

FIRST PRIZE

Lost Voice

*You will always have your voice, you say.
But what if I told you that you are wrong?
That my voice is silent, lost, and just simply gone.*

*How can that be? you may think,
Because it's always there, for anyone to hear.
But it's not when it's sucked back by my mind.
It's not when I'm muted by others who speak words much, much better.
It's not when my brain goes blank due to the stress of your opinion.*

*My voice is lost,
In the tangled mess of my thoughts.
My voice is nothing; it's silent
Because of the people it upsets.
My voice is gone.
It settled deep under my skin years ago
When I first started to care about what they think.*

*My voice isn't here.
I haven't had my voice for so long.
And if I could speak truly, without the influence of others,
I do not know what I would say,
I don't know how I would act,
What I'd do,
If I would laugh, smile, yell in glee.
I don't know anymore how to let my voice free.
I don't know how to be me.*

*I tried so hard to be normal, to be like them,
And along the way, my voice got lost
Then replaced with lies.
Because they can't know anything true about me or they'd
Hurt me,
Hate me,
Leave me,
Forget me.*

*My voice is gone, hidden, stolen.
My voice is trapped in a box.
My voice is forever forgotten.*

*So, I beg you,
Don't judge me,
Don't hate me,
Don't punish me
When I don't write or say anything.
Because it was not my choice for my voice to be lost.
It just happened.
It just flew away.
It's lost.*

*by Elianne Labrecque (15 years old)
Newport Station, Nova Scotia*

SECOND PRIZE

no. 21: denial

it's a bit easier to split into pairs
when you're not around.

and sometimes i still turn to
where you used to stand,
to maybe ask
if there is someone else
that you want to partner with.

and you say, "sure,
i can be with someone else,
it's alright."

next time.

and sometimes i still worry about her,
our sweet third of a whole,
when she doesn't talk to anyone
(she's just so shy)
and waits for me.
(why?)
for me, someone who doesn't even
want to be with her anymore.
(why not?)

but it's alright,
because she'll get over it;
she will.

i've a better social life than ever,
and i cried the way a good friend would,
but i know that
you'd want me to stop,
so i did.

and sometimes i still wonder
what would've been different
if i hadn't picked you into my group too late.

and sometimes it's a bit easier
to ignore it all
when you're not around.

by Jiyan Jane Fan (12 years old)
Vancouver, British Columbia

THIRD PRIZE

Without You

These days, I can't stand the sound of strangers laughing.
I hate the way the sun still shines down on the glistening dewdrops every morning,
because how dare anything glisten?
How dare beauty carry on as if it hasn't been stripped of its most precious possession—you?
Normalcy leaves a bitter taste in my mouth,
a wretched weight in my lungs.
I consider everything that didn't implode the very second you drifted away to be cruel.
I hate the birds for singing.
I hate the moon for rising.
I hate that the rest of the world hasn't flinched,
hasn't hurt; how can the sky be so okay?
How can the clouds still bear to float when you're not here for them to gaze down at?
These days, I can't stand anything but the dark.
I especially can't stand that life goes on
without you.

by Emma Kordic (15 years old)
Mississauga, Ontario

HONOURABLE MENTION

Vast Ocean

I'm stuck on a raft.
I'm stuck on a raft in a vast ocean, and I can't do anything.
My raft is torn; it's slowly filling up with the salty ocean water.
My thoughts are getting in.
I try my hardest to patch it up, but it's too late.
My thoughts are getting in.
I can't do anything.
It's hopeless.
I'm hopeless.
I can't even handle a simple raft ride without messing everything up.
I'm stuck.
I can't go anywhere.
No one can help me.
I lie down, ready to be taken away.
I don't hold my breath when the waves come.
My thoughts have consumed me, and it's all my fault—
My fault for not knowing,
My fault for my friends talking about me—
My fault.
The thoughts push and shove as memories come crashing in.
Those god-awful memories.
I want to go.
I want to leave.
But I'm stuck—
Stuck in this vast ocean of my thoughts.
I accept my fate.
I succumb to the thoughts.
Who am I to know if they aren't true?
I'm drowning in this vast ocean,
And it's all my fault.

by Robyn Gamache (15 years old)
Clairmont, Alberta

HONOURABLE MENTION

Hatred

We were taught as kids that if you are born into a house with an angry man, you're led to believe your whole life that every man is angry, when he is not.

When I was born, the angry man in my house wasn't already steaming from his ears and ready to explode in flames every minute you shot him with a certain glance.

Perhaps when I was born, there was no angry man at all. Sure, he might've been agitated at times and quite heated, but when I was born, he was not angry.

I was the start of his anger; I was the beginning and the end and every bit in between. My mother and father had unknowingly produced something that would be the source of all of their vexation, resentment, and fury.

