

FIRST PRIZE

Decomposition

I'll just stay here,
Be my quiet little self.
Live and eat bread,
Plant my garden,
Roots growing not just from my flowers.

I will age here,
Face grow wrinkled,
Hands stiff.

I will die here uneventful,
Be buried in my garden,
Return to this world the same way I was brought into it.
With no great noise or fuss,
Simply a passing mention in the paper.

My body will decompose here,
Return to molecules and atoms,
Be consumed and transformed,
My energy recycled into the place I love.

I will live my quiet life here,
And then I will keep on living.

by Ada O'Neil
Riverside-Albert, New Brunswick

SECOND PRIZE

The Grey Mist of Grief

I sit in my bland, silent world
alone and forlorn,
alone but not lonely,
enclosed by a hoary whitish tint
lacking any hint of brilliancy,
vexed by a vague sense of loss.

Lost amid ribbons of grey mist,
I stoically stare straight forward,
searching for a plausible reason
for the stinging track of tears
running down my ashen cheek,
spattering clenched hands below.

Television cannot quell my mood,
I ignore the grating peals of the phone,
newspapers report mostly nonsense,
the internet is only a nuisance recycler,
my mailbox is stuffed with slick flyers—
all relegated meaningless to me.

The cold grey mist surrounds me,
envelops me, grips me, confines me,
yet I refuse to allow it to burden me. . . .
I deny its consumption,
preferring mellow sound and
the luxuriant colour of existence.

by Roy James (80 years)
LaSalle, Ontario

THIRD PRIZE

Into Tomorrow

Deprivation measured
In grains of rice
Is the quantification of hunger
That consumes
A ravaged body
The accountant's calculation
Of starvation

But do they count
The flies on the faces
Of black sunken skulls
Who stare vacantly at us
While they wait like an insect
Wrapped in a web
Feeling its fear
Or not even that
Comatose intellect
Outside a passing life
A survivor's numbness
Enveloped in gauze

Yet there must be more
Beyond numbers
Because they do continue
Like larvae cocooned
Expectant
With the next rain
A primitive yearn
From Fertilization's promise
This flash of life
Seen deep in their eyes
As they stare hopefully
Into tomorrow

by Mark Constable
Edmonton, Alberta

HONOURABLE MENTION

Within

Dividing you
Your right lung

If I could draw a line

In half
From your left

And follow the breaths that rise

And fall
From within you

Trace the indentations
On the inside of your ribcage
Left behind from when you chose

Deep breaths
Instead of giving up

And find the curve
Of where your heart lies

I would thread a needle
And fix the fibres

Suturing back together the childlike memories
You once held

Of knights that could slay dragons

by Samantha Mazac
Red Deer, Alberta

HONOURABLE MENTION

Ghost from the Past

An ancient dialect forcefully silenced,
Oppressed and intended to be extinguished.
Believed to have been dead and extinct long ago,
But amid the crimes of abuse, and violence, and hate,
It endured and thrived back into life,
Back into the open;
Not eradicated but vindicated.
The descendants of an ancient people
Fighting for their ancestors,
And fighting for justice,
Wanting to reclaim what was once rightfully theirs,
What was stolen from them,
But also willing to forgive,
If the other side is willing to reconcile.
The truth has been unearthed,
And the bloodstained lies of the past exposed.
Their stories have changed the history books
And made them more accurate.
The fantastical fables of our “amazing” origins
Shoved down our throats,
Now proven to be false.
Apologies have been made
For the genocide and discrimination,
But there is still much work to be done.
Wronged, so very wronged,
Yet they are willing to forgive,
If the other side is willing to reconcile.

by Vickram Bachan

Toronto, Ontario

HONOURABLE MENTION

And We Begin Again

Yellow leaves luminous
Against a dawning night,
I stride
Through raindrops falling,
Slapping the leaves called
To concrete beneath my feet

Sometimes absence
Speaks louder than presence

Sometimes grief
Is a yawning void and
Our memories are too numerous
To organize

Yet
Nothing is sterile here:
It hums with life
Even in the mourning

by Maia Thomlinson
Winnipeg, Manitoba

HONOURABLE MENTION

Text Box

It's hard to see if someone is busy, frustrated, or lost
When all you see are words inside a text box.
I don't see your face.
I can't see when you smile or cry.
I don't hear your voice.
I can't hear if you laugh or sigh.
I don't see your movements.
I can't tell if you're tense or at ease.
I only have your words,
I can hardly tell from these.

It's hard to see if someone is busy, frustrated, or lost
When all you see are words inside a text box.
So when you are angry
Because you think I've been harsh,
Read it again
And read with your heart.
My words are not arrows,
They're not meant to strike,
They are my only way
To say what it feels like.

It's hard to tell if someone is busy, frustrated, or lost
When all you see are words inside a text box.

by David Dempsey
Saint John, New Brunswick

HONOURABLE MENTION

How It Feels inside My Mouth to Say “I Love You”

I'd like to say that it was spoken
in a caressing and gentle way.

