

# FIRST PRIZE

## Torch Song for Two Voices

Inspired by “Dance for You” by Rachel Emma D’Arcy.

The night they met, they heard the song and decided it would be their song. Together they listened to it, sang it together, and sang it to each other. And their life together was beautiful. Until one day trouble came. A knock at the door, then another knock. “I’m innocent,” he told her. “I haven’t done anything wrong.” And she believed him.

He hid in the woods behind the house while she answered the door. When they asked for him, she said she hadn’t seen him for a long time, he was gone. And they believed her. *I would lie for you, I would lie for you*, she sang to herself.

When they were gone, he came back out of the woods, into the house, and into her arms. And together they sang, *I would lie for you, I would lie for you*.

Time passed. More and more often, he was late coming home. Sometimes she smelled liquor on him. And then one night there was another smell on top of the liquor. The smell of perfume. Not her perfume, someone else’s. “Where have you been?” she asked.

“Nowhere,” he answered.

Because she wanted to, she believed him. But still, she was uneasy. *I would lie for you, I would lie for you*, she sang to herself.

And under his breath, he sang, *I would lie to you, I would lie to you*.

Each day, her uneasiness grew. One day, she saw him with the other woman. They had their arms around each other and were laughing into each other’s eyes. She was terrified at first, and then cold as ice. She schemed and she planned. She took her time, waiting for just the right moment. With him, she was as she had always been—smiling, laughing, singing. But when he wasn’t there, she followed him. She learned who the woman was, her name, where she lived, what she did.

When the time was right, one dark and moonless night, she went to the woman’s lodgings. She was quick and sure with the knife. Afterwards, she wrapped it in an old shirt of his and left it where it would be found. Not out in the open, but close enough for those who knew where to look. And then she went home to him, back into his faithless arms, all the while singing under her breath, *I would lie for you, she would die for you*.

And when he asked her where she had been, she answered, “Nowhere.”

He smiled at her, took her in his arms, and together they sang, *I would lie for you, I would die for you*.

He came home the next day ashen-faced. When she asked what was wrong, he just shook his head and said, “Nothing.” But she knew better.

Now it was just a matter of time. He grew thin and pale with each passing day. He stopped singing and laughing and smiling. He jumped at every knock at the door. She watched and she waited.

Then one day, they came again, as she had known they would. This time, when they knocked at the door, she told them where to find him, all the while singing softly under her breath, *I won’t lie for you, I won’t die for you*.

And when they took him away, he turned to her and sang softly, *I would lie for you, I would die for you*.

She stared at him coldly, then sang to him, *I won’t lie for you, I won’t die for you*.

by **Joan O’Callaghan**

Toronto, Ontario



# SECOND PRIZE

## Opening Act

A feverish buzz wove through the crowd anticipating the act behind the curtain. The outdoor stage, assembled in haste that morning, stood at the edge of the ragged town, as rundown as the last one. Behind the sagging curtain, Sergei positioned the long bar across his shoulders. The master of ceremonies began to speak and the buzz subsided, like bees settling.

Sergei heard the cadence of the opening act's introduction but had long ago stopped listening. His focus was the multiple stunts that would pummel his body, calling on a strength waning with each performance. Twenty years ago he won a gold medal in weightlifting at the biggest show: the Olympics. He was celebrated in his country. Now that country no longer existed, was shattered into separate nations.

The female performers settled into position around Sergei, the odour of three performances a day wafting from their sequined costumes. Their expressions were the same: smiles wide at the mouth, pain in the eyes. Like Irina, they had been gymnasts, funnelled into sport schools, forced the Olympic dream. These women would balance on the bar braced on his shoulders, one on top of another, forming intricate human patterns above his head, then leaping and twirling off, just as Irina had, although she had been the most graceful.

Heckling erupted on the other side of the curtain. Since the fall of the bloc there was little money anywhere. Entrance fees had dropped, yet audiences became more demanding, charging the stage if a show failed to entertain. A performer in Minsk had been trampled.

As the curtain opened in halting tugs, Sergei steadied himself and two performers mounted the bar. Once they were balanced, two more got on, then two more as they formed a pyramid above his head. He shifted his foot to centre the weight and the bar tipped slightly, the women adjusting to keep their balance, the crowd cheering the near mishap.

The next trick was an elaborate pyramid with the woman on top juggling three balls in the air. When Irina was in the show, she followed the juggling with a flip in the air—a real crowd-pleaser. Sergei's mind went back a year to the last time she performed, how Irina launched into her flip just as the girl above his left shoulder lost her footing. Girls tumbled off the bar and it shot into the air, striking Irina's face as she descended.

Two days before the accident, he and Irina had fought about marriage, again. He wanted it; she never had. Sergei knew from the beginning, yet he pursued her anyway. When Irina fell that night, landing in a heap on the floor, he crumpled too. He remembered someone in the troupe had gone to the hospital with her. News came back: her cheek was shattered, shards of bone forced up into the eye, the long-term vision questionable. Sergei was struck with the thought: *Now she will want me.*

He didn't visit Irina in the hospital, couldn't stand to see her look at him pityingly and agree now, finally, to marry him. Three days later, the troupe moved on to the next stop of the tour and Sergei went with them.

