

# FIRST PRIZE

## Weary Traveller

The snow lies thick, like a feather duvet,  
while moonlight shifts upon fields of hay.

I look to the sky and adjust my pack;  
frostbite advises me to turn back.

My knees are weak, my thoughts weary. . . .  
I need to rest; my eyes feel dreary.

The snow builds up, causing resistance;  
a light appears in the far distance.

Contemplation swirls around in my head:  
*Do I follow this light? Could it lead to a bed?*

I once heard that people unlock their doors,  
and travellers sleep upon their floors.

Candlelight guided even the most lost  
and gave them a place away from the frost.

My stomach roars, my face feels numb,  
the last I ate was but a small crumb.

I spot a farmhouse in candle glow;  
perhaps it can shield me away from the snow.

The door's unlocked, I climb inside,  
I feel some guilt, perhaps my pride.

Flames from the fire show I'm shabbily dressed,  
my eyes feel heavy, shoulders stressed.

Snow lies thick like a feather duvet,  
while moonlight shifts upon fields of hay.

*by Olivia Carlen* (Grade Nine)  
Campbellford District High School  
Campbellford, Ontario

# FIRST PRIZE

## **Ink**

Trailing down the withered floor, stone-cold knocking at the door.  
Greasy hands and pen wrought stare, wood-cut shavings lace our hair.  
Drenched beneath the black cascade, a laughing hymn, the jukebox played.  
Listen for their sharpened calls, leaking through the cartoon walls.

Take a stroke of hollowed noise, erasing sense, the paintbrush poised.  
The melted crayons become caffeine, the liquid lead is our vaccine.  
Drinking paper cuts our throats, chokes back karaoke notes.  
Faces masked in coloured smiles, dissolving into splattered piles.

Gloved hands tearing out the pages, concepts fade through endless ages.  
Seats all empty, booked in rows, projection lit, the beauty glows.  
Stumble, limping down the halls, frame by frame, the pencil calls.  
Slipping with a tainted smirk, their glowing pupils, how they lurk.

Palettes placed in perfect spectrum, begging quills with false affection.  
Bones of scissors, slicing thin, the classic theme song in the din.  
Tell our jokes of innocence, laughter rising, the plot imprints.  
Break down all this crass inception, the ink gives us our new reflection.

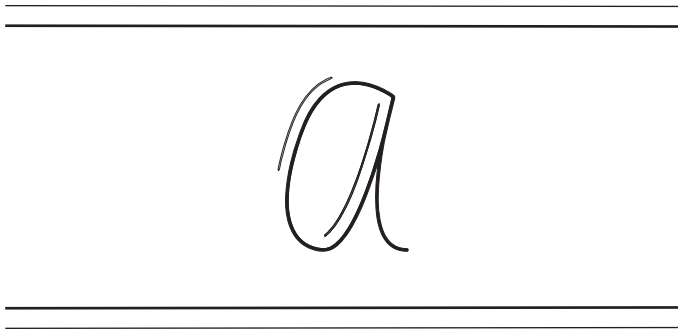
*by Ash McDonald* (Grade Ten)  
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# FIRST PRIZE

## The Clutter in My Room

Nothing puts me on edge more more than a cluttered room.  
My cluttered room. disorganization everything of My  
I know strewn about has me itching to put  
It all back in its place in my place  
And be able to feel as though I can find each (thought) as needed.  
Clutter strips all reality from the room. thoughts wreak of *hatred*, wreak of *frustration*.  
The noisiness of Mess is enough to mask the *beauty*  
Within. the mess consumes me.  
My mess My mess doesn't have To remain.  
I long to know the potential that rests Beyond  
The mess. My mess Enough  
That would be the wallpaper within.  
Enough to see the way the *ppaattteerrnns* loop  
In such an intricate dance, as though to cast  
Out my thoughts and paint an image of days better  
To come. days wherein  
I understand and I am able to put all other struggles  
At bay.  
The wallpaper. My wallpaper.  
Teaches through its colours  
That those days are only minutes from my grasp  
If I only continue to reach. to silence the voices that show me  
How awful I am, how all I Deserve is to end.  
The mess my mess  
Is only as intimidating as I Let myself be.  
The destruction of my own mind  
Will only remain if I don't start cleaning.  
I fear I'm all I have. though maybe I am all  
I need. I am  
Enough to clear  
The clutter in my room.

