

FIRST PRIZE

Don't Feed the Ducks

"Boris! Don't feed the ducks!" a young woman bustled past the bench, out of breath and frazzled.

Eddy looked up, startled by the solid crunch of his toes and caught a brief glimpse of a plump toddler throwing cornflake confetti in the air. Grimacing through the pain of having his foot stepped on, Eddy folded his newspaper to get a better look at the culprit.

The young woman was wearing a sun-hat and clutching an overflowing bag. Eddy nodded and muttered to himself, "That must be the one . . . children cause too much collateral damage. . . . I said that leashes were the only solution. . . ." Eddy crossed his legs and picked up his newspaper again, trying to tune out the gleeful screaming of the child.

Moments later, he was distracted by the scuttling of the woman's sun-hat on the pavement. Eddy peered over the top of his newspaper, locating the woman and the child near the edge of the lake. The child was continuing to flail gleefully, and his mother seemed not to notice her hat was missing. Sighing deeply, Eddy contemplated the efforts of getting up to return the hat or staying put to find the crossword in his paper. It was feelings of sympathy for the young woman that compelled him to find the sun-hat, and he grunted as he got off the bench, clinging tightly to his newspaper.

"I'm too old for this," Eddy muttered, rubbing his knees after he stood. He stumbled as he reached for the hat and made his way slowly towards the lake, where the woman was attempting to teach the child to skip stones. Eddy failed to find amusement in the toddler's lobbing of the rocks and feared for the ducks that had hurried away from the splashing.

As he approached, the child turned around and squealed, a high-pitched and inhumane noise. Eddy, having his hands full, couldn't even turn down his hearing aids. He pushed himself onwards, feeling as if he ought to be rewarded for getting so near to the surely sticky child.

"Excuse me," Eddy said to the woman, "I think you must have dropped this when you stepped on my foot earlier."

The woman looked taken aback, saying quickly, "Oh dear, I didn't even notice. Thank you—" and she was interrupted by Eddy's cry of surprise as the toddler ran up, throwing a rock at his stomach with remarkable aim.

Eddy stood in shock as the child continued to run closer, hands outstretched and empty. Eddy swung his newspaper towards the child while yelling, "Stay away, don't touch me!" He looked angrily at the woman, and his tone was abrasive as he said, "What are you doing? Keep it under control!"

Too surprised by Eddy's sudden reaction, the young woman took pause before bringing herself between Boris and Eddy, saying defensively, "Boris, stay away. You didn't mean to hurt this old man, did you?"

Eddy scoffed, more from the pain that his old age was so obvious than from having the toddler's rock hit him. The woman clearly was more naïve than he'd first thought, and he fought the urge to throw her sun-hat in the lake. Instead, he dropped it roughly onto the grass and turned away, mumbling about the importance of keeping children locked up until they learned to be civilized.

Thoroughly traumatized, Eddy attempted to straighten out his newspaper while he hobbled along the waterfront. It was never a good day when children were involved, and he fumbled at his ears, feebly attempting to turn off the offending noise.

Suddenly, Eddy felt his foot slide, losing balance and his newspaper as he fell into the water. *This is how it ends*, Eddy thought darkly, grasping weakly at lily pads.

He couldn't hear much now, and the shock of being submerged in the water left him immobile. Eddy wondered how the water could be so deep here, and he felt certain that this would be his demise.

Trying to keep his head above the surface, Eddy couldn't find the strength to call for help. He saw the child run towards him, tossing cornflakes again. Eddy realized his desperation as he yearned for Boris to come closer.

Boris drew nearer, throwing cornflakes at Eddy's head. Eddy whimpered; the lake was a lot colder than he had imagined. He heard the woman's voice faintly in the distance, and he regained hope that he'd be noticed, but everything began blurring together.

"Boris! Don't feed the ducks!"

by Shannon Tang

Vancouver, British Columbia

SECOND PRIZE

Private Poverty

Dorothy Hamilton wrapped her fingers tightly around her coffee cup. The days were shortening, and the warmth was delicious. It was nearing three o'clock and the end of her weekly coffee date with her daughter.

"So, if you're still looking for Christmas ideas for Doug and me, we were thinking we would love a hot tub," Jenny Hamilton said, taking Dorothy's hand. Her bright-red manicure seemed fever bright next to her mother's plain, clean nails. "They're not as expensive as they used to be. You can get little electric ones for only seven hundred."

"Seven hundred? Really, that is impressive." Dorothy lifted her cup to her lips but didn't drink. The barista glided past their table, leaving the bill in his wake. Jenny didn't so much as glance at it. "Well, you know, since your father left that is quite a bit more money than it used to be." She didn't look at Jenny. All she could see were the red nails, green the week before and purple before that.

Jenny squeezed her hand. "I know, Mother, but think of all the fun we could have—girls' nights and cocktail parties. Besides, you bought John a vacation last year, and that must have cost more."

"Yes," Dorothy agreed, gently taking her hand back, "but your father was still here last year." Dorothy fought to keep any signs of fury from her voice. Her eyes stung. She glanced at her watch: 2:55 p.m. "I promise to think about it." She stood, gathering her coat. "It's three, so I won't keep you, I know you're meeting Doug after his shift." Dorothy flashed her watch at Jenny, too fast to read, and her daughter nodded.

"Already? Okay. Do you want a ride? I hate to think of you alone on the bus. I still don't understand why you got rid of the Beamer." Jenny's eyes lit up. "And, I could finally see your new place! It's been two months already."

"Yes, time flies, doesn't it?" Dorothy agreed. "But, I think the bus will have to do today. I have some errands to run, and I'll only make you late."

Dorothy had to parry her daughter's offers and questions twice more before they finally hugged goodbye. Jenny left for the parking lot without so much as acknowledging the coffee bill. Dorothy scooped coins from the bottom of her purse, counting out the exact amount for the bill and her usual ten-percent tip. She offered the barista a brittle, whitened smile on her way out, beelining straight for the bus stop.