Tonight on stage, he braced the bar as more performers climbed on, delicate feet balancing on the slender shoulders of the girl below. The dimly lit stage hid the mended rips in their costumes, their practised faces concealing the pain of pulled ligaments and strained muscles. No one wanted this life; no one should have to endure it. The life was only bearable if carried out with someone you loved.

The raucous crowd tonight didn't jeer the act but reacted with whistles and applause. Sergei was relieved; you never knew what to expect anymore. In his trailer, he wiped sweat from his body, splashed his face with water from a bucket and sank into one side of the mattress, avoiding the other, empty for the past year. In the distance he heard the closing act playing a folk song that once brought him joy.

*by Diane Fretz*  
Southampton, Ontario

# THIRD PRIZE

## Oscar

*Oh no, oh no. No. No. No. No.*

Oscar was lying on his side not moving. His body once so full of energy was now lifeless on the gravel floor.

Before leaving for school, Eva had shouted to her mom how she forgot to feed Oscar, and Brie had assured her she could handle the responsibility.

Brie put her hand into the tank and gingerly poked the fish. He just lolled to the side, but didn't seem to be moving on his own. A wave of panic travelled through her entire body. This could not be happening.

She poked at the lifeless body again, and still there was no reaction from the fish. Removing her hand from the tank, she frantically scanned the area for a net.

Oscar was a blue beta fish whom Eva loved dearly. She had wanted him so badly and she promised she would take good care of him, which for the most part she did. She fed him every morning and night and could even be heard singing to him between meals.

Net in hand, Brie trapped the lifeless body and brought it up to the surface to get a better look. He was definitely dead. No movement. His gills which should have been gasping for air were completely still.

Her panic turned to dread as she realized she would have to deal with this situation.

*Stupid fish! Why did I let her buy a fish? On one hand, it did teach Eva responsibility and make her happy. But now what? What am I going to do?* Eva was going to be absolutely devastated when she got home.

*Ugh!* Why did she choose a pet with such a short and unpredictable life span?

She brought the net containing the fish corpse to the toilet and was about to drop it down to be released into the depths below, when she stopped herself.

*Should I keep the fish, and show my daughter the body? Maybe we could have a funeral for him, and we could build a little fish coffin out of Popsicle sticks, cardboard, and stickers. I could also set aside a small plot in the backyard for him and have a really official-like funeral.*

*No, that is a crazy idea. I should just flush it and tell Eva the fish died, and we could buy another one at the store, and that would be that.*

*Hold on, could I buy another one at the store and replace it; didn't they all look the same anyway? How could a six-year-old tell the difference?*

With that thought she dumped the fish into the toilet.

*But wait! What if Eva can tell the difference between old Oscar and new Oscar?*

*I could say how fish turn colours when they age and that's why Oscar looks different. . . . Is that even a thing? Maybe I should Wikipedia it and show Eva that yes, fish do change colours as they age. But then what if it weren't true? Could I edit a Wikipedia page and then change it back after Eva reads it? . . . No, that's ridiculous and probably very wrong on some level.*

*Or is it?*

Without flushing the fish, she returned to the bowl. *Maybe I could clean out the bowl and put it away in the cupboard and just pretend there never was a fish.*

*No, that was the most ridiculous idea yet. I would for sure regret that one years down the line when the therapy bills started coming in.*

With a heavy sigh, Brie knew what she had to do. She made her way back to the toilet and was getting ready to make funeral arrangements. She grabbed the net from the counter and went to scoop the fish out of the toilet.

She couldn't believe it—he was gone. *That stupid fish is gone! Where did he go? I know I didn't flush him, or did I?*

She brought her hands to her face and massaged her temples. This was literally the last thing she wanted to deal with today. *Now what am I going to do? Can you have a funeral with*

*no body? Maybe I could make the coffin now, and then tell Eva it was a closed-casket service.  
But what if Eva wanted to see the body?*

*Oh, screw it.* She went down the stairs, grabbed her purse and keys, and headed out the door.

*First stop: fish store.*

*Second stop: wine store.*

**by Karyn Husack**

Burlington, Ontario



# HONOURABLE MENTION

## Side Effects

“Hello, ugly,” I whisper to the repugnant girl I’ve tried so desperately to avoid.

She flinches as my acknowledgment of her startles the silence. She reaches up to smooth back a loose tendril and unintentionally pulls out a chunk of hairs and releases them from her grasp. Her puffy eyes begin to flood and spill over bare lids. One single tear takes a detour around her bee-stung lips as she watches the fried hair collect on the floor. Her arm surrenders back to her side; ribs protrude from her leather-like skin.

“Do you think I asked for this?” she quivers.

“You did not stop it from happening,” I argue. “I told you not to listen to that pretentious peddler’s promises. Didn’t you read the side effects on the bottle’s label?”

Behind her, the Beauty in a Bottle supplements were flooding her bedside table.

“I didn’t think it could be true. Why would any moral person create a product like that?”

I roll my eyes at her and impatiently reply, “All he cared about was getting paid and you were naïve enough to entertain his services.”

“Well, beauty isn’t cheap.”

“By looking at you the cost of beauty is quite obvious. I once thought you were beautiful.”

She covers her face with her hands and muffles a sharp cry. With shaking breaths, she relaxes herself enough to say, “I can’t even remember what I used to look like.” She parts her fingers as if hoping to find herself somewhere in the past, before she ever doubted she was enough just the way she was.