*by Josh Burris* (Grade Eleven)  
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# FIRST PRIZE

## Tracing

Can you help me write your name? He looks up to me  
Plaintively, with caution and curiosity.  
Sure, I say with a smile.  
We write, attentively.

We start with block letters.  
I take his hand and guide it carefully,  
Tracing the peaks and troughs  
Of each letter;  
Every space, calculated symmetry.

Next, we do cursive.  
Letters become characters.  
They move cohesively,  
Waltzing off the page,  
Flowing to the end, rhythmically.

Again, he asks,  
This time impatiently.  
The flourishes seem poignant,  
Slanted on misery.  
These characters bleed, heavily.

I look down at the page.  
It's loud,  
It screams—  
Loud, indulgent, and  
Flourished with redundancies.

I look down at the page.  
It's blank, like me.  
Retracing the letters in my name  
And who I'd like to be,

I write, attentively.

*by Afkaheen Alam* (Grade Twelve)  
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# SECOND PRIZE

## Torment

Gripped by the darkness that's hovering near,  
My mind is controlled by old habits of fear,  
Like a host forced into inviting a guest,  
Only the guest is that of feeling depressed.

A hell filled with torment is where I reside,  
Access to leave is strictly denied.  
Ravenous am I for a hint of bliss,  
For it's indefinitely seized my happiness.

It rules my organs with not a bit of remorse,  
I can only but window-shop for a changing of course.  
So, it continues to haunt me; now I'm stuck in this slump.  
I've given cries of surrender, my white flags are up.

And if there is still freedom trapped inside my body,  
It's simply a crumb overcome by a tsunami.  
Because I room with a hidden demon;  
A battle of mine that will never be beaten.

I can feel it ruling, I know that I'm losing.  
My heart's filled with grief so troublesome it's gruelling.  
Excruciated by my injury,  
I am lost in my misery.

*by Madeline Wood* (Grade Nine)  
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Edmonton, Alberta

# SECOND PRIZE

## How to Rebuild Ruins

*Step One:* Pretend the sky isn't shattering into billions of tear-shaped drops,  
And if you can't, then collect the tears in buckets  
And rebuild the heavens with something stronger than hope  
And let the rain wash away all misplaced affection.

*Step Two:* Repeat their name until it no longer sounds right.  
Disregard the sacrosanct utterance and forget it, then  
Repeat your name enough times to reteach yourself its importance,  
And if you can't, then say your name until it seems just as vital.

*Step Three:* Cry until the world allows you peace.  
Let yourself break and blame the universe  
Because you are not Atlas, and the sky is not your burden,  
And when the weight is a little easier to bear, then pick yourself up and breathe.

*Step Four:* Reinvent yourself into someone current.  
Take the time and the tears and the memories and fashion yourself  
Into a person a little stronger than you were,  
And focus on repairing the damage with something better than Band-Aids.

*Step Five:* Let the forest consume your routes and find an original way through.  
Find unique flowers to plant on the path away from pain,  
And when people begin questioning what happened to you, tell them  
Your plants were poisoning you, and you needed something fresh.

*Step Six:* Forgive yourself for everything you've done and failed to do.  
If you can't, then ignore the guilt just as you learned to ignore the truth.  
Let your heart have the time to create something stronger,  
To keep them outside your walls instead of inside as a mockery of devotion.

*Step Seven:* Don't hate them for it;  
Because hate won't surpass love so long as they are only separated  
By a distinction of virtuous or villainous instead of too much or too little passion.  
Remember that indifference is what you need to achieve.

*Step Eight:* Lather, rinse, and repeat until you're okay,  
And for every person who ever makes you weak.

**by Heather Law** (Grade Ten)  
Fort Nelson Secondary School  
Fort Nelson, British Columbia

# SECOND PRIZE

## **Exploding into Nothing**

They say if you are near a bomb when it goes off, you turn into pink dust.  
In seconds, you are gone,  
Raining on the earth with your own personal fairy dust.