While she waited, she wondered what her daughter would say if she saw her mother's new rental suite, Christmas lights up but not on.

When she could finally close herself into the little apartment, she was relieved to be alone. The job she had found doing reception for a small accounting firm allowed her to pay the rent, but keeping lunch dates with friends and family was more than her shrivelled budget could handle. *Still*, she told herself, *it's only a dry spell. Relief will come. It always does.* Only now, her kids were distant or wrapped up in their own lives, and Phil, well, he was wrapped up in blondes.

She charged her phone at work most days, and she turned on the smartphone's little flashlight to find the bathroom. When she was finished, she opened the "hot" tap wistfully, washing as quickly as she could in the frigid water.

In the living room, she passed her computer, screen still as blank as it had been every day since the first of the month. Dorothy slid onto the sofa, wrapping herself in blankets against the Toronto chill. She would spend the evening on her phone, crushing candies and posting pictures of better days. *#ThrowbackThursday*.

She wondered if anyone suspected that she was a fraud—if, on some level, they knew that the settlement with Phil had left her in the dust, despite how hard she worked to keep up appearances. Still, it didn't matter, this would only be temporary.

Dorothy ran a thumb over the orange plastic bottle, still full of Phil's old heart medicine. She'd be exposed at Christmas, unable to host the dinner and arriving without gifts. She'd be

forced to confess, and her family would be forced to accept—or not. At Christmas, one way or another, relief would come; and, for once, she wouldn't be expected to pick up the bill.

by Zenia Platten

Victoria, British Columbia

THIRD PRIZE

Whiskey Bottle

Dedicated to Raymond Porlier.

The house was quiet tonight; the low hum of the fridge was the only steady sound inside, besides the soft tune of Christmas music playing next door at the neighbours'. In the corner of the dimmed room stood a tree, weak and barely upright, with only the wall stopping it from tumbling over. The faint smell of pine was almost gone, and the colour of green had now faded to a deathly brown.

A woman in her late forties stood by the doorway, her eyes lingering on the dying tree across from her. Her appearance was distorted, face wrinkled with heavy lines around her mouth and eyes. The makeup that had once covered her face had turned into thick streaks of mascara and foundation running down her cheeks and the dark colour of a red lipstick that was still present in the cracks of her dry, thin lips.

Her nose scrunched up as she breathed in the lingering odour of old turkey and pumpkin pie. She paid no attention to the harsh stench, her appearance, or the state of the house. She stood as she had done each day for the last week, gazing at that dying tree, not caring about the space around her or the time moving forward.

“Mom?”

A soft voice made a smile appear on the woman's face. Her tired, dry eyes looked towards the unlit fireplace. Black soot covered the white brick, thick in the cracks and heavily coating the floor in front of the grimy fireplace.

She gazed intently at the little boy who stood next to it, wearing a pair of shooting-star patterned pyjamas with a large moon covering the front of the light-blue shirt.

“Mom, look what I made for you.”

The woman pushed off the doorframe, wiping her hands on her housecoat as she sat down on the couch in front of the boy. He smiled at her, showing off his missing front teeth and two small dimples. He held out a package wrapped in snowflake paper. In the centre of the paper, in black marker, a heart was drawn under the childish print “Love, Matty.”

In a careful motion, the woman held both her hands out for the gift. Her hands shook a bit as they stretched out in front of her. He took a step towards her, smiling as he lowered the gift into her two outstretched hands, and the paper crinkled under her grip.

“Aren't you going to open it?” he asked, looking uncertainly at her.

“I will,” she said to him quickly. “I mean, I am. It's just so pretty, the wrapping paper. Did you do this?”

His amber eyes twinkled with delight at her words, and he gave her a quick nod. His eyes watched her hands as she held the gift close to her chest.

“You're very talented.”

Her fingertips picked at the tape that held the paper together. The first rip of the paper gave a joy that entered her, as if she were a kid on Christmas Day.

Under the paper was a dark wooden picture frame with a small portrait under the glass. The woman stared at the photo of herself; next to her was a man whose image made her tears fall onto the glass. He stood tall in the photo, his eyes the same as those of the little boy in-between them. The boy was frozen, but the smile she remembered so well almost brought him to life. His dimples were imprinted into his two cheeks, and those beautiful eyes sparkled back at her just as they had the day he was born.

“Matty,” she whispered.

“Do you like it, Mom?”

The woman didn't look up from the photo. She savoured his voice as she closed her eyes and pictured the three of them together that day the photograph had been taken.

Her thoughts left at the loud banging coming from the front door. “Ms. Clarke? Are you home? It's Janet from next door,” a woman called.

She felt deflated, the moment of joy vanishing at the sound of Janet's voice. She looked away from the door and back towards the fireplace—where the boy, Matty, was no longer. The picture frame blurred in her vision. The wood frame turned into a hard glass, with an abstract pattern wrapping around the bottle. Inside the thick glass, the amber liquid danced, tainting the once beautiful colour of her memories with the poison.

by Tory LeBeau

Lee Creek, British Columbia

HONOURABLE MENTION

The Berry Bog

Recently orphaned, August arrives to his aunt and uncle's cranberry farm in northern Ontario. Uncle Duncan leaves an olive-green pair of bib-overall-style hip waders outside his bedroom door. These mysterious rubber boots become the keys to the kingdom—a kingdom of marshy, boggy land and ponds and thorny bushes and the skeletal outlines of birch and miserly pine that only the north and its feeble sun can grow.

