

FIRST PRIZE

Winter Road

April reminds us
 the river is not made of stone
she is more than winter roads to bring the outside in
February yawns
 through
 March
today shudders tomorrow's melt
sinks
 the highway
dissolves the inside left
 out

Old ice freed
 drifts into another season
young water coaxing us
 to roam
unmapped journeys longing to stretch
through boreal branches
 ancestor breezes sing
stories the land collected
before others called them
 history

Under dancing green shimmers
glistened ripples
 tap the old skin of the night
 on shores
spring
in shallow breaths
a season of change

a season of same
the inside
 out
the river free
April reminds us

by David Yerex Williamson
Norway House, Manitoba

SECOND PRIZE

One Art Work in One Museum

This Flemish painting slowly loses its light
beneath the craquelure and darkening oxides.

Still

it speaks across the centuries
of nobility and measured wealth,
of chess and chivalry,
of silks all bathed in amaranth;
a frozen, flattened panorama
of strength and certainty
revealed within a soft and secondary light
protected by a bored and wandering guard.

I was born within the lowlands,
generations from Vermeer or Hals,
yet I feel I know this artist well,
with his layers of colour painted on grisaille;
a Dutch alliance—this art holds my breath
beneath the many surfaces of me.
This painter strokes the stories of my past.
I am transfixed and do not/cannot move.

This artist from so long ago grasps the
mastery that shines and captures souls,
for while I simply stand,
I live again in times before my time.
The portrait is a wraith of personality: I am
an elegance in burgundy and ochre,
a life twice lived, immune to simple fate
long after my life shrinks to careless bones.

How can a man so long ago be
the mirror of my mind and mood today?
The centuries that stretch
between us now have vanished while I look.
This distant stranger knows the canvas of my life
and I am drawn not so much
to the subject of the art but to the mind
that painted this, who understands me now.

by Hans Devos
Sault Ste. Marie, Ontario

THIRD PRIZE

Lost in Thought

Paralyzing fear's stuck in my daughter's blue eyes;
She's afraid of rejection, germs, and good-byes.
No longer wanting to be in many public places,
Fears the germs left behind from people's hands and faces.

Afraid of things not kept in strict order,
Yet collecting so many things: a borderline hoarder.
Refusing to see friends, preferring to stay home,
She convinces herself she's happiest alone.

But her eyes tell another story, one of fear and of grief;
She longs for freedom from her thoughts, however brief.
Her struggle to others: invisible; they judge her peculiar ways.
Suffocating in judgement, her thoughts now ablaze.

Judgement and fear tell her she will be hated;
Her mind convincing she'll never be loved, liked, or dated.
She pushes others away to stave off rejection;
Fear, like a thief, robbing her of so much affection.

The walls in her mind grow too high for her to climb;
Now, going through life, she's as quiet as a mime.
Hiding from friends, listening to her mind's unfounded fear,
She truly believes her thoughts are true, pure, and sincere.

She believes she is ugly, too damaged, not someone to like;
She believes germs are everywhere, waiting to strike.
At such a young age, she's hating the world, ready to quit;
Among those who love her, she hides, feeling safe as a hermit.

As her mom, I am lost, unbearably sad and forlorn;
I have loved and admired my child since the day she was born.
I have seen how her smile can light up a room,
Her belly laugh captivating, starting slow to full boom.

She is beautiful from her head to her toes;
She has her mamma's eyes, her daddy's distinct nose.
Smart, athletic, she took pride in efforts to do well;
Desire burning to be her best, she used to excel.

But her mind now tells her she's not worth the time,
Now gives up on everything, still in her prime.
Her struggle so powerful—raging, so strong;
Why does she listen to her mind when it's clearly so wrong?

She will tell you she is happy, she loves being alone;
She'll tell you she doesn't want friends, she's better alone.
She'll tell you germs are everywhere, this we don't understand;
She's happy with these thoughts, not wanting them banned.

But her eyes show her heart, her soul, and the truth,
The pain is so evident, it's stealing her youth.
Her pain not only emotional, physical scars as well as ulcers;
I have seen her panic attacks, I know how much she suffers.