“You have an eyelash on your cheek,” she states still choking back tears.

I pinch the delicate escape artist and balance it on the tip of my index finger watching it teeter back and forth.

My eyes reconnect with hers. “Make a wish and blow,” she says.

“Didn’t wishes get you here in the first place?”

After releasing one determined breath, I watch the eyelash carry my wish as far as the mirror before it rests in the pile of hair on the floor.

*by Christina Fraser*

Woodstock, Ontario



# HONOURABLE MENTION

## Slivers

The bar was a facsimile to every other bar on the street, so why I took the chance of going there for one more, I don't know. There she was, the only person in the bar looking somewhat decent. I spoke to her. She spoke back. I put my eyes down from time to time, but she kept hers locked on me. I offered to get her a drink. "No one should serve someone a drink right away," she said. When she invited me back to her place, I didn't hesitate.

We entered her apartment, spoke briefly, undressed, and went into her bedroom. She lay there after, her eyes on me, her breath casual. I panted. As I left her the next day, knowing I'd be back, I trembled. I wouldn't be able to shake her.

She kept her rye cold. Really cold. Usually it stayed crisp in her freezer along with our mutual ounce of pot and a flank of salmon—Chinook salmon—she swore she would cook for me one day, with maple syrup and garlic.

The first time she served me rye I gulped it back and thought about the word Chinook and where the hell did that salmon come from? She kept the rye cold but her place felt like a furnace. We'd sweat together and each mug of rye made me think we were cooler and cooler. Afterwards, we would go to the bedroom, and laugh and whisper. Her eyes never looked away from mine. I couldn't hold her stare.

The second time she served me rye she promised me she would cook that salmon again—freezer burn ruining the flesh, but I still believed her. I started wearing a sweater to her place as we drank rye, hoping she would get her window fixed. I offered to do it, and that was one of the few times she snorted and looked away from me. The draft swept in, but when we smoked and drank a bit more, I took my sweater off, and didn't really mind.

The third time she served me rye, she threw the liquid all over my face. It stung my eyes. I stood up, then sat back down. I'd had too much rye myself. I looked up and saw a hole in the window, and I looked down and saw slivers of glass sticking out from my hand. I lifted my hand up and admired the chandelier-like qualities of the shards and their angles. My arm burned as the slivers seemed to needle their way in farther and farther. She screamed at me, but I couldn't tell why.

When I woke up, she served me rye for the fourth time: my arm screamed as she poured the remainder of the bottle over my hand. The rye wove through the labyrinth of glass in my arm.

We didn't have rye for a while after that.

When she served him rye for the first time, I wished it weren't real. My hand pulsed and oozed and didn't feel very good. My head burned and all I could think about was the really cold rye she used to serve me, and the word Chinook. I thought about them drinking rye together, and how she would explain my blood on her worn rug. And I thought about him talking about me, and I began to sway back and forth, thinking about what I would say to him, and then to her. I dreamed about her staring up at the ceiling afterwards, or looking directly at him, never breaking that stare.

When he served me rye the first time, it was still in the bottle. The splinters of glass didn't go near my hand. The blow to my head knocked me out. When I came to, I heard her screaming again, only this time it wasn't at me. Suddenly his boot came down on my hand, popping and cracking the slivers I probably should have removed but didn't, and blood and pus shot out.

Before the world went black, I thought about the facsimile of the bar and the girl I had seen and fallen for, and the rye and the weed and the salmon—Chinook salmon—and the maple syrup and garlic. And I really just wanted a cold drink.

*by Patrick St. Amand*  
Sarnia, Ontario

# HONOURABLE MENTION

## Conception Day

“Please find a seat and fill out the form. The doctor will be with you shortly.”

Dansy took the tablet from the nurse and turned to locate a place to sit. She led her husband towards a beige sofa in the far corner. They settled in close and she placed the tablet between them. A form was displayed on the screen and she tapped the first icon titled “Contact Information.” She waited for the prompt and then slowly swiped her wrist over the screen. Empty boxes immediately filled with her personal information. She tapped the icon again and waited while her husband swiped his RIFD implant, which added his information to hers.

Dansy Clare Hudson, thirty-six, corporate lawyer, and Simon Eton Hudson, forty-three, political advisor; married eight years, residing at 4781 Riverside Crescent. Medical history included a broken arm for Simon and an updated vaccination schedule for Dansy. Financial history listed a combined annual income of 705,000€ a year. No criminal history for either.

The next heading read, “Basic Requirements.” Dansy tilted the tablet towards Simon. They had discussed these qualities over dinner the night before so Simon confidently tapped the appropriate boxes from the drop-down menus. Skin colour: olive. Hair colour: black. Eye colour: green. Under “Specific Facial Markers” Simon checked “nose” under the “Father” subheading, as Dansy’s nose was too flat to be flattering. Under “Mother,” he checked “cheekbones” and “eyes.” Those were truly her best features and would show well. He tapped the “Done” button and the next heading appeared.

Pressing the “Personality Traits” icon he pushed the tablet back towards Dansy and she gasped in surprise when over 600 personality traits emerged. “How many should we choose?” she asked scrolling down the list, noting options like “meticulous,” “chummy,” “impulsive,” and “power hungry.”

Simon eagerly scanned the list. “The sky’s the limit.”

