

FIRST PRIZE

Timber

I watch the young men come into the bakery,
where I serve up sweet treats, pizza slices,
friendly banter, and local lore.
Some are fresh-faced and still wet behind the ears,
others, tattooed arms and eyes hollow, yet hopeful.
They've all come to make a fresh start, a new life
from what they've known.

They are young faller apprentices, dressed in their
new, stiff fluorescent vests and sturdy boots.
Not yet smelling of sweat and saw oil,
tucking up on sweets and savouries and beginning
a month or two out on the cut blocks, the timber leases,
learning their new skills in the sometimes unforgiving woods.

I see these young men as soldiers, going off to fight,
sometimes winning, sometimes losing, the battle to cut down
every viable tree still standing on this North Coast.
Oh, I'm sure some of these boys are secret tree-huggers.
But work is work, and sometimes we do what we must
to put food on the table and gas in the truck.

The falling instructors are mature men, having lived
to tell the tales of close calls, and what not to do,
and what to keep your eyes on. They are a brawny bunch,
older, tougher, wiser, and still alive after years,
sometimes decades, in the woods, always looking
for the sweet spot of old growth and perfect falling conditions.
These men have spent a lifetime in the woods, and it shows;
yet there is a gentleness and kindness that they possess.

But in reality the numbers are high: men, boys, killed
every year in the woods. Despite better safety gear
and regulations, the loss is still great, too great . . .
for wages, for a life cut short, for logs we ship overseas.

Yet still they come, fresh-faced or scruffy, into the bakery,
marvelling at the smells, like Mama's kitchen when the bread
is just coming out of the oven. They empty their pockets
and gather up a bag of goodness to dream on,
as their new adventure unfolds.

by Wisteria Wildwood
Sointula, British Columbia



SECOND PRIZE

Dynamics

Not so many days have passed since
you and I set up figurines,
batteries, emptied our drawers
on the bookshelf at the end of
your hall.

It was a way to pass our time
indoors; standing serious at
the head of your hallway, rubber
bands pulled taut like lions in the
tall grass.

Thick brown carpet anchored our toes,
legs flexed in silent potential
as we stared down the sights of our
thumbs, magazines dangling loose from
our wrists.

Subtle swaying of the wrist would
align our thumbnails with the first
targets; hunger drove us to the
utmost precision as we sought
our prey.

In the finite space that glues a
datum to a disaster, we
released our tension, sprung at our
victims, seizing our vectors like
archers.

Elastic cut through the air like
a vaccine ripping through muscle;
swallowing the trajectories
we breathlessly mapped out with our
childhoods.

Impulse broke upon our desires
as together we upturned the
fixtures we ourselves had placed there,
side by side at the end of your
hallway.

by Nick LeBlanc
Moncton, New Brunswick



THIRD PRIZE

When a Bird Dies before Us

*And where did you think you were going
high-tailing it away from unseen troubles—
Unseen to us
Uncommonly mediocre conversations
to any outside observer
who wouldn't know the strength
it had taken to get up and go and return
And then you arrived
a shot in the dark
and all we were left
with were exclamations*

*She couldn't look back—
Brought up short against
an invisible barrier
when all you saw for miles
was blue on blue and escape*

*It was too apt
and yet I couldn't stop
from returning to look down
upon your all-too-swiftly
snuffed existence
wondering what was lost
and if this fate could have been avoided
as hers was avoided
when the warning came sooner rather than later*

*Now her warning is my warning
and I still compare possibilities
My body lain out like your impromptu funeral
My body—
my muted plumage—
or my life
lived*

*It's the one I see when I look into the mirror
All body parts intact
and miles of blue on blue waiting
to be lived
It's the one I see*

*by April Harvey
Bay Bulls, Newfoundland*



HONOURABLE MENTION

I Remember Cherries

Plump and bursting with succulence
Round, crimson memories of summer

Of Mom, sitting down with a bowl
In the sunroom
Viewing the fruits of her labour
Spitting out the stones

Dad coming in, after a double shift
Dirty with sweat and box dust

Four-year-old me
Jolted from my reverie
Of playing at tea
With Bear and Francie
By the loud words
Words I don't want to understand

The powerful calloused hand swings
The bowl of crimson treasures topples
Sending rubies all around
The muffled punch of fist
Meeting plump cherry-filled cheek
The startled cry
From me, or from her?
And then another and another
Spitting out stones, or teeth
Blood mixed with cherry juice
Seeping out in a slow trickle

“Stop!” the command escapes my lips

I remember cherries

by Melanie Flores
Toronto, Ontario



HONOURABLE MENTION

The Night Sky

she rowed to the centre of the lake.
stirring up hurricanes with the oars,
almost tipping the red canoe,
she stopped and told you to look up.