The waders fit to his under-pits, and his feet swim inside the moulded rubber boots. He begins his exploration, easing through the turbid waters of the bog, surrounded by cedars and pines that smell like cinnamon on hot, humid days. Another child might have had a harder time acclimatizing to the bugs and the bush, but even floating amid the dense waters of his own loss, August fulfils the number-one requirement of his species: he adapts.

August had lived in a large concrete apartment complex in the east end of Scarborough. On weekends, his father would give him a twenty-dollar bill and send him for chips and liquorice to the convenience store that was right in their building. They would spend the day watching movies and playing video games.

Then, everything changed. A transport truck, with a driver drunk on lack of sleep and using his smartphone to update his Facebook status, crushed his parents against the concrete barriers of the 401. Eighty thousand pounds of brute negligence, and August found himself living with his odd, complicated yearnings on his aunt and uncle's berry farm.

August only understands his parents' disappearance like a clap of dark magic: here one moment and gone the next. August imagines a tidal wave of dark, murky water and viscous red berries that carried them away. Somehow, death and the bogs and the harsh northern Canadian landscape become enmeshed.

He is staring in amazement at an enormous dragonfly when he turns to see Philomena Hart for the first time. She navigates expertly on a flat-bottomed pirogue. August, who had not seen another living person since coming to live with his aunt and uncle, stares at her with a mixture of wonder and hope. Philomena stops the small boat the moment she spots him. They regard each other intensely for a moment, the bullfrogs sounding loudly around them.

"You're August. I'm Philomena. You're eight. You're eight. I'm eleven," she says.

August nods; the facts seemed to check out.

She sticks out a hand and stands regally, like a queen on the Nile, while August makes his way towards her. She seems nonplussed that he is wearing his aunt's lemon-yellow dish gloves. They ride up past his elbows like formal evening wear and are a part of his turtle-catching gear.

"Catch anything?" she asks.

August shakes his head. He is equally terrified she will turn and disappear into the bog and nearly delirious having encountered her.

"Hop aboard!"

With minimal difficulty, August sits cross-legged on the bow of the boat like a masthead covered in rubber. They slowly glide over the cold, still, dark waters.

August hears a loud *errraaaaaah* sound, oddly cowlike; although, he had precious little contact with cows, if the truth were told.

"Moose," Philomena says with authority. They float in place on the still waters, listening to the lament of the moose. "A moose can swim for over nineteen miles," Philomena states factually. She passes August a sandwich wrapped in ruddy-coloured butcher paper, taken from her knapsack. August unwraps his and takes a bite: bologna, Cheez Whiz, and bread-and-butter pickles, her signature dish. August eats, happily watching lazy clouds overhead.

That night, August dreams he is standing on his old balcony in Toronto, holding the cold steel railing, his feet between the square spindles. From behind, through the patio doors, comes a slow, steady rush of scarlet-red cranberries, flowing by the millions around him and through the railing and over, falling like a crimson waterfall. The cascade of red berries is endless, and

August sees the skyline and blue waters of Lake Ontario fill with berries until it turns blood red. The entire horizon and the orange sinking sun are blurs in the sanguine sky.

August awakens, hearing a loon on a nearby lake. He feels different somehow, as if his fear and sadness had spilt over the railings like the cranberries in his dream, his grief a wake behind him, spreading endless waves to distant shores.

by Jeanne Faria

Pefferlaw, Ontario

HONOURABLE MENTION

All That Talk

Mrs. Smith grabbed my elbow and pulled. I should have recognized the panic cast on her face, but I was late for an appointment. Often, more pressing thoughts entangled my mind.

“Come quick! They’re moving in,” she said, while her fingers dug into my flesh. Without waiting, she weaved us through her crowded living room towards the window.

Her window faces the same direction as mine. Our view is of the small courtyard planted with the Nankin shrubs that blossom with dainty flowers each spring. It’s the border that separates our apartment complex, 223 Robin Way, from 200 Bunting Crescent. They built them so close, anyone on the south-facing half can look clear into the windows on the opposite side. Drawn curtains and blinds help, but it always leaves one feeling naked.

I admit I expected the worst. My eyes locked on my feet while I followed, and I carefully sidestepped the fragile antique pieces overflowing with glass-eyed figurines.

Mrs. Smith stopped short at the picture window. “See!” She tapped her finger onto the glass mottled with dried specks of rain.

Who might they be? crossed my mind. *They, a nest of barn swallows perhaps?* Mrs. Smith was an avid bird watcher. *Oh, damn!* I prayed a motley crew of crows hadn’t taken up residence again. She hated that murder of birds and even threatened to shoot a nest on the ornamental maple with a BB gun.

But, it wasn’t birds or even a hive of pesky hornets or a wiggling swarm of ants.

Mrs. Smith looked expectant while I scanned the shrubs, the jungle gym, the trees bracing the ravine. The offending sight escaped me momentarily.

“Well?” She tugged.

“Ahem? I’m not sure what to say.” It dawned on me slowly that the long line of women, carrying cartons and giggling, bothered her: Muslims, the first family to take up residence in our neighbourhood.

“Well? Can’t we do something? Start a petition? They’re gonna take over.”

Mrs. Smith, aged seventy-nine, her eyes set like a storm, stood resolutely. I had to tread softly. She had survived turbulent waters as a single parent and now moored, the most treasured, besides the two cats curled on the divan, were her grown children. For economic reasons, they lived a thousand miles west. I knew them from the clutter of pictures crowding the walls, vying for a place of honour. Waning years shifted their faces from young to old. Over many shared pots of tea, I learned there isn’t a grandchild more precious than her Molly, Sarah, and Ben—what a smart tyke. The blue twinkle in her eyes always bloomed with motherly love.

Should I say something? Should I be bold and share my opinion about Muslims? Do I have enough gumption? With all that talk on the news, I am not surprised Mrs. Smith is fretting.

“Mrs. Smith? See that woman with the pale, blue hijab? That’s Yasmine.” I pointed.