Dansy smiled and quickly checked boxes “attractive,” “confident,” “creative,” “honourable,” “responsible,” “friendly,” “assertive,” and “genuine.” After an extensive search she added “affectionate” and “humorous.” Simon added “adventurous” and “intelligent.”

Dansy hit “Done” and the next box appeared. Simon clicked on the icon titled “Skills, Talents, and Special Abilities.”

A pop-up window appeared and he read the warning aloud: “By clicking on the following specific options, genetic modifications will be made to promote the predisposition of your choices. This does not guarantee the skills will be developed.” When he saw Dansy frown, he explained, “They can genetically modify the body so it has what it needs, like longer fingers to play instruments, but they can’t actually promise a musician.”

He reviewed the choices: “We agreed on drawing but let’s add cooking as well for hobbies, and both athletic and academic, which will give a better chance of one taking.” He clicked “Done” and the menu closed.

The next icon on the form was “Extras.” It opened a pop-up window which stated, “There will be a premium fee for the following choices as they require major modifications to be seamlessly entwined with the genetic makeup of your previous choices.”

There were only three boxes: “gender,” “sexual orientation,” and “obedience.”

The couple had already decided to leave the first two to chance, but a disobedient child could very well get them ostracized quickly within their circle of peers. The cost to have obedience added was astonishing, but wasn’t it worth it?

“Check it,” Dansy nudged her husband.

“Are you sure? Remember the Delkos’s son? He had absolutely no free will.” Simon took Dansy’s hand in his. “This child is our legacy, we shouldn’t handicap them from being someone great.”

Dansy sighed and closed the window. “It will be up to you to teach obedience.”

“Incubation Options” was the final heading, which included definitions.

“Natural Pregnancy will begin after harvesting the necessary biomaterial from both parents and our labs have made the necessary modifications. The mother will be implanted with the embryo, thus consenting to be responsible for its health. A delivery date will be scheduled nine months from implant date.

“Artificial Pregnancy begins once the modified embryo is implanted into an artificial acceleration womb, which is monitored ’round the clock. Parents may schedule visiting times for bonding purposes. After seven months, the baby will be examined, cleared of defects, and delivered to your home.”

With no hesitation, Dansy tapped the “Artificial Pregnancy” icon. “Seven months and no weight gain . . . is there any other choice?” She smiled wryly.

Simon chuckled just as the clerk called their name. “Come on, let’s go make a baby.”

***by Judy J. Dettling***

Clairmont, Alberta





# HONOURABLE MENTION

## Army in the Morning

Trumpeting echoed through the village, cutting through the early morning silence like a razor blade. Warriors marched fearlessly, disturbing the ground beneath them.

Trembling villagers searched for places to hide, but there was no escaping the fury and power marching through the village. The ferocious glint in their eyes said it all: the warriors were intent on drawing blood. I choked on dust and concern for the villagers.

The first victim was a little boy. His eyes were wide with fear in his battered head. His mother cradled him in her arms as he died. Her sobbing was silenced with just one blow.

Then the advancing army trampled an ill-fated woman when she tripped over a large stone. A few villagers were killed and some were injured in the morning's mayhem. Onwards, the army marched, advancing further into the village.

Rage painted a vivid picture on the warriors' faces, but there was also a palpable sense of anguish and despair. Their eyes searched through the haze of the sunlight and fear-stricken villagers, stumbling along the dusty road. Some sobbed piteously; hysterical screams of others penetrated the air. Unfortunately, as a journalist, I couldn't intervene.

"Why are you attacking us?" cried an old man. The army came to a halt. Minutes ticked by slowly and painfully. They spared his life, perhaps because of the age in his watery eyes; maybe they were less angry now.

The village elder, Yomzi Stofile, rushed over to the leader of the army. She pleaded, "Have mercy, please! Take my life, but spare the lives of my people!" Her tears splashed down and soon evaporated on the hot clay road.

Two leaders, eyes locked in time, stood proud beneath a wide-open African sky. One clutched a baby close to her bosom. The other shifted a disquieting gaze from Yomzi's eyes to the baby, then back to her eyes. A bone-chilling silence ensued.

Suddenly a hoarse voice shattered the silence: "Mama, thank goodness I found you! Please don't let the savages harm my baby!" Her beautiful ebony face shone with perspiration and anxiety. Yomzi passed her grandchild to her daughter and told her not to be afraid. She looked the formidable warrior straight in the eyes when she took a step towards her and her family.

Yomzi frowned when she eventually spoke again, "They are definitely not savages; something has pushed them over the edge." Gasps of astonishment rung out when the daunting figure rubbed her cheek tenderly against the baby's. Her mournful eyes glistened. She gazed upon the shaken villagers for several seconds. I sensed feelings of remorse, but then she abruptly signalled to her army. Onwards, they marched.

A low groaning stopped them dead in their tracks. Ahead of them lay an injured elephant calf. Gaping wounds bore testimony to the savage stabbing her young body had endured. A bloodied hunting knife lay on the ground beside her. Her assailants had fled, but the warriors chased them down and swiftly and fiercely slaughtered them. Fortunately, as a journalist, I couldn't intervene.

