

# FIRST PRIZE

## Salvage Yard

The speaker's feedback repeats  
your order in cracked static, that broken  
echo's the most I've heard you say all drive.  
When you're weeks between work  
there's not much for us  
to talk about.

At the drive-thru watching you dig  
calloused fingers into cup-holder change,  
paying with dimes so dirty  
there's no ship, no queen,  
just a grey sparkle in your greasy palm.

Drinking coffee out of cardboard and pulling  
metallic relics, the spoils of twisted metal torn  
from old, immobilized machines, harvested  
from work sheds under  
lacy cobweb beds.

Cold cast iron baking under the sun,  
empty drums spilling gasoline  
and thick red straps holding  
scraps together. There are burnt out lanterns  
between the rubble, black skeleton frames  
making prisons of snapped metal bars  
that hold in the debris.

We strip apart copper wires. A man in  
tan coveralls smiles showing me  
his gold-capped molars  
and yellow incisors;  
he whistles, but the sound is muted  
under moving scrap. A rough  
edge splits open your skin  
and you lick the blood sticking  
to your arm. I imagine it tastes metallic  
like sucking razor blades.

We drive out rich with three-fifty in fresh bills.  
You're staring as I put on lipstick;  
you don't ask but I tell you  
it's *Sweetheart Valentine*, shade two-oh-five.  
I pucker up my pink pastel lips into an invisible kiss  
and put my feet on your dash.  
Under my shoes flakes of paint chips  
and drywall colour your floor  
like confetti.

*by Elizabeth Andrews*  
Caledon, Ontario

# SECOND PRIZE

## **This Is Just to Say**

For the longest time I thought the city had raised me.  
My territory expanding beyond the bend in the road  
and over years becoming only the limit of my feet.  
Eventually cross-streets became landmarks  
and no longer boundaries.

I thought what made a man  
was trying to flip the 9:50 west-bound train  
with wishes stolen from the mall fountain.  
At the time I did not notice that train  
brought with it the unfettered dark  
and wiped away the final rays of fading daylight.

This is just to say  
that now, I remember everything.  
That Dad drank cake mix, or something close to it,  
every day since he was fifteen years old.  
Black coffee was far too bitter  
and he needed something  
to let him climb into that truck cab  
on mornings when his marrow  
was made brittle and thick,  
with frost.

I remember out of the two weeks a year which were his alone,  
he took me early, with hands like granite pushed through a shredder,  
and together we watched the forest sleep,  
the earth drooling to the air while the lake spooned her curves.  
Still, not even breathing.

I remember how Mother built us up,  
she could not stand the sloth of your un-buttered sandwiches,  
or my little lies about where my time had gone.  
Somewhere between fighting the stained porcelain avalanche  
that was our kitchen, and carefully packing the next week away  
in our little red pails stacked side by side,  
she found the time to tell us,  
“Lift your skinny fists triumphant, like antennas to Heaven.”

I am ashamed I ever thought growing old was giving up,  
believing every day was the same dream.  
All I wish now is to follow the luminous trail  
of streetlamp nightlights  
all the way home.

*by Ryan Hayden*  
Toronto, Ontario

# THIRD PRIZE

## A Sea of Black Balloons

*Inside an art installation.*

I practice the art of waiting  
Standing here *dans cette file d'attente* (in this waiting line)

Staring at stories carved in grey concrete walls  
Not listening to the ones spoken  
Trying my best not to think of you  
The slowness of this line  
Makes it a useful exercise to pass the time  
Until it's my turn over the threshold  
*Vers l'inconnu* (Into the unknown)

Black balloons fall towards me  
But the weight of you not being there  
Isn't drowning  
So peaceful this synthetic sea  
Light shines barely through metallic hues  
Like swimming at night, not caring what you'll find  
Hoping every stranger is you—but no, it's never you  
*Et je suis seule* once more (And I am alone)

But this is a place to be alone  
*Et tout oublier . . .* even you, but I can't (And to forget everything)  
*Alors, j'imagine que je dessine au feutre* (So, I imagine drawing in felt-tip marker)  
The missing stars in the night sky  
*Tous mes souvenirs de toi en contradiction* (All my mismatched memories of you)  
Hiding somewhere between  
Damp earth and pine trees,  
Old paper books and ink,  
Lost coffee cups and hastily written notes