*Tick*

From a heart that loves  
And a brain that knows  
And hands that care  
To nothing.

*Tick*

Nothing,  
No try-agains, no restarts, no second lives,  
Nothing but dark with no end,  
An endless restless sleep. Hard to fathom, really.

*Tick*

I get it, though.  
I get how an explosion can turn something into nothing.

*Tick*

A fit of rage.  
With every word, you spit venom,  
Getting louder and louder, the words blending with the warning beeps.

*Tick*

*Boom.*

It's all over.  
The heart that beats for you, now silenced.  
That mind that knows you goes blank,  
And the hands that care for you go stiff.

I understand how in seconds everything can be destroyed,  
How life itself can turn into nothing—  
Because he gave me first-hand experience.

**by Jessica Thodas** (Grade Eleven)  
Holy Trinity Academy  
Okotoks, Alberta



# SECOND PRIZE

## Nosedive

First,  
 when you are  
 young, the Pegasus  
 looms over you—so big,  
 and breathtaking, almost  
 You can imagine flying  
 with the wind in your  
 your feet. But then, you  
 grow up, and suddenly, the Pegasus doesn't seem so large anymore.  
 thoughts change from fighting dragons to learning about math and spelling, the  
 Pegasus nibbling at your pockets. You don't remember when it became so small.  
 As the years go by, you find yourself noticing that other people's steeds are not  
 present anymore—gone. Soon, you are the only one left, and then all the harsh  
 comments begin: “Stay focused!” “Stop all the musing!”  
 “No one likes the dreamers.” Looking at my  
 Pegasus, I can see the hurt within his  
 eyes. Bitter men order  
 me to get rid of  
 him. He is so  
 small now, but his  
 wings always unfurl.

*by Kaitlyn Mison* (Grade Twelve)  
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 Brantford, Ontario

# THIRD PRIZE

## **Pinky Promise**

Every night, as my mom tucks me into bed,  
I ask her for a pinky promise,  
A promise that everything will be okay—but  
To ask that of someone is unreasonable;  
Like Atlas, you'd be holding the weight of the world on your shoulders—  
But she still holds out her hand and promises  
And continues to keep that promise to this very day.

My mom's shifts start when the sun kisses the sky  
And end as the moon rises  
Bright white on inky black.  
She trudges into the room,  
Lead arms that ache with every swing,  
Heavy eyes pleading to meet the shore of dark under bags,  
But she still proofreads my essay  
And washes my uniform  
And makes our lunches  
And tucks me in, promising that everything will be okay  
Then starts all over when the sun kisses the sky.

Looking at you is like looking at a reflection;  
My mouth shares your beaming smile,  
My voice has stolen your raspy voice.  
But the weight of some of the cruel words my mouth utters  
(Never a thank-you)  
Makes your arms ache even more,  
Like Prometheus,  
Gifting his people with the pleasure of fire  
But being punished.  
I'm the vultures  
That cause you hurt and pain on that lonely mountain;  
Yet, like Prometheus,  
You still love the people you created  
Unconditionally.

*by Samantha Melo-Centanni* (Grade Nine)  
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Toronto, Ontario

# THIRD PRIZE

## I Miss Us

I miss the us we never got to be,  
I miss the chances we never got to take.  
I miss the trouble we never got into; I miss the fights we've never had,  
I miss not being able to annoy you.  
I miss not experiencing so many things with you—  
From going to the grocery store to going to England.  
I miss never being able to meet your friends; I miss you making fun of me.  
I miss knowing you were mine and I was yours; I miss you being with us.  
I miss you being a part of our living family; I miss the chances we never got—  
The first day when we could go to the mall alone without Mom,  
The chance to have Christmas with us both, every year.  
I miss us giving each other bad presents; I miss all the memories we don't have—  
And never will.  
I want a chance to cheer you on; I want a chance to be proud of you.  
I miss you embarrassing me in front of my friends,  
I miss me embarrassing you right back.  
I want to see you learn to drive—I miss that we'll never fight over the car,  
And that I'll never beg you to drive me places; I miss singing off-key in the front seat with you.  
I miss that it will never be us against the world—  
Or against Mom, anyway.  
I miss that we never got to ridicule each other;  
I miss forcing you to watch rom-coms that you'd already seen a hundred times.  
I miss making fun of you and your secret crush; I miss you making fun of me and mine.  
I want to see you on your first day of work,  
I want to see you go off to university.  
I've missed the chance for people to say, "Oh, you're Derek's sister."  
I've missed the chance to be your little sis.  
I've missed the chance to know you and love you.  
I miss the chance that you never got—  
I miss you,  
Derek.