I'd like to describe it as sultry,
how the words danced through the gaps in my teeth
and softly leapt off my tongue,
emerging into the world,
gracing your ears.

I'd like to describe it that way,
but that'd be a lie.

Because my mouth hurt,
and my gums began to bleed.

I pushed my tongue against my teeth,
trying to block the words from escaping.

When they leapt off my tongue,
they leapt with great courage
and insanity.

Once the words hit your ears,
all that was in my mouth
was the taste of regret
and uncertainty.

by Willow Duggan
Ottawa, Ontario

HONOURABLE MENTION

Pike Place

Sisyphus finally quit;
The last supper was instead the first breakfast;
Rejection is rejoicing,
And I find myself incapable
Of capability.

More than that, love has overgrown itself again,
Despite my inadequate trimming
And far too much rain in such a dry season.

The heart of Eden was a simple desert
Overtaken by our suburban jungle.

Apple cider isn't a sin,
Or so we find ourselves sinning.

At Pike Place, the coffee isn't any better,
But the view is.

As Sisyphus quits, I take his place,
Contented with an eternity by the ocean—
Or in the mountains,
Or on the plains—

Wherever the wine in my veins
Touches soft lips and stains
And I can have a simple cup of coffee.

by Georgette Tate
Calgary, Alberta

HONOURABLE MENTION

What's in a Face?

What's in a face?

Not just eyes
Not just a mouth
Nor the expressions
Although they tell so much

There are stories of seasons
Spring, summer, winter, fall
With cycles of sadness, love
And joy for all

What's in a face?

Recognition, maybe regret
History of time well spent
Second chances, forgiveness, and yet
Those things too difficult to forget

There are hopes and dreams
Childhood wishes that remain unseen
Wonder, awe, and believing
In the magic of a full-moon evening

What's in a face?

Beyond the stories, years, and grace
Beyond forgiveness and mistakes
Beyond the wrinkles from laughter and birthday cakes
There is a deep, welcoming embrace

Even when hidden from view
Beneath a mask worn by choice or rule
The brilliance of a face still shines through
With expressions of hope for me and you

by Tricia Sybersma

Thornbury, Ontario, and Cayman Islands

HONOURABLE MENTION

Grocery Shopping during the Pandemic

Determined to hit the grocery store before it becomes crowded, he leaves home when it is cold and dark outside. Double check: keys, phone, grocery list, glasses, mask. It is recommended that only one family member grocery shop. It used to be such a pleasure (he inherited the mindset from his European grandmother), but no more.

The guys who stock shelves are just getting started. Although masked, they have no sense of social distancing. Avoiding them is another pandemic challenge.

Wandering aimlessly, a family of four is deciding what to have for dinner. It is suggested that customers plan ahead, make a shopping list. His is organized according to location of items in the store, for extra efficiency.

In the produce section, inflation is obvious. Cauliflower, once a maligned vegetable, has soared in price and popularity. Perhaps plant-based gurus recommend cauliflower steaks. He recalls his grandmother's cauliflower au gratin, served with roast beef.

Shortages are common. Inexplicable hoarding. Inefficient stocking of shelves. The excuse is always the same: "The truck is late again."

At checkout, he starts unloading. Ever helpful and efficient, checkout staff are not permitted to help pack shopping bags. He gets behind. Customers in line become impatient.

8:15 A.M. Done. Anxious. His partner will have checked their bank account online and knows he is on his way.

by Roberta McGill
Orillia, Ontario

HONOURABLE MENTION

Don't Look Back

Long forgotten, out of mind
Though never truly gone

Without warning, your name appears
Like a boulder tumbling down

Panic sets in
Heart pounding, pulse racing

Should stop right there
Curiosity peaks, unable to stop

One simple *click*
Storm clouds form, lightning crashes

Frozen in place, needing more
There you are, face so familiar

Lump in my throat
Eyes closed, deep breath taken

Continues still
I hear your voice, an uninvited tremble

I see your hands, feel the sting on my skin
Haunted for so long

Shake my head
What's past is past

Power down and run

by Jodi Nelitz
Windsor, Ontario

HONOURABLE MENTION

Bus Angel

I am cold
In my favourite season,
Which I no longer love.

I head for the bus shelter
With a cup of hot coffee
In my cold hands.

There, a man sits on the bench.
He sees me and shuffles over a bit.

I am cold, I tell him.

*Pah! In three months
How will you feel?*

*I don't know.
In three months, it will be the end of December:
Winter,
Snow.*

Then how will you feel?

Colder.

So, . . . how do you feel now?

A little bit warmer.

The bus comes, but it is not my bus.
The man stands to catch it.
His left leg is mechanical,
Sticking out of his shorts.

by Roxanne Merits (68 years)
North Gower, Ontario