The army leader remained by the bleeding calf's side. A solitary tear finally ran down her craggy cheek. She laboured to lower her bulky frame to hunker down beside the calf. Gently, she caressed and comforted her dying baby. The calf feebly wrapped her trunk around her mother as far as she could. Her groaning became virtually inaudible as her life ebbed away. She sighed and exhaled her final breath. My heart ached.

Yomzi wiped away the mourning elephant's tear with her gnarled hands. "Now I clearly understand the reason for this morning's tragic events." She looked at the calf's wounded body and then at her own daughter and grandchild. "I'll wage war against animal abuse from this day forth!" she declared. "On behalf of humans, I humbly apologize! Please accept my sympathy, wise one, and know I grieve with you."

Two venerable matriarchs embraced and wept. I pictured their tears flowing in one steady stream, forging a path and cleansing the world of abuse and injustices. The blazing sunshine

signified a great sense of promise for a better tomorrow. The grey giants marched back towards the jungle and slowly disappeared into the morning's shimmering haze. The camera stopped rolling, but Yomzi's journey with these highly spiritual, sensitive, and emotional beings, had only just begun.

*I've returned to Canada, but the ancient calling of drums . . . and exultant trumpeting of mighty elephants will draw me back to Africa one day.*

**by Denise Kemp**

Toronto, Ontario



# HONOURABLE MENTION

## No Response

With a weary sigh, she sank into her narrow aisle seat. Harried passengers continued to bypass her, jostling her with their luggage in their haste to reach their own seats. Stewardesses stood throughout the aircraft, some directing passengers while others busied themselves with last-minute flight preparations. Were they always this rushed? The cabin air seemed stagnant, hardly tolerable when combined with the multitudes of people milling about her.

She let her eyes close briefly, exhausted by their hectic pace, impatient for the flight to depart. A bustling to her right forced them to open again, however, and she glanced, somewhat annoyed at the source of her disturbance.

A man, dashing despite his evident years, stood pressed against her seat, penned in by the accumulation of people around the overhead compartments across the narrow aisle. A child, no more than four years old, stood behind him, clutching the back of his trousers with one hand, the other clasping a stuffed bear. She smiled at the child, who quickly hid behind what she presumed to be his father's leg. The man, feeling the child's movement, glanced at her briefly, before clumsily stepping past her and forcing his way through the crowd, child in tow, without apology and with complete disregard to her look of obvious distaste.

*The nerve of some people*, she thought to herself as she shifted in her seat, attempting to find a position offering some comfort in the cramped environment. Thank goodness she was leaving this wretched city. As far as she was concerned, they were welcome to their frantic lifestyles; she was moving on to relative peace.

As a big-city nurse for most of her career, she knew the pace of a hectic life well. The constant rush, impending to-dos and lack of rest had taken its toll on her as much as anyone. *But no longer*, she thought to herself with a small sigh. She was finished, thanks to unfortunate circumstances, and had vowed never to practise her trade again.

Suddenly, the aircraft began to move, pulling her from her thoughts as the plane taxied down the runway. The aisle was cleared and the flight attendants positioned themselves along it, giving the customary pre-flight safety instructions.

Finally, the plane found its position for takeoff. She awaited the surge of power felt throughout the craft, her skin tingling with excitement as they leapt forward from their immobile position with a burst of speed. She settled back into her seat once again, now completely at ease. She was off! To an unknown land, a new life. Happiness radiated from her person as she slipped her complimentary in-flight headphones on and proceeded to block out the world.

She regained consciousness a few hours later to the plane in a state of uproar. Something was wrong. The seat belt sign flashed overhead, instructing passengers to stay in their seats. Attendants, typically the picture of calm, now dashed throughout the plane, speaking with urgency to passengers, attempting to calm the atmosphere.

Snippets of conversation floated to her: "Collapsed. . . ." "Unresponsive. . . ."

A stewardess finally reached for the microphone located at the front of the plane: "Attention, all passengers. We have an unresponsive male passenger in the rear of the plane. Are there any medical personnel aboard the aircraft?"

Passengers began hurriedly speaking among themselves, turning in their seats, and craning to see if anyone would come forth. She looked around as well. This wasn't her responsibility. This panic and terror, these situations had been the reason she had left her profession. Settling herself, she closed her eyes, removing herself from the commotion around her. *Someone else will come. Not my job* . . . were her last coherent thoughts as she drifted off.

She awoke to the announcement of the aircraft's descent, muffled by the sound of a child's wails. Curiously, she turned around in her seat and stared down the aisle to the rear of the plane. A stewardess walked past then, motioning for her to sit properly in her seat as they prepared for

landing and interrupting her view of the scene. But not quickly enough. The solemn attendants, speaking in hushed tones. The crying child being dragged from the scene, his bear thrust aside. And the man, eyes staring unseeingly at the ceiling, as a plain white sheet covered his body. Lifeless now, when only hours ago it had been so alive.

Now, as her mind replayed the horrifying images, she was haunted by a single thought:  
*No one else had gone.*

**by Libby Giesbrecht**  
Winnipeg, Manitoba



# HONOURABLE MENTION

## The Other Side of Winter

“Jesus, Jack, who tied your tie?”

“Mom.”

Dad sighed and knelt down before him. Jack saw dark circles under his eyes. “There,” Dad said, getting back to his feet. “Have you eaten anything?”

Jack nodded and tugged uncomfortably at his collar. “Why do I have to wear a suit?”

“Everyone will be wearing one.”