The anger in this home, which would destroy this family, was this family. It would have made no difference where we lived or what jobs my parents had held. We were cursed from the beginning. The angry man stayed furious, and he was the one who destroyed this home, before this home was even built.

I often wondered what it would be like if I weren't here, whether the house would still be standing. If my house's structural integrity would have been enough to prevent it from falling before me. But I don't think it would've—as I've said before, we've been cursed since the beginning.

I do everything humanly possible to get away from the house and from the man, and I do get away eventually. But somehow, despite all of my efforts, I always find myself back here. Not in the same house with the same angry man, but in a different house with another man, who is angrier than the first man ever could have been.

We are taught that the angry man we grew up with makes us believe that every man is angry, when he is not.

But what the angry man was actually doing was not teaching us that every man is angry, he was teaching us that, although my house had been destroyed many years ago, we were still a part of my house's structural foundation. Hatred was the cement that held us so closely together.

by Payton Gillis (15 years old)
Rockland, Ontario

HONOURABLE MENTION

Comfort of a Girl

I'm uncomfortable.

My shorts just at my knees, my shirt bigger than me, my face bare, and my hair messy.
Yet, I'm uncomfortable.

I can feel those wandering eyes; they pry, I want to cry. BUT I WON'T.

I'm uncomfortable, but that doesn't matter.

I list my clothes as if they matter, but they don't.

I'm a woman, a girl, a daughter, someone's child, but you know, "boys will be boys."

No! I'M UNCOMFORTABLE. Boys will not be *boys* but will be *monsters*.

Yet my comfort is second to theirs.

Stay quiet, stare straight ahead or nowhere at all. I'm uncomfortable.

Not only that but an object, a prey.

I'm uncomfortable, and that will never matter.

My voice is caged within my throat, waiting to escape, scratching the walls in horror,

Yet I'm filled with silence—dark, dooming, comfortable silence.

I'm uncomfortable, I'm uncomfortable, I'm uncomfortable. Let it be enough!

by Gloria Jasson (14 years old)

Mississauga, Ontario

HONOURABLE MENTION

Ignorance Is Bliss until You Die a Dreadful Death

Raise a toast:
To the dismissible heat of tangible melancholy,
To discreetly murky air in busy cities,
To floodings in unfortunate side stories;
To the brushed-aside, forgettable global tragedy.

Oh, the world is on fire.
The ground bleeds red, brown smoke;
Earth looks upon us with ire
As nature is choked.

Sip your champagne with white silk gloves;
Let a gossamer light catch the gold tint.
Hold the glass stem delicately
So as not to leave fingerprints.

In this throw-away society
We revere the gods of online delivery.
Buy anything for the right moral cost,
Tomorrow it will end in the landfill of lost.

Marvel at the city lights,
Forget they ravage starry nights.
Let the earth spark and smoulder and lose in the end;
It's no match for the nescience in human destruction.

Surround yourself with cruises on yachts;
Wear sunglasses and jewels for which other nations fought.
Let your fuel contribute to endless blue misery,
You won't have to watch the ocean's agony.

You feel you hold a righteous hegemony?
No one reaps the consequences today;
For the right to disrupt the natural harmony,
Our intellect is our expense to pay.

When the sky grows old like a mantelpiece figurine,
When the trees collapse wearily into their graves,
When the birds groaning hoarsely aren't born anew,
When the sea is parched, crying tears of greyish blue,
You hope to exploit Mars and the moon.
Though our planet will lie forlorn in ruins,
This cataclysmic calamity is only second-page news.

Cradle your happiness in white lilies and leaves,
But don't be surprised when the flowers can't breathe;
When your joy is strangled in hot fiery curls,
You'll understand what the blaze will do to the world.

When the world goes up in flames,
You'll have yourself to blame;
When the heat singes your hair,
Maybe then you'll start to care;
When you step out of your car,
Your money won't go far;
The paper bills will burn
And feed the hungry fire.

by Alison Koop (13 years old)
Toronto, Ontario

HONOURABLE MENTION

The Boy and Chippy

There was once a chipmunk named Chippy who lived in a bush.
He was brown with a clean white stripe from his head to his tush!
He lived happily in front of a lovely home.
Every day in the yard, he would freely roam.

The kind homeowners left a bowl of peanuts on the deck up the stairs.
When Chippy climbed up, he could see them by the pool on their beach chairs.
One day, the owners invited some friends and their little boy.
When they got there, they were all filled with joy.

After a while, the boy had gone into the pool.
He found the water a little too cool.
At one point while playing, he almost drowned.
Thankfully, his mama and papa came right around.

Everyone helped him feel better in an instant.
Back in the pool, the memory of drowning was distant.
He fearlessly splashed and played again,
Then floating—feeling calm and very zen!

Finally, they went inside to have scrumptious steak.
Everyone was hungry and needed a break.
The food was delicious, the hosts were the best,
Generous and friendly, truly spoiling their guests.

