

FIRST PRIZE

Smoke

I rise from a crater—weightless,
Floating from a burning shell.
I am smoke again, a memory of chaos.

Bodies lie strewn,
Eyes open—glassy, blank, and dead.
What is not black is pale and cold.

Acrid smell of smoke,
My odour spreads—choking, blackening, corrupting,
Filling the noses and hearts of men with the familiar scent of death.

I embrace the solid bodies,
Brush their cool faces and smouldering clothes and flesh.

On I go

Past the trenches; men huddle in the aftershock,
Blind now to one another, oblivious to touch,
Deaf to their own senseless groaning.

Further I go

Past more trenches; men swarm like ants,
Turned hard by the war, their hearts gone numb.

Past the village and the medic's tent:
A line of stretchers pushing to get in;
Blackened bodies missing fingers, eyes, limbs;
The constant shouts, groans, and praying from the tent . . .
All melt into an incomprehensible murmur,
Like waves rising and falling at home.

So far away now.

I move further on and further up
Into the clouds and break free into cool evening light.

Clouds, so oblivious, unburdened
By the fighting, the hatred, and suffering below,
The golden pink light of hope no longer able
To penetrate the dark hearts of men.

Is it not enough when they are waiting for the end?

by Maya Van de Mosselaer (Grade Nine)
St. Mildred's-Lightbourn School
Oakville, Ontario



FIRST PRIZE

I Am Not a Poem

My face is not the night sky.
Don't treat me like I'm so mysterious.
My eyes are not planets, my lips are not milky ways.
And even though freckles dot my face like constellations
They are not there for you to connect.

I am not a poem.

My fingerprints are not maps;
They are not here to guide you—even though you are lost.

I am not a poem.

I am not a sinking ship lost at sea.
My seasick heart is not some ludicrous beacon
That will carry me home.
I am my own lifeboat,
And although I may be seasick
You're no lighthouse;
I'd rather be lost.

I am not a poem.

My heart is not a glass house,
And I most definitely did *not*
Give you a hammer
To start smashing.

I am not a poem.

My soul is not yours for the keeping.
You believe you come first, and trust me, I thought the same.
But I am not some girl in a poem
Who falls for every pinched hip
And flickered smile.

I am not a poem.

But I have a brain.
And I have finally learned
The problem with putting other people first:
They believe you come second.

by Anastasia Gorontzy-Slack (Grade Ten)
Shawnigan Lake School
Shawnigan Lake, British Columbia



FIRST PRIZE

Garden Thoughts

Blades of grass caress the sky, but when the wind strikes, beauty and chaos converge
like two lovers frantic under the moon.
Multifaceted swords dance to disaster, each clash ringing out in thick, rich blood-song.
I feel safe in this tangled net,
wrapped in layers that stick like old blankets torn raw from moths.
They cling too close to me, and leave latticed imprints.
I can be smaller, though. I can shrink and shrink to fit this armour of threaded needs.
I can be less.