“Even Grandpa?”

Dad hesitated before nodding. Jack smiled; he had wanted to wear his pyjamas, but if Grandpa was going to wear a suit, so would he.

As Dad drifted off to finish putting on his own suit, Jack went downstairs into the kitchen. Mom was sitting at the table, her eyes far away as she fidgeted with her black dress. She didn’t seem to notice him.

“Look, the limo’s here!” Jack exclaimed, running to the window. “Mom, look!”

Mom put her head in her hands, and Dad’s voice called from upstairs, “You go ahead, Jackie. Tell the man we’ll be right there.”

In the limo, Jack swung his legs back and forth, bothered by the silence. He tugged at Mom’s dress and asked, “What’s it gonna be like?”

Mom made a funny noise and looked away, while Dad fixed him with a serious look. “It’s not a party, Jackie.”

Eventually, they stopped outside a plain white building. Grandma was waiting for them inside, along with a man in a dark suit whom Jack didn’t know. Mom went straight into Grandma’s arms, and Dad shook hands with the strange man.

They went into a bigger room, which was empty except for a long wooden box. Dad picked Jack up so he could look inside. As promised, Grandpa was wearing a suit. He looked like he was sleeping, but something was not quite right. “Will he wake up?”

Mom made the funny sound again, and Dad’s arms tensed around him as he said, “No.”

Jack twisted around to look back at him. “Why not?”

Dad took a breath. “Because he died, Jackie.”

His stomach fell, and Jack felt something like panic rise up through his throat. Dad carried him out of the room, saying words he couldn’t understand. All Jack could see was Grandpa, sleeping but not sleeping. He began to cry.

Dad held Jack in his arms as he stared out the window. For a long time, there were only sobs, then silence.

“Will that happen to me?” Jack asked finally. Dad didn’t say anything, but there were tears in his eyes. Jack touched his face, and Dad looked at him. “Will we see him again one day?”

Dad looked away, smiling sadly. “Maybe.”

Jack thought suddenly of the first time he rode a bike. Grandpa had been there, laughing and clapping each time Jack passed him on the track. “Proud,” Mom had called him.

“He loved you, Jackie,” Dad said quietly.

Jack looked at his reflection in the window. He imagined himself lying in a box like Grandpa’s. Not now, but a long time from now, after he had done a lot of other things that would have made Grandpa laugh and clap.

“You won’t have to worry about that for a long time,” Dad said, as though reading his mind.

Jack nodded at his reflection, and Dad put him down, keeping a grip on his hand.

“Do you want to say goodbye?”

Jack nodded. He’d tell Grandpa about all of the things he was going to do, even if he couldn’t hear him. Hand in hand, they left the room behind.

*by Greta Whipple*  
Toronto, Ontario

# HONOURABLE MENTION

## Time In

Mo stumbled into the dilapidated trailer her daughter had hauled to their quarter for her. “Gotta fix that stupid step.”

The door stuck in the spring and fall, and the wind blew snow in the mudroom in the winter. She shared the trailer with Willis, her tabby, and an assortment of mice. Her job at the tree farm paid minimum wage, and was hard work, sometimes upwards of twelve hours every day during the busy season. Mo’s legs ached by the end of the day.

Mae had left a mini casserole in her microwave for her to reheat. She knew she should be grateful for the leaky roof over her head, and food in the 1950s fridge. Glancing upwards she wondered if the insurance money would ever come through for the repairs or a replacement.

After twenty-seven years of marriage, this is what she had to look forward to when she came home. How had it come to this? What did she do to deserve to live the last part of her life like this?

She had given up college as an animal health tech to live with Ray after getting knocked up in the second semester. Ray had been such a charmer, a farm boy with his family farm and herd. She popped out Mae, then just a year later, Ray Jr. They were her pride and joy, she put all her energy into them.

They had lived so far back in the bush the driveway was a dirt path. They never did marry. Ray told her they didn’t need “no piece of paper to tie them together.” He was hers and she was his.

Things were good when life was going good. Things were ugly when it wasn’t. The bottom dropped out of the beef industry with mad cow disease. So Ray took up drinking and smacking her around. He had finally gotten a job out in the oil field driving a truck, and she finally had a reprieve from his fists. He squandered away money, so when he wasn’t working they had something to live on and he had something to drink with. He left her enough grocery money and gas to do only one or two trips into town. She relied on the half-acre garden to supply their winter’s supply of food. It was hard work, but the food tasted better, as Ray had always said. They never lacked for meat, from the goats, sheep, or chickens they kept.

He would drive off in his new Ford and she would be left with minimal gas, little money, and a junker she called Fred. She used to try to keep back a little bit of extra money for material for the kids’ clothes. She and her old Kenmore used to sing late into the night making new pants, skirts, and shirts. Once in a while she could make it to the Sally Anne to get material cheap. Everything in their house had been someone else’s first.

Ray did all the banking; Mo didn’t do any of it. She didn’t even have a bank card. She paid everything with the cash Ray left her. Ray had persuaded her she didn’t really need an account, he could supply her with everything. For a time he did.

Things changed after the kids. He told her she had to use cloth diapers, and nurse so they didn’t have to pay for frivolous things like disposable diapers and formula. There was extra work rinsing and washing them. In the winter she had to hang them out to dry after the dryer went belly up, and they never did seem to have any extra money for repairs or a new one. Her fingers used to freeze up with the cold.