“Yasmine?” Her eyes rolled sideways, poking the recollection.

We watched as Yasmine raised a toddler from the arms of another and showered its chubby cheek with kisses, both laughing in the sunshine. Mrs. Smith sensed the love flooding from mother to child, and her shoulders sank; her eyes widened as she nodded. A mother’s love, in any language, speaks volumes of truth and transcends cultures, distance, and time.

“Yes? Remember last month when I bought that scarf for your birthday? It was Yasmine who helped me choose.”

I watched while Mrs. Smith’s eyes computed, from the scarf she had proudly shown to everyone in the building back to Yasmine. Yasmine had chosen a rose-coloured silk and said, “This Mrs. Smith must be special.”

“The one who wrapped it in the gift bag with the peacocks on it?”

“That’s her. I also told you her husband works at the bank.”

We stood in silence while the train of women vanished into the building.

“You said Yasmine is studying to become a teacher, like me.”

“That’s right. You said teaching was a joy.”

“When I was young, I believed I could change the world—one child at a time.”

“You’ve changed me.” To convey the sentiment, I laid my hand on her shoulder.

“Do you think they’d enjoy my apple pie? You know, as a housewarming gift.”

“They’d appreciate it.”

Mrs. Smith dropped my elbow. A second later, she rifled in the pantry cupboards. “I need cinnamon and butter.” She had already forgotten I was there.

by Monika R. Martyn

Calgary, Alberta

HONOURABLE MENTION

Being Rosie

“Point-eight percent interest—one year,” says Reuben Gollinger. His name tag declares that he is the financial advisor here at the bank. He scoots his chair back and forth, sniffs several times, and grins, flashing a perfect piano keyboard of teeth.

I shift my grandson on my lap in the chair in front of Reuben’s desk and sigh. “On a hundred dollar bond? That’s all?”

It’s my grandson’s birthday and he’s got everything—except a savings bond.

Reuben nods. “It’ll cash in for one hundred dollars and—,” he says this as if he’s announcing a sports game, “eighty cents.” He sniffs again.

Cocaine, I think. 100% cocaine.

“Not worth the paperwork to get it ready.” I look fondly down at Ben. “I’ll just cut him a cheque like other years, I guess.”

Reuben leans forward. “Gold, that’s a fun gift. You gotta know the markets for that. He can hold it in his hand, feel its weight.”

“I don’t think—”

I can hear a muffled order through the closed door of Reuben’s office, a sharp voice not normally used in the hallowed halls of a business of commerce. Reuben looks at his computer screen. A red light flashes on and off, reflected from his shocked face, its rays illuminating the sombre corners of the room.

“Shit! Red alert. We’re being robbed.” He cranes his neck and tries to look out his office door, half standing in front of his chair. His voice is a whispered command: “Shut the lights off—behind your head.”

Ben is wriggling to get down from my lap. “I want Spider-Man,” he laments.

The light switch? I shake my head and whisper: “He’ll know we’re—

Why is it a ‘he’? It could be a ‘she’. On the Dr. Phil show, I’ve seen women who presented as delicate flowers, toting a crime sheet a mile long.

I lean forward, balancing Ben on my knee and whisper hoarsely, “They’ll know we’re here if the light goes off.”

He scowls, and then starts to hum, rocking in his chair. I can see under his desk that he smooths his hands over his trousers, soon picking up speed, rubbing frantically. Ben begins to whine, and I clap a hand over his mouth. My heart is slamming against my chest.

“Sh,” I whisper and begin to rock, too, hoping to lull him into a soothed state. “Remember Rosie the Rabbit?”

I hear scuffling sounds on the carpeted floor beyond the door. There’s a bang like a drawer slamming. Someone screams, and there are more growled commands, none distinct enough to hear. I crane my head to look through the frosted glass of the office door, but all I can see are legs and feet lined up in a row against a wall—hostage shoes on parade.

Ben squirms again to get down.

“Let’s play a game,” I say. Reuben shakes his head and rocks. “Yes,” I say firmly. “We’re all being Rosie the Rabbit. Remember, she couldn’t talk.”

“Why?” Ben asks.

I draw in a deep breath, the panacea for fear. “Because she lost her voice. So, we’re going to be quiet. Whoever is Rosie the longest gets a surprise.”

Ben’s eyes widen. I raise my index and middle fingers on both hands and put them on the side of my head. “Rosie the Rabbit ears,” I whisper. “Let’s be Rosie. No talking.”

I take my own shaking hands down, show Ben how to make Rosie Rabbit ears himself, and then resume my pose. I nod to Reuben. “Do it.”

“This is whacked,” he hisses.

We both hear a she-scream coming from the hall. I don't even look there, just rock and keep my rabbit ears up. Ben does his too. Reuben slowly raises his fingers and makes rabbit ears. I nod. "Being Rosie," I croon softly.

How long does a bank robbery take? It seems like hours, but in a little while, there is more scuffling outside, followed by shouting, crying, and sirens in the distance.

The door slams open, and a sobbing young woman sputters, "The police are coming; is everyone okay?"

I nod and am overtaken by a spasm of terror and relief all at once.

"Grandma," Ben whispers, still holding his fingers up for rabbit ears, "do I get the surprise?"

by *Connie Cook*

Melancthon, Ontario

HONOURABLE MENTION

The Stowaway

I am about to sleep for a very long time. When awakened, I will be with my brothers and sister. But not my parents. They will be dead—dead, so that I can live.

I am sixteen years old, and I have lived all of my years, days, and minutes aboard this starship. I am a stowaway. You see, my mom was a teacher and my dad an engineer on this very ship. Each had secured positions in the new colony, far, far away from Earth. Then my mom failed the medical—she was pregnant. My parents already had three adult children and were too old to have more. Or so they thought.