Here, I can be immune to the outside world  
Creating my own for a half hour  
Pretending jellyfish don't sting  
Yet they do—all pretty things do  
*Et pourtant, je vois que tu n'es pas comme eux* (And yet, I see you aren't like them)  
*Je découvre peu à peu* (I discover little by little)  
That you have a beautiful soul

I wade through static electricity  
As I leave the Sea of Black Balloons behind  
A weight lifts, and I understand this  
Untangling myself from the last balloon  
*Je sais que* (I know that)  
This untogetherness  
*Était une bonne chose,* a means to grow (Was a good thing)

**by Larina Mietzker**

Smiths Falls, Ontario

# HONOURABLE MENTION

## **My love is . . .**

My love is like bananas  
harvested in St. Lucia:  
exotic, sun-thirsty, hardy,  
a plantation providing employment  
to my every thought,  
forcing my mind  
to put out the sign:  
“Went bananas.”

My love is like slipping on a peel,  
toes arching towards the skies,  
learning to walk vertically  
while my lungs are gasping for air  
from the surprise of the fall.  
*How many banana peels later, I wonder,  
did we come up with the expression  
“Falling in love?”*

My love is hushed,  
teeth silently piercing the flesh  
stealthily, like a pair of sneakers  
walking on a Venetian meandering alley  
marked on no map  
but offering breathtaking vistas.

My love is like peeling,  
revealing with every falling strand  
another part of me:  
velvet skin, firm flesh  
eagerly yielding to the bite.

My love is bold like an overripe fruit,  
unafraid to show its brown age spots  
rendered sweeter by the passing of time.

My love is slightly radioactive,  
an equivalent dose of danger  
meriting its own unit of measure,  
but still grown in yellow clusters  
heavy with mouth-watering goodness.

*by Marcela Croitoru*  
Windsor, Ontario



# HONOURABLE MENTION

## **Faces in All Places**

I can't escape them. Souls,  
trapped in everyday matter, reach out to me.

One peeks at me wearily from the folds of a  
tissue I raise to my nose, rendering me  
destined to drip. Another frowns, cemented in  
my walkway, accusing me daily.

A group of them have disguised themselves as  
hardware on my kitchen cabinets, they  
think I don't notice them. I suspect  
Weight Watchers.

Most troubling are the multitudes of species and  
races and personalities, calling out for help from the  
cobblestone tiles I had felt so clever for finding, as I  
sit helplessly on my toilet.

At times, I try to ignore them, I  
avert my eyes, busy myself. Other times, I  
take them in, amused. I readily share veggie and  
noodle soul-spottings in my soup, and I have  
no problem pointing out goofy, Picasso-like ones that  
appear gleeful, surprising me in public places. It  
depends on my mood, I guess.

I wonder, am I being called upon to  
release them? Do I have a special power I am  
not yet aware of that, if tapped into, could  
set them free? Or are they hanging out until the  
end of days, forged in earthly matter to  
remind us there are other worlds, or  
something more?

Perhaps they are there because there is  
no room in heaven, or maybe it is hell that is  
spilling over. Or perhaps, there is  
no heaven and no hell at all, and this is  
the best God could do, because,  
souls don't die, do they?

Forgive me for this one, but  
perhaps God is really just Charlie, or Betty, or  
some schmuck who got in over their head. The  
puppy-like eyes looking up at me from my ottoman  
tell me different.

*by Karen Sylvia Rockwell*  
Belle River, Ontario

# HONOURABLE MENTION

## Character

I feel my temper rumbling  
Like thunder on fast approaching clouds  
While you stand, bold and resistant  
Hurling chaos at the front lines of my discipline  
Scattering troops of self-assurance  
Leaving great craters in my authority

Then you strike a verbal match  
Which you toss at my brittle wasteland of composure  
Watching it flare  
Fuelled by the wind of your defiant air  
A fire so irate  
That all the training of a lifetime cannot douse  
Yet you remain, proofed  
With a little plastic rake and a bucketful of water  
And we are both about to be consumed