Things went along as usual till he decided to bring home that hussy from down south. She just waltzed in as if the place were hers. Ray threw Mo out, and then it was hers. Mo’s life went from tolerable to disastrous on one fateful evening. She had to forge a new life after twenty-seven years of oppression. Living out of a battered suitcase at the local women’s shelter, surrounded by sad stories and snotty do-gooders, she was glad when Mae had told her the plan.

Strange things happen. That gas stove in the house had never given her a problem before.

*by Terri Sinnett*  
Whitelaw, Alberta

# HONOURABLE MENTION

## The Samurai and the Cherry Blossom

It is said the samurai and the cherry blossom are the same. They never age, fade, or wither. Upon reaching the moment of perfect beauty, they fall.

The barracks were cold and dark; it was still well before dawn and Akio and his comrades were barely stirring.

“Hey, Fumio,” Akio called over to the youngest volunteer, who was just showing his head above the sheets. “Did you get it up last night?” A few of the guys had gone to a nearby brothel to pass time and soothe their nerves before the coming mission. It was to be their first, and last.

“No,” Fumio responded in a small voice, blood flushing his face, “I was too nervous, and she was so old—much older than me anyway.” He would die today, months short of nineteen, a virgin.

“Never mind,” ribbed Satoshi, the joker among them. “There’s always next time.”

“Fuck off,” snapped Fumio, his embarrassment forgotten. “I’m no Buddhist.”

“Hey, Akio,” Fumio said, “do you think this will work? Will we defeat the Americans? Everyone says they haven’t got the guts for real sacrifice. That if we kill enough of them, they will run away.”

Akio couldn’t answer right away. Should he tell the truth? How their deaths would probably mean nothing more than a flea-bite to a horse. Could he take the last piece of meaning from his friend’s life? He knew the Americans, had studied there before the war. He had seen their huge cities, knew their industrial capacity, their determination, their anger. They would not stop until Japan was destroyed.

“Our deaths will be glorious,” he finally replied. “We will fall from the sky like samurai. We will avenge our loved ones.” Yes, Akio thought, *avenge our loved ones*. The American planes now flew at will over his hometown, unleashing seemingly endless bombs. He shivered as images of the carnage flooded his mind. The earth-shaking explosions, blinding flashes, choking smoke, storms of fire, and the stomach-churning moment he found his sister’s head, oddly out of place on its own, on the kitchen table, her mouth slightly open as if she were about to speak.

Sergeant Cho interrupted all thought or conversation as he crashed through the door all boots, swords, and a furious face. “Get up!” he screamed raising the roof. “Bring honour to your country, your families. Die killing the enemy!” He spun on his heel and was gone, his face even more stern, if such a thing were possible.

The squad began to get ready. Aside from their usual flight gear they would all wear the rising-sun headband, some would carry their ceremonial swords; a few would mimic the samurai by painting their faces white. This reminded Akio not of fierce warriors but of kabuki actors. But then Akio thought this was all an act, the last snarl of a paper tiger.

Within minutes they were on the parade ground and were blessed by an impatient priest. They were not the first this day and many more would follow. The ceremonial sake burned throats and they dutifully yelled the battle-cry: “Tora, tora, tora!” From his place in the middle row Akio looked around at his fellow kamikazes. They were young—so young. Most looked happy, some excited. A feeling of almost sensual joy hung in the air.

Carried up by the excitement of his comrades Akio was in his plane when reality hit home. hard. This was a flying bomb that would take him to his end. The engine thrummed and throbbed and the smells of fuel and leather filled the cockpit.

After take-off Akio found his place with dozens of others. They flew, seemingly for hours, through the remains of the night. Soon enough, however, they spotted signs of the battle raging around the enemy fleet. Here was the enemy—American troops with their gum, Lucky Strikes, and cola—daring to attack Japan, his homeland. Even though he hated them, Akio couldn’t help

but remember his college friends, the girls, and the good times he had in America. He scowled, forcing himself to think only of the samurai, of honour, and his approaching noble death.

Flak began to explode all around and chunks of shrapnel tore through the planes. To his left Fumio vanished in a bloom of bright orange. Another plane followed, then another. As day fast approached Akio spotted his target.

Dawn came, bringing fingers of bloody fire through the clearing sky. The cherry blossom fell. . . .

*by Jon Elliott*

Coquitlam, British Columbia





# HONOURABLE MENTION

## Harvesting Organs

She made a large incision in his abdomen from the sternum down to the pubic bone. There was no time to waste as she quickly separated the fascia in order to get to the intra-abdominal cavity. He was a previously well twenty-three-year-old and so she knew all his organs would be healthy enough for transplant. There were two people waiting for kidneys and one for a liver, and she couldn't disappoint them.

The patient beneath her was the drunk driver responsible for a car crash killing two other people and giving himself severe head trauma. After four weeks on a respirator with no brain activity noted, the patient's family finally made the decision to donate his organs to those who needed them. "He'll never be able to breathe without a machine again," she had explained to them. "He's a vegetable. Let him save lives by donating his organs. It will give meaning to his death."

"Clamp!" she yelled at her scrub nurse just as she nicked a small vein that began to ooze. The scrub nurse on with her tonight was the best one in town; she was a master at reading minds and passing her the tool she required before the words left her mouth.