At the mercy of her thoughts, we, too, now feel lost;
All who love her dearly . . . feeling, paying the cost.
If only through my thoughts, my eyes, she could see her own reflection,
From this agony she'd be set free, no more affliction or fear of rejection.

by Sandy Totten
Belnan, Nova Scotia

HONOURABLE MENTION

Maisaloon

At the height of a merciless summer—
one that scorched even the smallest grains
of moisture from the earth;
one that seized the will to live
from the best of seeds in the dirt—
a truck filled with water
arrived at last
to a sprawling city
of tents,
in the middle of a war,
in the middle of the world,
a few weeks too late for too many.

Among the herd of despair that emerged,
lined up with buckets drier
than their sun-dried bones and sockets,
was a radiant, resilient, little girl,
who insisted on carrying the weight
of her father's final prayers:

that she would not wither or fall prey
to the warmongers' games
aimed at breaking her people—
their humour,
their humanity.

The rebellious little girl was spotted
by a foreign photographer,
sent by the same charity that graciously ensured
the delivery of a litre of water
to each delirious family
every few weeks.
His task was to find and capture
subjects and stories that could captivate
the impulses of those fortunate
enough to feel sorry
instead of fear
when their countries' bombs dropped from the air.

He took a few shots of her and frowned.
"This won't do," he said,
checking through the stills.

"Okay, sweetheart, let's try a few
without smiling, shall we?"
He modelled for her what he wanted,
molding his own features into
what he thought would be the look
of a stolen childhood.

by Sayan Sivanesan
Toronto, Ontario

HONOURABLE MENTION

Tutankhamun

Rest well, boy king—
still a teen after ten-year rule—
drift on mummified dreams
beneath Valley of Kings
amid
gold-covered chariots
bejewelled cat beds
gilded statues
ebony walking sticks
regal chests
Netherland murals
golden death mask

for soon, very soon
sealed doors will fling open
cast light on hidden treasures
not seen for three millennia
as archaeologists
slice body in quarters
decapitate
peel away from glued sarcophagus
photo/crate/record
nickname King Tut
as news explodes of century's
greatest discovery

bejewelled coffin
imprisoned
within museum's glass display
your tomb's serenity
a distant memory

so rest well, boy king, rest well

by Kathy Robertson
Kitchener, Ontario

HONOURABLE MENTION

Anxiety at Midnight

When the neurons inside my head misfire,
All I can feel is the tumultuous, scalding
Paralysis of anxiety.
Then, all I can do is pace,
Keep moving, keep myself afloat,
Because if I don't, if I stop, if—
I will cease to exist and the worry
Plunges the boiling beneath my skin into
The realm of sublimation.

I need an escape.
It's easiest in a thoroughfare neighbourhood,
In the neon, the passersby, however fleeting and rare,
Give my life a certain rhythm, a certain meaning.
It doesn't matter where my feet take me,
So long as they fly briskly,
Whichever way the crosslights beckon.

In the forest-suburb of my youth,
When midnight was pitch—save the moonlight
In the leaves, a sparkle on the creek—
It was hard to find the stars through the canopy, the distant street lamps,
To take solace in the serenity of hopeless existence.
On a trail in the woods, my feet require focus;
Eyes can't drift to the sky without a fear of falling,
Heart rate can't calm without some double-time, twice as long.
My anxiety is not limited to what I'm (in)capable of—
Is-that-someone?-is-someone-there?-am-I-alone?—
Are we ever alone?

It's not a worry I need to face in the faux daylight
Of downtown squares,
Stretching upward to hold it all within my gaze:
The clouds, the stars, existential beacons—
They battle against the brackish void of my depression.
Sometimes my legs grow so weary I sit down
On cold concrete and curl into myself,
Rocking for warmth and wishing vainly
For my forgotten jacket, at home on the knob.
That instinct to flee is all-encompassing,
A multitude within multitudes.