“they say there is a black hole in the
middle of our galaxy,” she started.
“and that in several billion years,
everything we know will be pulled into it.”

you pretended to be surprised,
as if she hadn’t told you this several billion times.
you smiled, but her head was tilted too far back for her to notice.
she touched the water.

for a while, you didn’t see the beauty
in those tiny balls of white light like she did.
she used to say they were her first loves.
“they’re reminders,” she would repeat.

the lake was glass.
the canoe swayed as she rowed on,
reflections of stars that had burned out years ago rippled in the water.
“reminders,” she’d say, “that nothing is infinite.”

she was right, you know.
for weeks after she was gone you avoided the night sky.
the canoe stayed dry.
the stars were hers alone and you didn’t need a reminder.
her absence was enough.

it took you nine weeks to go back on the water.
you whistled aloud,
trying to stop the deafening silence from flooding your ears,
you stopped and looked up.

you thought of the black hole.
of the way she tilted her head upwards.
of how some of those tiny balls of white light were already dead.
reminders, you thought, *that everything shines on*.

by Julie Leroux
Timmins, Ontario



HONOURABLE MENTION

The Disadvantages of Organized Lawn Mowing

All the tiny townhouse people
in their spotless red-brick squares
with the tangerine wallpaper
and no railing for the stairs
line their teacups up in triplets
and their dress socks up in pairs
and call greetings to their neighbours
tinged with haughty townhouse airs

And at two o'clock on Tuesdays
they mow their backyards in a line
each inhaling gasoline
from the motor's tinny whine
and at tepid, tasteless tables
it's at six o'clock they dine
trapped in garish red-brick houses
of identical design

All the tiny townhouse people
hate the identical décor
all the teacups set in triplets
and the socks paired in the drawer
and the tangerine wallpaper
and the dust upon the floor
and the lines upon the lawns
and the neighbourly rapport
but the tiny townhouse people
purse their lips and lock their doors
and go back to folding dress socks
that they've folded thrice before

by Abbey Pagée
Edmonton, Alberta



HONOURABLE MENTION

From the Ashes You Will Learn

Green girl, Summer's
babe, what do you know
of Winter with his sharpened
tongue and chapped lips?

He kissed fire while suckling
Mother Earth's breast and taught himself
how to love the charred remains
of finger bones but you
haven't seen a bloody heart
since Mama's hung above
her door frame.

Wait until he turns your toes
violet and your collar bone peppered
in broken galaxies. Wait
until your hands turn black
from frostbite,
until your lips become bats, and let him
hear your screeches. Wait
until his words become poison ivy
and you cannot swallow it
anymore. Then you will know
of Winter and his wall
built tall enough to climb
with thorns thicker than your arm.

Green girl, take a hammer
to his walls and use the bricks
to build a bridge. Walk
until your blisters bleed. Make
a home in every town and send
postcards to your mother. Run
your fingers over your scars
until every mark he left is held
up in self-love. Summer will flee
from Winter's chill but you
will rise from Fall's foliage stronger
than his hidden daggers. Winter
has a sharp bite but you are iron-born.
You cannot be tamed.

by Robyn Tocker
Fort Qu'Appelle, Saskatchewan



HONOURABLE MENTION

Rocking Chair

I am a rocking chair
made from human flesh and hair.
I have a smile and hands to hold,
a book of stories yet untold,

of dogs that know of human speech,
of dusty rooms where old men sleep,
where children dance past time and space,
rainbows colour sunshine's face.

A clock to track our hearts' soft rhyme,
not of use for story time,
grows wings and flutters over sill,
then returns to doorway: still,
to listen with enchanted pale,

as wings brush breath of summer's tale,
soft as waiting breeze exhales.
Such wonder as my tales enthrall
past tick of time to bend and fall
and rock the world of green and rush
to gentle sway of story's hush.

by Eileen Bell

Aldergrove, British Columbia



HONOURABLE MENTION

Desertion

The intergalactic tour guide announces,
“Ladies and gentlemen, we have now attained
99.99% the speed of light.”

Eighty years later:
“If you look to your left,
we are now passing Alpha Centauri.
We would like to remind passengers
once again, please be careful not to
think yourselves out of existence.”

Generations of astronauts
will collect the energy of entire stars
and leave black holes in their wake.