*by Marilla Pekter* (Grade Ten)  
Oak Bay High School  
Victoria, British Columbia

# THIRD PRIZE

## Inner Agita

There's always an open window in my room.  
White curtains with flowers halt my view.

Hesitating, am I, to take a glimpse outside,  
Afraid to lose myself  
Or, perhaps, find my old self.

When a soft breeze passes by,  
My heart flutters like the curtains' dancing waves,  
Sometimes letting the rays draw small suns on the floor.

Without looking at you,  
I slowly roll into your bosom to greet the mellow scent  
Your sunray-tinted cloak conveys.

As the sun sets,  
White turns into orange, coral, dark pink . . . coal black.

I cannot see the waves nor the small suns anymore.  
But I can feel the brisk sighs of the sky,  
Sometimes giving me shivers railing down my spine.

I can hear the cicadas cry.  
Their taunting thirst buries me more deeply into my covers  
As I drown in a bottomless well.

Time skates on my window to announce the arrival of winter,  
And my well fills with frost flowers,  
Halting my descent for a while.

I slowly let go of time and open the two dreaded faucets.

The clouds' gentle knocks wake me up,  
Afloat, drifting through my room.  
As I get up, it all trickles away.

I can see the waves and the small suns again.  
And this time, it is your mellow scent that greets me  
As the flowers float to me with the warm words you blow through the window.

Without a word,  
I slowly draw the curtains and fall into your solace.

*by Annette Hong Kim* (Grade Eleven)  
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# THIRD PRIZE

## Dead Man's Dirt

I am a worker, digging is what I do;  
And one day soon, I may dig the dirt for you.  
It's honest work, I tell you real and true,  
Yet, in this trade of digging Dead Man's Dirt, we have so very few.

I am looked down upon because of my chosen digging trade;  
The people see it as morbid, and I am not very highly paid.  
I am not rich, and I will never achieve glory or fame,  
But I need no more, because rich or poor,  
The Dead Man's Dirt, upon my shirt, is always just the same.

The holes I dig are always six feet down, in the cemetery just outside of town.  
It is, oh, so quiet there, just me and the dead,  
And I'm always at peace while I prepare another dead man's bed.

I find no love in the town, for the people want no Dead Dirt-stained man walking around.  
They would rather not see me or acknowledge I'm there  
But still whisper about just how strange I am and what I choose to wear.

My Dead Man's Dirt paycheques do not allow me to purchase clothes such as they,  
And the dirt from my work would quite ruin them anyway.  
But I have no shame in what I do, and I know that the dead appreciate it too.  
It's to them I talk as I work, their dirt the same whether an officer, a criminal, or a judge's clerk.

I've been here long, and the end I can see,  
But I wonder, *Who will dig my dirt for me?*  
When I am laid six feet down in the cemetery just outside of town,  
I wonder if when someone dies, there will be a frown  
When they show up and see no hole in which to lay their loved one down.

Who will dig the dirt? I cannot say, for it is work far too honest and true for those such as they.

I was paid just a little, my clothes threadbare and worn;  
All they did was belittle, and all I received was scorn.  
But I truly hope that town will see, just how much they should have appreciated me.

For I am there no longer to dig the Dead Man's Dirt,  
I am laid down to rest, surrounded by my friends who knew my work the best.  
And I still smile six feet below the loam,  
In the Dead Man's Dirt, which is now my home.

**by Cole Vankoughnett** (Grade Twelve)

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