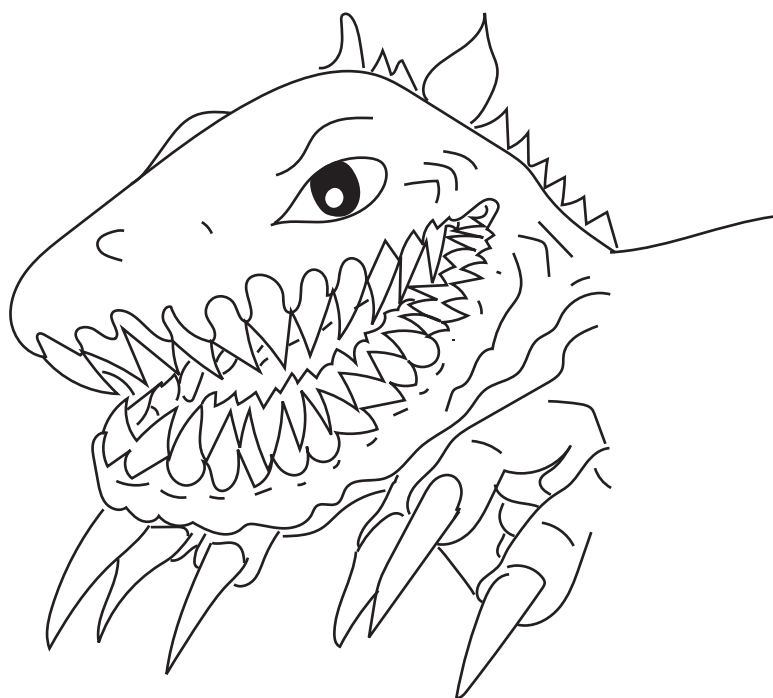
I can be less for the eight midnight pearls,
sick with an empty desire.
They might brush over me now and again,
but the webs are spun so thick I can't tell if they're lingering on me,
or ravishing some other entangled afterthought.
I will beg in silence for the poison pain staining the inside of my eyelids a jewelled violet.
I will give, and I will give,
and I will be less.

An eight-legged body came crawling from the earth,
grasping over upturned dirt for my garden sandal.
I let it kiss the soft skin at the top of my foot.
I will be less.

Until winter freezes the heart pumping everything I could ever give.
Until the blades rust into sweet crunching mulch.
Until the frost creeps over pointed toes and its legs curl up under its body.

by Jamie Robinson (Grade Eleven)
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Maple Ridge, British Columbia





FIRST PRIZE

The Monsters

We are used to being told
The monsters are lurking under our beds.
They're hiding in the closet,
Or behind locked doors.
They host meetings in abandoned houses
Or alleyways filled with shadows.
They exist in movies
And storybooks.
The monsters were used as a way to put us to sleep.
We were continuously told to not
"Let the bed bugs bite."
But the bugs have been biting,
Although the monsters are not
Tall, furry creatures
With fangs or a growl.
They don't hide under my bed
Or in the closet. They don't hide in alleyways
Waiting to scare me.
They are the ones I sit next to
On the bus,
In class,
Or even hold hands with.
Because once you grow up,
You learn
The monsters
Have piercing blue eyes
Or dark skin.
They have brown curly hair,
Or straight blond locks.
They are the ones you pass while
Picking up milk from the store,
Or walk by on your way to school.
You learn at an age—
Sooner or later,
The easy way
Or the hard way—
That not all people are monsters,
But all monsters are people.

by Emily Stachow (Grade Twelve)
St. Joseph's School
Windsor, Ontario



SECOND PRIZE

Mother

Across the room, my mother sat
Hunched over
In grief or disappointment, I could not tell

Sitting that way, she was unrecognizable
So spiritless, so sad, so shaky
So small

A timid, tremulous sob escaped from the woman, swelled
Filled the frigid air—
Which already held me captive in its numbing grasp—
And broke down a dam somewhere in my mind
Releasing a flash flood of tumbling childhood memories
Warm vibrant summer days spent
Lazing on an emerald sea of fresh grass
Cozying up during the frosty winter
Against mugs of steaming hot chocolate

My mind kept leaping back in time, but halted
In astonishment when I saw my mother as
A little girl just like me
All smiles and sunshine
Fingers sticky from a dripping Popsicle
Next my mind backtracked and I watched her
Grow up, marry, and
Raise children
I saw her as she was now
Hunched over, collapsing
Under the weight of life

Finally I realized
The tiny, trembling woman before me—
My tall strong mother
And the young toddler glowing with the merriness of childhood—
Are one and the same

by Kaylin Xu (Grade Nine)
Sir Winston Churchill Secondary School
Vancouver, British Columbia



SECOND PRIZE

Lucernae de Leonem

The mane of the lion burns bright and yellow
The higher he holds his proud head, the more he wavers, flickers
His glowing amber coat keeps him warm
In this barren, breezy November room
He keeps me warm, too