Earth, by now, has folded in upon itself
from grief, excused itself for its failure
to hold you, the lover it sacrificed itself for.

What truths you withhold,
what lies you tell your
children and grandchildren,
born weightless of body and past,
at once unburdened and unenlightened.

You delude yourself into absolution
while successive generations, unbeknownst to them,
erase your history.
The new definition of progress—
a pathetic, overdue attempt to save yourselves.

But what you left behind
remains— the remnants
for alien time travellers to sift through,
their faces full of pathos and bewilderment.

How convenient, five billion years from now,
the sun will engulf your sins
and all will be forgiven.

by Erica Lewis
Halifax, Nova Scotia



HONOURABLE MENTION

Remember Me

When you get wherever it is that you're going
I hope you'll always remember where it was that you started
And how you felt when you got here
And how you'll feel when you leave
And if all of that still can't change your mind
Remember me

Remember how we spent a whole day fishing on the shoreline
Because we both had too much on our minds
And we needed to be alone
And the best way to be alone was together

Remember those few days of terrible weather
And how we stayed inside until you couldn't stand it
And I was there with a sweater when you came back in
To warm your heart but first your hands
And that became your favourite sweater

Remember, when you make your first friend there
Not to forget the friends you left here

And when you get to wherever it is you're going
I hope that it's snowing
Because I want you to have a fresh start
And I hope that no one ever breaks your heart
The way that your leaving breaks mine
And I know you needed to find yourself
I just wish you could have done the finding safe at home

And if I had known you'd be leaving
Maybe I never would have pinned my hopes on you staying
Or maybe I would have pinned a few more
Because maybe fate would have taken my side on you

I love you
And I'll miss you
And I don't know what else to say besides
I wish you'd stay

by Lindsay Fumerton
Kemptville, Ontario



HONOURABLE MENTION

A Sincere Apology to the Galaxy

To begin
we wish to apologize for
the faded flags and ancient footprints
as well as the stones taken
without consent.
We would also like to say
that we feel great remorse
over Laika
and promise that
it won't happen again.

We are ashamed of all the space junk
in Saturn's rings
and of all the vulgarities
surrounding Uranus.
But most of all
we sincerely apologize
to Pluto
for the confusion over its status
in our astronomy textbooks.

We fail to adequately express our regret
over the rubbish in the asteroid belt
and of our constant conquests.
We would also like to mention
the rovers on Mars
the stations in space
the inquisitive Hubble
and the forgotten satellites
in perpetual orbit.

We ask forgiveness for our selfishness
at the laughable notion
that we are important enough
to be the centre
of the universe.
We have done the galaxy a profound disservice
by forgetting about its vastness.
We are a curious people
and a lonely one.

by Kristen Unrau
Hope, British Columbia



HONOURABLE MENTION

This Girl

This girl,
she has these celestite eyes;
I can see polar bears in them.
But sometimes they're olivine.
Are those spider monkeys underneath?
But then again,
in her eyes I notice
aquamarine, turquoise,
nephrite, and sardonyx.
I guess azurite is what her eyes truly are.
When her pulse caresses me,
there is a phantom of myself
flowing through her body
along with countless others:
a sushi chef, a diamond miner,
a revolutionary, and a priest.
In the end, her heart
is no heart at all.
It has the names of
corazón, сердце,
trái tim, and *kalp*
and its alter ego is core.
I am a boy composed of copper cables
whispering to this girl of fibre,
“*Je t'aime.*”
My reply is a choke.
Her eyes discolour.
Her heart grows fainter.
My mechanical grip on her throat
is just a little too strong.

by Jamie Kihira
Victoria, British Columbia



HONOURABLE MENTION

Closed Door, Unlocked

It's strange when things perish and then become changed

Like a deafening silence
Like a sickening stage
Like the sound of her voice as it pumps through your veins

The minute you feel her
The moment you relax
It pulses
You're welcome
Your eyes are green stacks

She's erotic
Exotic
Where were you
On track?

I want you
Resolve me
The sweetness in cracks

You squirm in the silence
She catches her breath
Just a moment

It lingers

You want her
In darkness
In movement
In the curve of her back

You're hungry
And selfish
You can't get the contact

Like worn treaded tires
No traction
Slip back

But your body defends you
Still strong in your youth
You grasp her
Move closer
Your focus is true

Then exposure
Unwrapping
A collision in heat
You fuse in the moment
You're becoming complete

And after

More silence
The settling of souls

Entangled
Sweet nothings
Caresses

The story's been told

by Kate Lightstone
Halifax, Nova Scotia