Once the moon and I have conquered the distance in-between,
Where we are and where my mind needs to be,
That supermassive post-supernova is filled with the
Steady calm that accompanies being.
I can unfold myself from the three a.m. street,
Stagger home, and sleep.

by Courtney Miller
North Vancouver, British Columbia

HONOURABLE MENTION

In Early Dawn

Out in the gathered light, he walked
With weathered coat and eyes upturned.
In early dawn, he passed me by,
As on the heights, the morning burned.
One who, by luck and fortune mocked,
Had sought the road, its summons sweet
Pursued, with falling footsteps fleet—
A landless man beneath the sky—

Had ever risen thus, alone,
In early dawn, when silver seem
The sky, the road, his bed of stone,
All the colour of a dream—
All the cold of winter's night
Torn from sleep, or sleep-enspelled
Ragged lines of geese beheld
Wild and wretched in their flight.

And have I never woken, heard
Beneath the scudding grey, the drear
Of cloud and shade—the singing clear
Of houseless home? Have I not seen,
From windows wide, the soaring bird
And yearned to follow? Long have I,
In early dawn, left pastures green—
A landless man beneath the sky.

The ground is white with swift spring snow;
Far off, the raucous migrants' cry
Rises and falls as north they fly.
There is no last horizon, no
Warm-windowed hall, where hearth-fires burn
In waiting welcome—no return.
He knows this, he who has passed me by:
A landless man has but the sky.

by Karin Murray-Bergquist
Winnipeg, Manitoba

HONOURABLE MENTION

Crow County

Infinite skies of quicksilver
wash the canvas in soapy waves of
white, sharp rods of
steel erupting from an
unsettled time and
field
where we come home
to roost.

Trees meet in full coverage
over acres of uninterrupted
russet, yet
being Dover-bred, we prefer
the crafty solitude of an
ancient, barren ash tree
or snow fence gone
astray.

Our stake in this
landscape is steadfast.
Faithful as *le vieux pays*,
for twenty million years we have
watched rows of gladioli, conifers,
and corn reach and recede
alongside the frozen waters
of the Erie-Thames.

We are a mob family, communing
together to raise our young,
chasing dark predators from
our lands,
and roaming fertile Hudson River
tributaries, testing new life.

A sunflower on a window ledge
may be contained in the ordered
domesticity of the house, but as
the window opens and the curtains
blow free, its wily, windy
core extends to escape.

by K. Alexandra Smith
Erieau, Ontario

HONOURABLE MENTION

Losing You

You leave the milk carton
on the counter again,
so I put it away
without saying anything.

You tell me about
Uncle Joe's new girl
born yesterday, even though
my cousin is twenty-five now.

You buy six oranges,
even though there are
six on the counter
and six in the fridge.

You call me Emily
and, without crying,
I struggle to say,
No, Ma, I'm Amanda.

by Robyn Petrik
Port Coquitlam, British Columbia

HONOURABLE MENTION

Amorphophallus Titanum (Corpse Flower)

I can miss the light
that flecks on your lashes
or the way the soft skin
meets the beach of your smooth lips.

I can check for you everywhere,
though we've only just met,
for I can be soft, lover,
and I am bleeding heart.

I'm not strong like you,
but rather, strong unlike you.
You lion heart, you nonchalant,
I'll tell you what I'll do.

You, you are no hunter,
or so you are, but I am not your prey.
I see the way you're stalking,
and I know I'd like to play.

It's I who cut the deck in hand,
the one that baited and waited.
My small, soft breaths will curl into you;
warm and sweet, you'll be sedated.

It's true, I'm drawn to your calm waters,
which suddenly erupt with thunder and seethe,
but I am no bird whirling—
I am the siren in the sea.

I'll hide in plain sight,
and your pride will come sniffing,
but I'll play dead as corpse meat,
already half eaten.