So they publicly said their goodbyes but privately planned to smuggle Mom onto the ship and rig Dad's sleep pod for later use. If Mom died, Dad would go into the pod; if not, the pod was for me, his namesake. Either way, when everyone woke up, there would be someone with my dad's name in my dad's pod.

I am named after my dad in the hopes that when I am discovered in his pod, bearing the correct name might give me a legal loophole to slide through (my mom made me look up “loophole” in the Digital Database). So, I am Canon Farr, a decidedly unfeminine name, but fitting. Dad said a canon is “authentic works,” and that's what I am—the authentic work of the both of them. They call me CC for short.

I had a wonderful childhood: I crawled in the concourse, toddled in telemetry, and slept under the stars. Mom, Dad, and the DD were my teachers. They taught me words and numbers. Dad and I held science fairs. Mom and I performed plays. We watched old movies. When I was ten, I was Tinkerbell in an improvised tutu. At eleven, Tinkerbell gave way to Titania. I took a darker turn at twelve when I was a brooding Hamlet, a resigned Roy Batty. *I've seen things you people wouldn't believe.*

My parents shielded me from my complicity in their situation. During one particularly angsty moment (my mom made me look up “angst”), I was railing against them for the unfairness of *my* situation: *Why* did they have me like this? They were so *selfish*. It was then that they told me . . . how I had worked so hard to glimmer into existence. What were they to do? My angst gave way to guilt: I was the reason they would never see their other children again. They hadn't wanted me to carry such a burden and so had delayed in telling me this awful truth. They told me that when I arrive in the new world, asleep with everyone else, upon awakening I will be with my brothers and sister. They are expecting me and already love me.

I love them too. We visit them on holidays and birthdays and other momentous occasions, like when I learned to read. I even read to them, my silent audience. I used to study their faces and could see that I would look a lot like my sister, but I had the heavy brow of my eldest brother and the fair hair of my middle brother. Mom said my eyes were completely different from theirs, but she said that made sense in a parallax way (I looked up “parallax”). When I look at them, never changing through the years, I think of us as the children of Narnia. Peter, Susan, and Edmund have gone into the wardrobe without me, but I will catch up to them soon.

My mom used to call me Sleeping Beauty. But then this imperceptible shadow would cross her face. I think I understood when I was fourteen, and we were celebrating my sister's fortieth birthday. She still looked twenty-six. My parents only got to see their children like this, frozen in time, and they would never see what awaited them, or me. Their sadness became mine. But they have done their best to prepare me for what life holds after my big sleep.

And here I am, ready for this journey. This is my last entry into the DD. Tomorrow I go, *an exposition of sleep come upon me*. Into the wardrobe. I hope there will be books there—real books. My last embrace with my parents will give way to my first embrace with my siblings. That's what Mom and Dad said as they tucked me in one last time.

by Becky Hingley
Severn, Ontario

HONOURABLE MENTION

It's Never a Good Time

The young man careened along the icy platform, hopscotching over haphazard baggage and dodging errant children. Her radiant smile lit up her entire face, guiding him towards her like a lighthouse beacon through the gentle drizzle, providing safe passage from the train. He finally reached her and scooped her up, twirling her around joyfully, as if they were on a movie set. Their laughter suffused the entire station. Passengers nearby smiled into their cheeks, remembering, perhaps, how love feels. An elderly couple reached for each other's hand.

Since infancy, her smile's had the ability to light up whole rooms. People respond to it instinctively, without thought. It illuminated the love of her life. He basked in the warmth of it—such a fine young man. Could any parent wish for better? It almost broke my heart.

They swirled past me with a glow of happiness. I followed, heavily. The mist clung to me with grey indifference.

"Why me, lord?" I grumbled morosely to myself. Then, predictably, acquiescing, but in the process feeling the need to vent a little of the pent-up ire expanding in me.

"Whatever," I huffed. "Thy frickin' will be done, as frickin' usual."

Chattering joyfully, she popped the hatch of her Mini Cooper for his backpack and holdall. Another quick kiss, and they jumped in. She slipped into gear and steered carefully out of the slick parking lot. I watched her navigate the turns, looking both ways several times before easing into the dual carriageway. She's always been a careful driver. I'm proud of her for that.

Only six kilometres to go, I thought. The inevitability of it constricted in my throat. *If there were only a way*. . . .

But the beast loomed, right on cue: an enormous, blue eighteen-wheeler. It was still clear across the other side of the highway, and she hadn't yet caught sight of it. I sighed, and it began to lurch erratically. I took a deep breath, and it started fishtailing. Swiftly, I guided the seemingly directionless mass of the semi-trailer across a few lanes of traffic.

Then, she finally spotted it. The terror on her face sickened me. She tried to steer away, tried to brake, pumping her foot for all she was worth. But whatever avoidance manoeuvres she tried in those few, heart-stopping moments had little relevance to the inevitable result. The rig was out of control, jack-knifing on the black ice. I hurtled it smack over the centre median and forced its tall, looming cab to whip backwards on itself in a horrendous screech of tearing steel. At the last possible instant, I carefully spun the sharp corner of the trailer's back end around so that the impact of its pivoting bulk smashed precisely, cleanly—and only—into the passenger side of her car. Right into the love of her life.

It had only taken a few seconds. The noise must have been appalling. But all I heard was the sharp inhalation of her terrified breath before she blacked out. And following that, only the soft sibilance of the rain on the deserted verge, the wiper blades continuing automatically, swishing against the shattered, ice-glazed windscreen.

"Job done," I said, exhaling. I waited for the vehicles to slow down and stop; for the kind people to swarm around the car like ants; for the horrified trucker to climb down from his high cab, sobbing; for the ambulances and fire trucks to arrive and do the very best they could do in circumstances that were utterly beyond their control; for people to say how lucky they were that it hadn't been them on that icy road, at that precise moment—how lucky she'd been to escape without a scratch. Little did they understand the awful wound inside her soul that bled and bled. . . .