After dinner, the boy went back outside to get fresh air.
Chippy was eating and got quite the scare.
The boy inched forward to give him a treat.
Chippy met him halfway; it all looked so sweet.

The boy would call him with a special tune.
Excitedly, Chippy would come back real soon.
Chippy liked the boy feeding him two peanuts at a time.
He spat out the shells as if he had just tasted lime.

The boy was fascinated by how chipmunks eat:
One peanut to savour as a treat,
The other tucked for later, safely in his cheek!

At the end of the evening, the boy wanted to relax,
So they decided to head home, for he was tired to the max.
The boy did not want this special day to end,
For this was the day he had made some wonderful new friends.

Chippy was tired, too; he went to bed in his den.
As he fell asleep, he hoped he would meet the boy again.

by Perseus Valodwala (10 years old)
Toronto, Ontario

HONOURABLE MENTION

Grateful

COVID-19, a terrible illness.
The whole world went quiet, sitting in stillness.
After a long while of lying in wait,
Life started improving, at a slow rate.
Some people were frightened and timid at first,
But the best was ahead; behind was the worst.
I missed loved ones, hugs, and school, which I yearned for,
Travel and dancing on stage, which I adore,
And activities like track-and-field and choir—
All the things that I love and desire.

I'm grateful for uniqueness I can see with my eyes.
I can now see unmasked faces. Oh, what a surprise!
My family and friends, without social distance!
I'm thankful for all of their love and assistance.
They are kind and helpful and loving and smart,
Always there with open minds and huge hearts.

I'm grateful for my arms, grateful for my chest,
Because now I can hug and squeeze any new guest!
I can show my gratitude, my thanks, and my grace,
By doing a simple thing that's called an embrace.

I'm grateful for my mind, my brains, and my skills.
In-person education has a lot of thrills;
I can now research, do math, and write essays.
I love my school, where I spend most of my days.

I'm grateful for experiences, food, and sun,
Because now I can travel and have loads of fun!
I can visit new countries and cities and sites,
Discover pretty places and explore highlights.

I'm grateful for my ears, my heart, and my smiles.
On stage, I can dance in many different styles.
I can listen to music and bop to the sound,
As my heart shines on stage and my smile is found.

I'm grateful for my muscles, my legs, and my feet,
For now I can dash—I can dash at my track meet!
With COVID improved, a track-and-field chance came near.
I ran and had fun and could shout and cheer.

I am grateful for my lungs, my voice, and my noise.
When I sing in my choir, we all stand with poise.
I can now make vocal and expressive sounds.
The sopranos and altos sing in long rounds.

Mostly I'm grateful for a little thing called hope;
It brought us through all of this and taught us to cope.
I'm thankful all of my unique interests can be done.
I'm thrilled that I can do amazing things such as run.
I can dance. I can travel, go to school, and sing,
Spend time with family and friends. Oh, what a sweet thing!
What I wrote in this poem, for my life is essential.
I'm grateful to live each day to its fullest potential.

by Shirah Margolis (10 years old)
Toronto, Ontario

HONOURABLE MENTION

Pines and Firs

Cherry blossoms bloom and wither—
Weeping willows green and yellow—
All the heather . . .
Lost in Autumn's chilling embrace—
Remaining strong and firm
Are the pines and firs.
A splash of emerald
In the flaming amber.

Winter's frosty hand
Knocks on Earth's door.
Feathery and downy
Do the snowflakes fall.
In an age of skeletons,
Pines and firs stand tall.

You'll never notice
Those guardians of life,
Those warriors
Ever so courageously
Standing against the cold:
The pines and firs.
The pines and firs.

by Xinyi (Isabella) Chen (9 years old)
Richmond, British Columbia

HONOURABLE MENTION

Flying Sticks

You see sticks fly,
High up in the sky.

Down, down they come,
But where are they from?

Brown ones, black ones, red ones too.
How many more will make it through?

Peering through the trees,
I feel the Yukon summer breeze.

There, to my right,
Oh, what a sight.

One brown tail and two black eyes,
Four small feet, and there, to my surprise,
It's a beaver!

by Austin Noyen (8 years old)
Whitehorse, Yukon

HONOURABLE MENTION

Body Argument

My brain is telling me to do my homework,
But my heart is disagreeing with my brain.

My lungs, feet, and legs are on my heart's side,
But my hands, arms, and stomach are on my brain's side.

My body does not know which to agree with.
It is a big argument!

by Sion Xu (7 years old)
Thornton, Ontario

HONOURABLE MENTION

I Like Bears

I like bears
Because they are very furry.
They like to eat sticky honey
And eat yummy berries.

I like bears
Because they hibernate.
Sometimes, they only eat meat,
And they make the world a better place.

by Juniper Morash (6 years old)
Whitehorse, Yukon