Because I know you; you have a taste
for such morose scenes as these,
and I will have you, lover,
for as long as I please.

by Danielle Giles
Ridgeville, Ontario

HONOURABLE MENTION

Bitter Webs

Master fabricator,
as the light, you come and go,
a lively stitching motion, an acrobatic show,
escaping teasing from the bars, by a fine lifeline,
flimsy with your freedom,
envy hooks my mind.
Bones that would be nimble
embraced and framed in stone,
spun and bound in irons,
deeds in fallow sown.
A lofty visitation, each day you work and spin,
twist a cord of cross intent within.
Closer, thorny weaver, a tattered knot we share.
No mind of my shifting, you edge so boldly near;
a final pomp and caper along the looming floor,
a race in vain, a rage in chains
strikes with a splitting roar.
A silent, severed thread hangs aimless, frayed, and bent,
lacks weight to keep it straight,
kin to my tangled net.
Timely shadows lace and sprawl to shade our bitter fate.
Amid a web of pacing,
your traces dimmer,
unravelling mate.

by Freida Murrin

Corner Brook, Newfoundland

HONOURABLE MENTION

Little Kicks

Your little kicks
Are like butterfly kisses
Softly brushing against my tummy
The small flutters of your life growing inside me

Your kicks are bigger now
Like small rabbit hops
Pushing out against my swollen belly
Your small growing life isn't so small anymore

Overwhelming joy as the smiling doctor says
"It's a boy!" at the scan
My mother holds my hand
You're going to be my son

I wake up in the middle of the night
With no rabbit hops to say "Hello"
I lay my hand on top of my belly
You must be sleeping

We go to the doctor's the next day
He isn't smiling anymore
He tells me that I won't be feeling your kicks any longer
You were going to be my son

My baby bump slowly shrinks
Over the next few days
There isn't a baby in there anymore
No more growing life or butterfly kisses

I feel empty on the inside
Quiet, hollow, and cold
Just like the freshly painted nursery
And unloved teddy bears

I pack your clothes after a few days
I bring them down to the store to return them
"Small baby shoes—
Never worn"

by Sayde Coffill
Campbell River, British Columbia

HONOURABLE MENTION

Where Are the Children Now?

Copper leaves and empty, skeletal swings
rustle against the blistering carbon machines
smoking out particles of greying, sonorous melodies,
heavy with a layer of thick, mournful soot and perspiration,
sweating out the saltiness of human fervour.
Like a young, raw-like fever that stretched out, dissolved and collapsed
its black plumage around iron playgrounds, where children used to play
in illusive and corrosive battlefields, swirling
in an antagonistic, coal-lit fire crackling its scarlet canker,
smouldering like a cancer
along the tremors of their innocent bone marrows—
along the emerald-green fields of their small capillaries.
In an intricate design of love and war, that canker buds
like weeds in a mercury-infused soil,
oozing out the yellowing pus from mankind's selfish gold.

Where are the children now?

Whose pink, fleshy feet used to run around the dewy skin of verdant dreams?
The ones who used to chase indigo butterflies across sunflower fields
barefoot and fluttering their callused hands like vibrating hummingbirds
with pastel ribbons and lavender-scented paper planes
combusting the plastic soldiers that dismantled into crooked men.
Gone are the half-truths with the vapour,
the sleek strings of ebony condensation
smothering the mouth that curves in derision,
the rage that came foaming at the mouth—its silvery saliva dripping,
spitting, and raining its acidic hate, tarnishing the world with oxidized lips
that sucked on lollipops;
all the loathing that children feed in crimson-coated saccharine.

Where are the children now?

The ones who used to laugh in the wind and hum mellifluous rhymes
about bumblebees, three little blind mice, and Mary had a lamb.
Because we are all little lambs brainwashed in the dark
by the sweet nectar we used to drink from Mother's bosom,
the milk that curdled the chaste into thick petroleum.
Beautiful and esoteric was their madness,
coated in a magnetic wool of lies and avarice.
Their Bambi eyes burnt like gasoline leaking the lachrymose bombs
of a past and future entwined,
as I am only but a poet in this inky sphere of words
and children, the spawn of wooden puppets.

Where are the children now?

At the zenith of time, they watched
iridescent auroras dancing in electric firelight,
flickering in the void of incandescent and vigilant
eyes that gazed how humanity withered
like desiccated and rust-coloured
daffodils grazing the muted dawn.

by Daniela Quintero
Calgary, Alberta