But his electric-blue eyes show the true heat inside
He fights valiantly in the cold wind to survive
Everything around him drips away
And though he is strong, the ice-wind defeats him
His once golden fur falls away, he was proud once
In this frosty, unforgiving December room
I was proud once, too

Now nothing is left but his hard, black core
Still standing, but slight, crumbling
He lives alone on his melted wax pedestal
In this cement-and-bars January room
I am alone, too

by *Emily McIntyre* (Grade Ten)
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Kamloops, British Columbia



SECOND PRIZE

The Me Generation

The “Me Generation,” that is our name;
 We didn’t pick it, yet, we still get the blame.
 We photograph ourselves, then are told it’s self-tainting;
 Yet, didn’t Napoleon sit hours for a painting?
You’ve murdered our planet, stripped and burnt it bare,
 Gave it to us gift-wrapped, then told us, “Do your share.”
 We can fill our minds past capacity over the www dot.
 Yet, you’ve programmed into our cores that knowledge it is not.
Shamed for using this technology you once shoved down our throats,
 In this ocean, we are lost ships you simply won’t let float.
 Tattoos are prohibited because “we’re too young for such choices,”
 Yet, at fifteen we choose our futures, school snuffs out our voices.
To be successful, you say “go to school,” and I laugh since it’s funny,
 ’Cause I can’t go to school if I don’t have the money.
 And I can’t get the money since there’s no time for its earning.
 Since I’m suffocating in homework, that feeds the flames in which I’m burning.
I’m burning, I’m burning, like Icarus, my old friend,
 Who just wanted to fly but instead met his end,
 Like me, whose wax wings are melting the more I try and I try;
 I’m plummeting, I can feel the wind, but did you not say I’d fly?
So forgive us for being the Me Generation, but we are in terror,
 Since you judge our behaviour without margin for error.
 You left us naught but a crumbling future and a social battle,
 You tell us to be leaders, yet, you drive us all like cattle.
This generation is falling past the clouds you said we’d own.
 We’re scared; we know we’ll end up back in this empty home.
 So forgive us, the Me Generation, for thinking of ourselves—
 Someone has to.

by Darby Huk (Grade Eleven)
Iona Catholic Secondary School
Mississauga, Ontario



SECOND PRIZE

Take Me Back

Take me back to the cul-de-sac
Where herbs of thyme and rosemary
Bloom, handpicked by you like a
Bouquet of roses given to
Me beside your pale-green garage
On an August afternoon.

Take me back to the cul-de-sac,
A circle of endless youth.
With summer nights and water fights,
Skipping stones by the stream, and
Ice cream to satisfy sweet tooths.

Take me back to the cul-de-sac,
Our secret kisses cloaked by the night.
Petite hands dancing along the
Freckles decorating your skin
Like the myriad of stars in sight.

But life is prone to wanderlust.
The rosemary and thyme you selected
For my bouquet are devour'd by weeds.
Their thorns bite my hand with malice.
How could nature be so callous?

Ghostly strangers occupy these
Houses of green and navy blue.
Or maybe the stranger is me,
Intruding on their peace in my
Quest to find vestiges of you.

The spots of your pale-green garage
Are worn down from years of use,
But I remember the summer nights,
And water fights, and tracing the
Freckles only painted on you.
Take me back to the cul-de-sac.

by Grayson Chong (Grade Twelve)
St. Augustine Catholic High School
Markham, Ontario



THIRD PRIZE

Yutta-Hey

I think I'm lost; I'm not quite sure,
I could almost swear I've been here before.
Where the path is narrowed by burgundy leaves
And the towers obscured when finally I breathe—

What disbelief that one breath brought
As my lungs swell till they're full.
My shoulders drop, no longer fraught
By skin too tight to fill.
My tongue grows lax, no longer crass,
For my watchers, my jury, my critics, my class,
And for once my mask is my own.

My spine, like a cripple hunched
By great expectation's lead weight,
Straightens once more in the red autumn light,
No help from pillars or brace.