Nowadays, she's very quiet, pliable. I have no say in the matter—it's never a good time to raise questions of randomness; a seeming lack of direction; fairness. I pilot her towards quite another destiny, different entirely from the one she had imagined. What's to be is yet to be.

And her smile? Well, . . . we shall see.

by kerry rawlinson

Peachland, British Columbia

HONOURABLE MENTION

Waiting

“I don’t understand. Why does it matter what they think?”

“You’ll understand one day, when you grow up.” The man scratched at his freshly shaven chin and peered at his reflection in the cracked mirror. He nodded and walked across the creaking wood floors to grab his briefcase. The boy absent-mindedly munched on his buttered piece of toast, following his father around as he got ready.

“What if I don’t want to?” the boy asked again, through his chewing.

“You won’t have much of a choice.” The man made sure his tie was as neat as possible. Hopefully, the loose threads wouldn’t command too much attention . . . yellow was already too bright against his dark, second-hand suit. At least the shoes were polished.

“You’ve always been great, Dad.”

The older man chuckled. “Greatness doesn’t pay the bills, kid. If I don’t land this one, we’ll have to be great in a dumpster somewhere.”

“That doesn’t sound fun.”

“It’s not.” The man grabbed at his briefcase and took a deep breath. “I guess I’ll be back in a while. You stay out of trouble.” He rustled the boy’s hair once before opening the apartment’s front door.

Summer hit him in the face, with a burst of heavy, humid wind. *Secure both locks for the boy’s sake. Adjust the suit. Make sure every piece of ID is present.* It was a checklist he had run through a thousand times before—a thousand times too many, he would say. He made for the bus and it was, thankfully, on time, air-conditioned too.

Slumping into one of the side seats, he pulled his briefcase onto his lap and closed his eyes in thought. *What was greatness, anyway? And why did it matter what people thought, after all?* He had given those answers to the boy, but they were answers he had conveniently heard before from the adults in his time. *The run-down apartment, the lack of money . . . those were things to worry about, but for what reasons did he worry about them? For his own reasons—or someone else’s? For society? For the boy?* At once, he was questioning what he knew.

His head snapped up as he heard his stop called, but it was too late and the bus drove by. It would be two extra blocks of walking in the summer heat.

The man got off and adjusted his suit while going into a brisk walk, down the city sidewalk crowded with people. *Where were they all going . . . today?* he wondered. *Where were people going? Where was he going?*

He made it up to the interview, on the twentieth floor of an ultramodern building. Everything was practiced and precise. He knew the answer to every interview question. He watched the large man roasting in his three-piece suit, despite the air-conditioning running. They exchanged an awkward, sweaty handshake, and the man made sure to wash his hands.

It was a disappointing result. He was sure that he would get the job, but two months was too long a wait. There wasn’t enough money for that.

He splashed cold water on his face before taking the elevator down. The next bus was conveniently there, and he jogged for it. He put his head down until the driver called his stop. He got off.

The boy’s words came into his head again as he passed the supermarket near their home. *What if greatness could pay the bills, after all?*

He stopped and looked at the market entrance for a minute. At last, he walked inside, and to the front counter.

“What’s a handsome young man like you doing working here?” the old woman asked, shakily putting a jar of peanut butter on the belt.

The man smiled at her, taking a sticker from his apron pocket and putting it onto the jar. “Being great, ma’am. But, slowly.”

She smiled back and patted his hand. “That’s the only way to do it, you know. The only way.” She slowly picked up another jar as he waited behind the cash register.

by Shane Blackwood
Toronto, Ontario

HONOURABLE MENTION

Friday's Friend

There was always something magical about Friday night—a weekend away from school or work and responsibility. . . ? Friday night with friends was our time, our ally and protector of good, our chance to indulge in childish pranks or hang around street corners, watching neighbourhood skirmishes under the phosphorous haze of the gas lamp's illuminated sphere.

Pressure-free Friday night, stretching into darkness with tomorrow's promise of lengthy slumber, would revitalize the spirit. Whatever the season, the same Friday-night aroma spread along the street, tempting our palates to mouth-watering submission, with the prize of fish and chips, a ritual celebrated each Friday night at Liz and Bill's chip shop. Newspaper-wrapped fare were served in steaming, pleasing perfection. Cod, a mild-flavoured fish, with flaky, white flesh, was surrounded by scrumptious batter and fried to crunchy, golden, unpredictable shapes, with fingers sprouting outwards in a chorus of sizzling eruptions. Plaice, a flat fish with smooth brown skin and distinctive red spots, was available for those who could afford it. Chips, those succulent columns of potato, graciously collapsed between untended teeth. All served with delicious, over-stewed, soggy, mushy peas.

Liz and Bill's fare was always a treat, but on Friday night, everything was better. Extra batter crust for the same price with bonus scrapings, the bits of batter that fell off into minuscule pieces of crunchable, over-cooked delights. Liz wrapped our meals with unsoiled newspaper as neatly as she tied her high-bun hair, offering extra dabs of malt vinegar and salt we didn't need.

On Friday night, the till sang praises of fresh, piping hot food—never reheated, sad imitations like Monday's lot. Liz wore her special, red, flowery pinafore, while Bill donned his blue, thin, white-striped butcher's apron and a clean white replica of a worn chef's hat, as he prepared extra consignments for the crowded weekly event. Friday-night queues, like the wait for a double-decker bus after a football match, were lineups that went on and on, but nobody seemed to mind lingering for those cordial Friday meetings, expected by Liz and Bill with cabinets stacked for the occasion.