My own scars, from such third-degree burns  
Begin to itch  
And I remember the sorrows of the after-fire  
Glimpse the guilt around the corner  
Waiting to reprimand me  
While my maturity slinks off to nurse its wounds  
Leaving my self-control alone to take the blame

Emotions pass  
Like flash storms  
And I am drenched in my own complexions  
And self-reflections

So I turn away from a Pyrrhic victory  
Defeated  
Though not all is lost  
For I never wanted to hurt you  
And your spirit remains unbroken

*by Miwa Hiroe*  
Valemount, British Columbia



# HONOURABLE MENTION

## Enchantment

it is your dew-dampened bare feet on a lawn  
in early morning, your palm tickled by grass  
warming in the sun, a scent of orange peel mingling  
with a fragrance of trellised roses by the garage

a swing hung from a sturdy bough, overhead a canopy  
of green leaves and a fringe of light

it is your verandah at noon,  
you seated licking a frozen popsicle,  
(its icy-ness running down your chin) or a wedge  
of blueberry pie, purple sweetness on fingertips

a bicycle you ride everywhere, and in the afternoon,  
lounging in a chair or hammock, curled like a cat,  
reading, shaded by lilac, the lovely heat settled  
on your shoulders, believing because of the breeze  
you have all the time in the world

it is the thrum and clatter of push mowers,  
in-line bladders whizzing past in a sway of absolute ease,  
the warm air abuzz with cicadas, a butterfly pausing  
for the red of a dahlia pinwheel, wings fanning the flower,  
gliding over a sprawl of gardens

a sandy shore or sloped riverbank, you dive  
into the water, a shimmering slickness over your body,  
your own hidden place of tangled appetites and languor

it is lovers on a blanket lying shamelessly close  
or a late afternoon stroll, you holding someone's hand,  
thinking nothing of importance and saying little,  
enjoying the carelessness, the cooling air

evenings lit by bright backyard lanterns,  
fireflies winking among trees and a parade of stars  
marching across the floor of heaven,  
young women who saunter by in cotton dresses laughing  
in the blue-metal dusk, while dandelion seeds adrift  
with fluff rise, and blow away

*by Jayelle Bond*  
Steinbach, Manitoba



# HONOURABLE MENTION

## **Still River**

When the moon  
does not fall on the river,  
darkness blankets  
the water  
silence hears only  
the paddling oars  
slow boat  
and my hand  
caressing the surface  
hoping to unveil  
its ebony smooth skin  
echoing the breath  
of the night  
and the absent moon.

Fisherman's trained ear  
enlightens the sound of silence,  
shocking our reverie  
over the quiet rowing  
and the boat glide  
carrying us towards the light  
the fisherman beams upon us  
making sure he is the only one  
to capture the soul of the still river.

*by Svetlana Miskovic*

Windsor, Ontario





# HONOURABLE MENTION

## Premonition

The sound of twisting metal  
screams in my ears.  
The scent of burning rubber  
fills my nose.

Shards of glass  
sting my face my hands my arms  
piercing my skin.

My head and neck are forced sharply,  
redirecting my gaze to the side window.

I watch the wheat,  
golden shining gently bending  
allowing the breeze to have its way.

The sunshine encases me  
in its tight hug.  
A loud *snap!* Then darkness.

“Mom!”  
a child screams.

I jolt upright! Gasping,  
as though I had just plunged into cold water.  
Finally, air finds my lungs.

I pull the vehicle to the side of the road.  
It rolls to a  
slow relentless stop.

*by Eileen Reese*  
Hague, Saskatchewan

When I am brave enough,  
I look around—  
nothing no one silence.

I sigh deeply.

With newly heightened alertness  
I continue on.  
A calmness fills me  
as I realize urgency  
does not get me places.

Further down the road  
blue and amber lights  
flash with importance.

As I draw near to the lineup of vehicles  
the wail of the sirens becomes closer.  
I can see glimpses of the accident  
that has the traffic stopped.

I redirect my gaze to the side window.

I watch the wheat,  
golden shining gently bending,  
allowing the breeze to have its way.

The sunshine encases me  
in its tight hug  
sending a shiver up the back of my neck.



