MENTION

## **(f)loss is a luxury**

lost a pint of blood  
(g)one straight to the head  
from the boiling of my fist  
crushing  
the post of a bus handle  
shared with a man  
who's also done things  
to (get) her  
with the lips  
that i miss  
that i kissed  
before and after  
the (s)laughter  
but now  
nothing matters  
more to me  
than the fact  
that your face has  
a couple  
of teeth  
too many

for my liking

*by Giuseppe Di Lonardo*  
Montréal, Québec

# HONOURABLE MENTION

## Choppers

The decision was made that they had to depart,  
She was well overdue for a healthy fresh start.  
Because they'd been hurting and causing her grief,  
The dentist hauled out most of her teeth.

So taking the bull by the horns, as they say,  
She signed up for new choppers one winter day.  
To do the job right, she needed some freezing,  
The doc was an expert at gently easing  
A needle that seemed as long as her leg.  
She thought about bolting, but wisely, she stayed.

She felt not a thing in a very short while  
As the work commenced on her brand-new smile.  
She felt her lip swell like an oversized grape.  
Next was her nose, which grew wildly out of shape.  
How would she breathe with her mouth full of tools  
And a nose big and wide like some sort of ghou!

The denturist was the next man in line,  
Humming and measuring and smiling: a good sign.  
Though her face looked as if she'd forgotten to duck  
And was whacked in the mouth with a hockey puck,  
Her temp teeth he promised to make in a jiffy,  
So, soon, she would be looking quite nifty.

A diet of soup while she healed was just killing,  
She needed a meal that was much more fulfilling.  
What could be better than something with eggs  
To comfort her gums and new dental pegs?  
An omelette would just about hit the right spot,  
*I'll add sliced cheese for more flavour, she cheerily thought.*

That's when the wheels met the road, so they say.  
The cheese grabbed her uppers and threatened to stay.  
She wrangled and twisted with wild gyrations  
Using every trick in her imagination  
To unstick the cheese that seemed welded in place,  
Giving her quite a comical face.  
Then . . . finally scraped loose to her great relief  
And dislodged from her brand-new teeth.

She sat down for a while, reliving the scene,  
Thankful that none of her neighbours had seen  
Her digging and poking, making strangled sounds,  
Trotting, and hopping up and down.  
*It must have been funny, she surmised with some chuckles,  
My hand in my mouth way up to my knuckles.*

She'll remember this day for the rest of time,  
Each morning, all day until her bedtime.  
It sounds like a story: a really big whopper,  
The day cheese got stuck to her brand-new choppers.

*by Barbie-Jo Smith*  
Calgary, Alberta

# HONOURABLE MENTION

## **Paper Cranes**

A box came today,  
lightweight,  
layered in packing tape,  
full of paper cranes.

I knew they were yours  
from the little fold in their beak  
you always liked to add.

“Sets them apart  
from the other cranes,”  
you would say,  
“makes them my own.”

Looking in the box,  
I didn’t have to count  
to know there would be  
one thousand cranes.

Other than the birds,  
there was only one slip of paper  
with your small printing:

“I wish my hand were holding yours.”

*by Robyn Petrik*  
Port Coquitlam, British Columbia