The silence, I realize, that grated before
Is in fact not quite so still.
And the wind that howls and tears at my scarf
Is naught when I feel no chill.

The noise in my head, it quiets at last
Away from the stifling crowd,
And for a welcome second I have no future or past,
Undaunted by deeds not allowed.

Free from the weight of familiar eyes,
I shout to the oblivion sky:
"Yutta-hey, yutta-hey!
It is a good day to die."

*Yutta-hey: (phr.) lit. "It is a good day to die"
A battle cry of the Cherokee Indians—
not a wish to die, but rather a complete,
content feeling of life at the moment.*

by Michelle Wei (Grade Nine)
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Mississauga, Ontario



THIRD PRIZE

Dreamer's Hope

Childish laughter escapes your mouth
and you look around to all the blank faces
wondering where all their hope
came and went away to.

A dreamer at heart
you close your eyes shut
and can see a bright future
through your dark eyelids.

The grass stirs as the wind races;
you fall down to look up at the clouds
and believe you will reach the sky
even when you have fallen.

When you look in the mirror
you smile at your reflection
because you have realized
you don't have to be beautiful
to be seen clearly.

Your eyes may be able to shed tears
but you have nothing to fear
as you tackle any challenge
that is set to bring you down.

Hope shimmers even in shadows.
Hearts are left to beat the seconds,
even through the hard times.
Your feet lead you on paths
that point every which way.

Even if you think you are lost
you have your guides,
helping you along through
all life's indifferences and bewilderments
to help you find your smile
in this harsh world.

by Mercedes Azzoparde (Grade Ten)
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THIRD PRIZE

We Couldn't Reach

We were young, we were brave, we were strong.
Trained to fight and protect, we felt like heroes.
That's what every little boy dreams about, right? Being a superhero?
We were living the dream.
Who knew how quickly a dream could turn into a nightmare?
It was warm, so very warm, that morning.
Sweat dripped from our brows as we huffed our way out of camp.
We laughed, we pushed, we smiled.
It was our patrol.
Long hours, hot sun, and monotonous tasks awaited our future.
We wanted excitement.
We got it.
Green smudges slithered, hurried, snuck.
We tried to run, we tried to warn, but we were too late.
Oh how we wished we weren't.
We screamed and scrambled.
No one heard, we couldn't reach.
Loud noises and bright flashes followed.
Slivers of metal cut, dug, and carved.
We tripped, our hopes melting away into nothing.
We were almost there, we could almost reach.
But we didn't.
We fell, we shuddered, we lay still.
We were young, we were brave, we were strong.
We believed we would live forever.
We were wrong.

by Nicole Joostema (Grade Eleven)
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Penticton, British Columbia



THIRD PRIZE

Label Loss

It was three days before they found the body.

For three days he rot, unnoticed and forgotten. They found him tonight, this morning in another country, and through phone lines and text messages word found way to us.

They say you die twice, right? Once when your body dies, then when your name is said for the last time.

Tell me his name.

Tell me his name and let me immortalize him in writing. Let it never fall into disuse, let it never disappear.

Tonight the name of my mother's mother is lost. The matriarchal line is gone. No heir, no heir, our line is dead. Lost in maiden names. Lost between the first and final initial. No longer passed down and through and into other families. Toll the bells, they drown out the cries of mourning sisters, and the tears of daughters who never knew his face.

I see why people name their kids after their parents. Never gone.

Tell me his name. Let me paint it in blood, for you've already drawn it from tears. Let my children and my children's children forever remember all is not lost.

My name is not my own, and it's a blinding flash of realization. I am my own identity, a collection of words and thoughts and concepts from my friends and family, labelled with a name my own and yet not. My name, my label, who I am. I am the sum of my actions, and I earn my worth. I am the product of my imagination and everyone who has ever loved and known me. I am who I make of myself, and yet I am the memory of my family and those long gone.

For them, those who gave my name in all four parts broken pieces, I will not forget.

Three days. . . .

by Alexis Nagum (Grade Twelve)
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