# HONOURABLE MENTION

## **The Ballerinas**

The little girl opened the big book  
So many wallpaper pictures to see  
Her finger pointed to the ballerinas  
Hundreds, dancing in rows of pink perfection

Smiling symmetry on satin toes  
Happy, bright, black-lashed eyes  
Dressed in tiny, puffy veiled triangles  
She loved them

At dinnertime  
When she heard the car tires crackle over driveway stones  
The sound of ice cubes dropping, clinking in glass  
And when the loud, mean voices came  
She would return to the ballerinas

They still smiled  
They still danced

*by Wendy Morison*  
Dundas, Ontario



# HONOURABLE MENTION

## The Last Day

The year was an absolute whirlwind,  
And I fell into it headfirst  
From the very first day until our last.  
Autumn came too soon for us,  
But we delved into it together  
For the first time in years.

Morning, afternoon, and evening kisses  
Filled my every weekday,  
Living back where we had found each other  
And found out the meaning  
Of the best and worst of timing.

We lounged under the pine tree,  
Your arm on me, my head in your lap  
On the last day of summer wind  
Even though it was October.  
More than anyone you hated poetry,  
But you read it to me anyway.

Winter brought nights of uncertainty  
Because I was falling in love  
At the same time of year  
When all I'd known was losing it,  
And I couldn't face that again;  
I couldn't lose what we'd made.

But then came nights of reassurance  
Tucked perfectly underneath your arm  
And falling asleep beside you,  
Spending Christmas by your side,  
And I saw my future before my eyes  
For the very first time.

And I fell more in love in Ottawa  
When we were the only ones alive,  
And the world, for once, was silent.  
And I had something to hold onto  
For the rest of the coming days  
I spent wanting to run back.

And when April came too quickly,  
The spring afternoon's rain  
Fell from my eyes instead  
Because somehow, the clouds cleared  
And I wondered if I hid them,  
Or if they're our new best kept secret.

On my drive home, the sun shone  
Across the glowing county sky  
With its brilliant April rays  
A bright gold behind me, and I wondered  
If it meant the best were on the way  
Or if they were now behind us.

*by Angelica Lachance*  
Amherstburg, Ontario



# HONOURABLE MENTION

## **Crow Burial Ground**

No death of speeches  
Or dark utterance of stone  
Just a feather  
Hung  
In a headdress of snow  
Scribbling invisible  
Like a vagrant saviour of bones  
On the last scaffold  
Alone

And the half a skull said nothing  
In half its idiot smile  
Not even a cough  
Nor the lapse of half its jaw bemoaned  
The scraps  
Of scarecrow-shedding skin  
Eaten raw  
By whispers  
And the soft descending of snow

High on sticks  
The warrior now still  
Cannot resist  
Even the call of crows  
Though his spears once felled the hills

Whistling now  
Through windows of his ribs  
Only  
The wind  
His newfound flesh  
Insists . . .

Like the requiem of a wish

*by Richard Grace* (67 years)  
Toronto, Ontario



# HONOURABLE MENTION

## **Patrick's Arms of Steel**

Newfoundland cod fisherman,  
patron of the "Golden Arches,"  
AA man and joker,  
a booming presence.  
This "once in a while" man  
pushed his way  
into our circle one day.  
Our lilting laughter had  
lured him in to source the frivolity.

"Why is the guy up in  
the tree with a briefcase?"  
"I don't know."  
"He's the branch manager!"  
We swayed with gales of laughter  
as Patrick spun his yarns  
with threads of awe  
while silkily slipping in  
shows of strength: "Feel my arm!"  
We poked, we prodded—  
no mark could we make.

Like flies, we were drawn into  
the web of his steely embrace.  
He removed his cap.  
His "once upon a time"  
ocean-drenched and  
salted face struck me silent.  
He stood unusually quiet;  
soft brown eyes belied his tough veneer.  
God told Patrick where to go,  
what to do each day.  
The peacekeeper of this McDonald's  
settled fights, never started them.

We looked for him over  
the winter months.  
"Where is Patrick?"  
In bits and buzzes  
the news trickled down,  
no fish tales were these;  
Patrick had died in March.

Sipping coffee, I press fingers of one hand  
into the hardness of the table top,  
close my eyes and remember . . .  
Patrick's arms of steel.

*by Francesca Burton* (68 years)  
Windsor, Ontario