"Our Tom's been promoted, you know?" a turbaned Elsie Egan bragged, her curlers pointing out like impish horns. "Grooming him for management, they are. Not bad, eh, Liz, with Mary expecting, is it?" She spoke only to Liz, but all could hear and were meant to. There were no secrets on Friday nights. The line snail-paced forward.

"Mrs. Taylor is down with the mumps," said Aggie Perkins, enticing gossip, and Liz's ever-sympathetic eyes widened with genuine concern. "Not too good at her age, is it, Liz? And to top it all, her son's wife has run off with that bookie from across the tram lines." Aggie rolled her eyes. "That Atherton girl was never good enough for Stan, was she?"

Liz knew all the gossip—and how to stop it. "That was three fish, you said?"

"And a large order of chips, please."

"That'll be one shilling and nine-pence, please, love." Liz efficiently wrapped the package, the newspaper showing last week's partial football results.

The spinning florin traversed the white marble slab countertop, and Bill emulated a smile, revealing stained brown teeth, while laughter lines raced across his forehead. He placed another spud over the pedestal-mounted splicer and pumps with a sliding motion, as if drawing draught beer instead of thick, square chip slices. Almost another two-bob closer to retirement, his eyes expressed with a sparkled glint.

"Three-pence change, love. Good night," said Liz, her cordiality favouring the customer's return. Then, on to business: "Next!" As an afterthought, she scanned the ravenous throng. "Bill, we need more fish and loads more chips, in a hurry."

We'd collect our prizes, consume like hungry wolves, then watch others come and go to savour Friday night's magic. A treat, a fantasy, too far for Monday's thoughts to quell the loosening spirit within, and a hope for tomorrow's football game—if the fish and chips wouldn't slow us down too much—thanks to Friday's friend.

by John A. Barrett

Nanaimo, British Columbia

HONOURABLE MENTION

The Reprimand

“If you can’t behave like a proper young lady, then you shouldn’t look like one either, should you?”

Rochelle began to panic. Her father’s grip on her left arm was like a vice. He forced her across the room and slammed her into the vinyl dental chair.

As a little girl, Rochelle had climbed up on that pale purple chair and begged him to spin her around. When he first set up his practice and did not have many patients, they would stretch out in the chair and read *Sleeping Beauty* until they dozed off, snuggled together. As a pre-teen, Rochelle even “played dentist” with her chum, Zainab. She scraped her friend’s teeth and had her swish and spit minty, blue mouthwash. Her father’s office had always been a private playhouse, a sanctuary—not this afternoon.

He yanked a fistful of luggage straps from a bottom drawer, to make her a captive. Before she knew what was happening, he had strapped both of her forearms to the rigid arms of the dental chair. His face muscles were tight and twitching. His eyes were bloodshot, wet, and furious.

Rochelle’s panic made her kick. Somehow, the man who had raised her and loved her was now going to trap her and hurt her. She flailed, partially pinned to the chair, which was immovably bolted to the floor. She screamed and resisted, but no one was out in the waiting room. No one could hear her or help her. She kicked at his legs, even at his arms, but he refused to stop.

Soon, her shins were strapped to the legs of the chair. She felt like a frog pinned open on a Styrofoam block before the inevitable clumsy and vicious science class dissection.

“Please, Daddy!” she wailed. “Please calm down. Don’t do this!”

“Why didn’t you tell *him* that? What is *wrong* with you? *Why* did you do this, Rochelle?”

“Dad . . . it was nothing! It just happened. We went to the library. We studied for hours. He is a very nice boy. He’s just a nice boy. . . .” She sobbed, coughing out the words.

“No. Nice boys don’t squeeze you and kiss you on public steps. You’re a tramp now. Everyone will say so. You are not my pretty little princess anymore!” He spat the words at her and turned away.

“Yes I am, Papa. I am still . . . I will always be your—”

Her father stood at the sink, scrubbing his hands. He slid his arms into his dental smock and tied the ties at the back. He straightened up to his full six-foot height and took several deep breaths. Then, he reached for his tools.

Rochelle felt tingly, as if her arteries and veins were electric. She swooned a bit and tried to rip her body from that chair one final time. It was futile. He had her, and he *would* punish her.

Tears streamed down her cheeks. Her eyes burned. When she closed her lids, she saw a different face.

She flashed back to a fuzzy memory. *She was wobbly and tiny. A lady in a flowered dress squatted on the floor, crying and laughing simultaneously. Her arms were reaching for Rochelle.*

“Come on. Come on. You can make it, honey,” cooed the lady. Her grin was both funny and frightening. She had a pretty face, flushed with devotion and emotion, but she had no front teeth.

“Now, I must make you look ugly,” her father announced, “so they will leave you alone.”

by Maria CampbellSmith

Ottawa, Ontario

HONOURABLE MENTION

The Day She Left

Liza surveyed the mess that was her bedroom. Her government-issued small, black duffle bag sat in the eye of the hurricane on top of her unmade bed. It was all packed and ready to go. She had to be forgetting something.

Liza pulled her tablet out of her duffle for the tenth time that morning, making sure it was still there. She had already forwarded everything on it to the Earth II team. All of her twenty-five years of digital life were preserved for her as part of her lottery win, but, *What if?* Her brain had been filled with what-if questions for weeks. The only way she got to sleep was reminding herself that she could back out until the doors of The Ark closed behind her.

There was a soft knock on her bedroom door. "It's time to go, slowpoke. The rotation of the planets won't stop for you," Richard said. He tried to make his voice light.

She shoved her tablet back in her bag and slung the bag over her shoulder. Forcing a smile onto her face, she opened the door. "Ready for my great big adventure!"

They sat side by side in the car, staring straight ahead. Richard had one hand gripped on the steering wheel, even though the car was on auto-drive. His other hand was squeezing Liza's gently. They were both crying. Liza kept stealing glances at him. His jaw was tight, which was an unnatural look for him. Richard had a movie-star smile, and he deployed it often. They were a movie couple; all of their friends said so. She looked at the small scar above his eye. She had smacked him in the head with a door during their meet—cute. He joked that she had made him see stars. They even had matching star tattoos on their wrists.