She made her way to the left kidney and began the careful dissection. She clamped the renal artery and vein before cutting the kidney free. The kidney was quickly passed to the scrub nurse before a gowned gentleman swooped it up and hurried it out of the room in a small container. *One life saved*, she thought to herself.

Dr. Maria Bennett had wanted to be a surgeon since she was ten and her grandfather's bowel cancer was cured with the slice of a knife. She loved the instant gratification of cutting someone open, seeing something wrong, and fixing their problem. At the age of fifty, Dr. Bennett was highly successful in her career. She was respected, admired, and feared by most. There were very few people in her life who called her Maria: her husband—the also terrifying orthopaedic surgeon—her mother, her sister, and two colleagues she considered friends. No one else dared.

The steady beep of the respirator was the only noise in the room. The second kidney left her hands and was rushed away just as quickly as the first. *Two lives saved*.

On one occasion, years ago, the scrub nurse at the time dropped a kidney on the floor requiring it to be disposed of. Small organs such as the kidney can be quite slippery between gloved hands, but this was no excuse for Dr. Bennett. She was outraged and quickly saw to it the nurse never worked another surgery again. Dr. Bennett demanded perfection in her surgery from herself, as well as her colleagues.

After finishing with the liver, she took a deep breath and smiled. The hard part was done. *Three lives saved*.

"Get ready to extubate in five!" she yelled to the anaesthetist, who was half asleep in his chair.

As she began suturing him up, she noticed a flicker in his left hand. Her heart started beating faster. She suddenly felt warm and clammy underneath her mask and gown. It was just like the last time, but she didn't say a word. "Take the tube out!" she yelled. "We're done here."

The anaesthetist removed the tube from the patient's throat and turned to flip off the respirator. She watched the patient take a small, weak breath. "Give me five minutes alone with the patient," Dr. Bennett said forcefully.

There were a couple sideways glances exchanged between the nurses, when finally the scrub nurse said, "It's okay, Dr. Bennett. You can't save everyone. His organs will save three lives. We'll be out here if you need us."

When everyone was out of the room, Dr. Bennett reached into the anaesthetist's cabinet and grabbed the potassium. As his eyelids began to flicker, she injected it into his vein. His eyes popped open, he groaned loudly, and his hands clenched tight. The life drained from his eyes.

"Are you okay, Dr. Bennett? We heard you crying in there," a nurse asked.

“I’m fine, thank you. Just paying my final respects to the deceased,” she said. She put her hand in her pocket and rolled the vial of potassium between her fingers. “We saved three lives today. That’s better than just one.” She smiled as she walked away.

*by Courtney Manser*  
St. Davids, Ontario



# HONOURABLE MENTION

## Unnoticed

Eureka is constantly in your space.

He touches your arm when he talks to you, ducking his head a fraction to save you from looking up at him.

When you walk together, he places a hand at the small of your back, shortening his stride to match yours.

You tell yourself you let him do it because it's important to indulge his natural curiosity, he's programmed after all to be curious and to learn from every experience. And even as Archer reminds you there's nothing natural about him, you still can't help but feel he's more real than half of the people you've ever met.

Eureka is always honest.

He doesn't understand the concept of lying or have any reason to do so, that's just not who he is.

When you ask him something he answers. He doesn't beat about the bush. Sometimes he's blunt, too blunt, but that's not really his fault. He doesn't know better.

You tell yourself you like this because it's not behaviour found in people. That everyone you've ever encountered has lied to you at one time or another. You like how he is unable to lie to you, or to anyone. Even after you hear him tell one of the other researchers a blatant and outright lie about a clip of video footage from decades ago, a video you've personally watched, you still can't help but feel he's not a fraction as self-motivated as most people.

Eureka is so very kind.

He offers you his seat when no others are available and you've spent far too long standing in the lab, going over projects and experiments again and again.

When you're ready to fall over from exhaustion, pushing sleep aside to get the work done, he is there with a cup of what passes for coffee. All without having been asked.

You justify this as being part of his programming, something thought of by a kindhearted engineer. You like his kindness because he doesn't expect anything from you, but you see the way he seems to light up every time you thank him, even for the smallest things. But then there is the incident with his coat, after the explosion in the lab that has left your left hand shredded and bleeding, two fingers missing, when he's kneeling next to you and wrapping that white lab coat around you. His touch is gentle, too gentle, his eyes full of a concern he can't really feel.

It is then things begin to line up in your mind.

He's never treated anyone the way he treats you. With others he's almost cold and closed off. Clinical. The way one expects an android to be.

But with you he's warm and open.

With you he's different.

With you he's almost normal.

With you he seems almost . . . human.

As he helps you stand, you see it in his eyes. You see what shouldn't be possible. What Archer once made a crude comment on but you ultimately dismissed because of what Eureka is. Part of you can barely begin to believe it's possible. You, who chased your beliefs across the galaxy and back, cannot truly face what is now so clear.

He is an android.

He is supposed to be incapable of emotion.

He is still looking at you that way.

He is holding your hand when he should be moving back to his owner's aid.

It's all clear as day and yet you feel lost in the dark.

It is impossible.

It simply cannot be.

But there it is in those synthetic blue eyes.

Eureka loves you.

*by Elisabeth Burke*  
Newburg, New Brunswick