Liza had been so sure they would beat the odds when they decided to enter the lottery. They sat side by side, staring at their tablets the night the results were announced. Liza's lit up with digital fireworks that spelled out congratulations and immediately started downloading a two-gigabyte update. Richard's sat cold and dark. Neither of them spoke for several minutes.

Liza broke the silence. "I won't go," she said.

"You're not staying for me. I'll leave you if you stay."

Rain spattered the windshield. Liza wondered if it rained on Mars yet. It must, if they enacted the fertility lottery. Bringing in colonists to populate the planet was the last step of the Earth II program. You could probably stand outside in the rain too. It wouldn't burn you like it did here.

"Dance in the rain for me," Richard said.

"I will."

It was a short drive to the spaceport from the Earth II program's living quarters. Richard had been her constant support. Together, they went over everything she needed to know, but they had never talked about today. When Liza thought about the near year-long journey in front of her on The Ark, and then a lifetime on a strange alien planet, she always imagined Richard beside her.

The car stopped. Richard got out. A moment later, her door opened.

"It's time," he said. She took a deep breath and got out of the car. "I'm going to say goodbye here. I don't think I can handle going up there. I'll really fall apart." He laughed and wiped at his face.

"I love you," she said.

"I love you, too," he said.

Liza walked forward in a daze. Crying and smiling faces surrounded her, camera flashes went off, and music played.

Before she knew it, she was sitting in her seat on The Ark. She was gripping the handles of her duffle bag very tightly. She took a breath and relaxed. This was it. She could turn around right now and run back to Richard. He would be parked down there until The Ark took off—and even after that. He wouldn't really leave her. They could live out their days on a dying planet together. It would be very romantic.

Liza stowed her bag and buckled her harness. Under the sadness and anxiety, a new feeling was bubbling in her chest. It was excitement. Liza was going to Mars. She was going to try and help save the human race, whether they deserved it or not. It was going to be an adventure.

When The Ark doors closed, Liza was smiling.

by Ashley Ouellette

Windsor, Ontario

HONOURABLE MENTION

Kaze No Denwa

It is April 11, 2011, and one month has passed since the great Japanese tsunami splintered the island. In a small coastal village, a man parks his car at a distance and walks towards the only object in a large field: *Kaze No Denwa*, the “Phone of the Wind.” Tears begin to well in his eyes as he feels the gentle breeze wash over him. His shoes crunch the loose gravel underfoot. On this day, there is no-one else around.

In the middle of the field stands a white phone booth. It glows boldly in the bright afternoon sunlight. The man walks along a winding path through low-cut, manicured underbrush. He reaches the phone booth, slides open the door, and enters. He takes his time, looks around, and finally picks up the receiver from atop an old-fashioned black rotary phone. He places a finger into a small circle at his desired number, gently spins clockwise, releases, and repeats nine times. The phone in Kaze No Denwa is connected to nothing; there is no electricity here, no dial tone even, but the man is not surprised.

“If you can hear me,” he says, “please listen carefully.”

He stops, looks around the tiny phone box, and sobs, wiping the tears from his eyes with a sleeve.

“Please, let me hear your voice say ‘Daddy’ again.” He covers his eyes with the sleeve and gently whispers, “I’m so sorry I couldn’t save you. I will forever be sorry and ashamed.” His head falls, his eyes close.

His name is Satsuko. He has travelled far to visit Kaze No Denwa. The great tsunami has brought havoc and, with it, many lives have gone to that place where spirits reside. Sadness has punctuated the land, and Satsuko is in its midst. His face and demeanour are altered. Kaze No Denwa, the Phone of the Wind is becoming well known. Its back story and sentiment have resonated with the people.

He read about it in a magazine published the year prior; the story of an old man’s burning wish, long before the tsunami, to communicate with his deceased relative. A phone booth was set in the middle of a field tilled by hand and hoe for generations, a place for the old man to air his grief, where his breath could catch the wind and set out across the field, down the cliff face, and across the vast blue Pacific.

Satsuko moves slowly. Kaze No Denwa is even more beautiful than he could possibly have imagined. Each side of the booth is windowed, diced into small cubes of rimmed glass with a neat turquoise roof on top. There is not the slightest hint of a scuff or a dust speck on the glass panes. Inside, there is a small table at waist height, and upon it rests a candle holder with a half-burned candlestick. Next to it, an open notebook with cursive dialogue inscribed in its pages, a pen resting on top of the notebook, and the phone. Satsuko enjoys the feel of yesteryear, of time stood still; the juxtaposition of old ways in a new world is obvious. He feels the wind gently caressing the field and the phone box, within which he now stands. He breathes it in, notices the flora with its permanent lean towards the ocean, and wants to feel it.

He has arrived here saddened but finds himself in awe. It is a radiant sanctuary in a world gone angry and desperate. Satsuko has thought about this place many times since he first read the magazine story.

Before he exits the phone booth, Satsuko speaks again: “My daughters, I will always love and honour you. You gave my life meaning. As the land changes colour and the leaves come and go, as the years move on and I become an old man, my love for you will endure. Please, never forget that. I hope you are safe and warm and eating well.”

Satsuko spends a few minutes writing in the notebook, places the pen down on the page, bows, and then steps outside. He looks up. Through drifting cloud, the blue sky is pensive and big. He looks out across the ocean. The horizon shimmers. A bird nosedives towards the escarpment between himself and the water. He notices a small yellow flower at his feet; wiping away his tears with his jacket sleeve, he slowly bends down to smell it.

by *Kerry Hale*

Courtenay, British Columbia