

# FIRST-PRIZE WINNER

## Breaking

When Louise entered the kitchen, she found Ed seated at the table, cleaning one of the handguns from his collection. She noticed the metallic and musty smell of the oil he was using, mixed with stale fumes of rum. Leaning opposite him, she raised her eyebrows at the half-full glass sitting near the cleaning paraphernalia. Ed followed her gaze. “Good old Captain Morgan,” he said, reaching for the glass.

Louise looked around for the bottle. It was on the sideboard, where Ed’s cane leaned like a long question mark. About an inch of amber liquid remained. “Did you drink all that today?”

Ed peered into the open chamber of the gun, bracing his disabled left hand with his right. “Did you come here to preach at me?” he asked. “Sunday’s still two days away.”

“Funny.” Louise pulled out a chair and sat down. “I came over to see if you wanted to take a drive down shore with us. The kids want to look for shells and driftwood. It’s such a beautiful day.”

“I know.” Ed glanced out the window. “When I woke up I was hoping it would rain.”

“That’s so crazy, Ed! You need to get out. You always loved the beach. Sitting around here, messing around with your stupid guns isn’t *my* idea of fun.”

“Nor mine,” Ed said. “But it’s what I’m gonna do today.” He picked up his glass and held it against the ray of sunshine pointing a long finger across the table. Ed looked down. When he raised his eyes again they were filled with tears. “Tomorrow, maybe.”

“Oh, Ed. Ed.” Louise felt tears of frustration welling in her own eyes. “I just do not understand you! It’s not like money’s a problem. You could travel, go somewhere different, *do* something different!”

Ed raised the glass in front of his face as though to fend off her words. “I can’t,” he said. “Leave me alone, Louise. It’s all I can do to get out of bed. I’m a classic case of depression, eh? A nuisance. A death’s head at the feast.” He drained the glass and set it down carefully.

“Then let yourself be helped!” Louise reached for the bottle, knocking Ed’s cane to the floor. She stood at the sink, letting the last ounces gurgle down the drain. “I’ll drive you to Pictou, Ed. The first thing you have to do is dry out!”

“Who in hell do you think you are: Carrie Nation?” Ed tried to rise, lost his balance and sat heavily on the edge of the chair. “Give me the goddamn cane!”

Louise picked it up and handed it to him. Ed looked at her as though he wanted to hit her with it. She knew he did.

“Now, you listen to me,” he began. “I am *not* going to friggin’ Pictou. I tried that before, remember? I don’t want to give up the booze. I’d have nothing without it.”

“That isn’t true.” Louise hated crying in front of him, but she couldn’t help it. “What about the kids? Your friends?”

He looked at the empty bottle. “You’re a self-righteous bitch, know that, Lou? What’d you think you’d accomplish, pouring my rum out? I’ve got bottles stashed all over the place. Backups. My pals. Companions. Now why don’t you take your little bag of virtues and go home. Tell the kids I love them, and I’ll see them later.”

“When?” Louise demanded. “Don’t come around if you’re drunk.”

“Later. I’ll see them later. And I won’t be drunk.” He stood up clumsily, supporting himself with the cane.

Louise took a step towards him and put a hand on his arm. “Please let me help you, Ed. I can’t stand to watch what you’re doing to yourself.”

Ed laughed the big infectious laugh that always made people smile and turn to look. “You’re a saint, you are,” he said. “Saint Lou. Just not enough of one to live with a crippled alcoholic. Or should that be an alcoholic cripple? I’m a leftover in your life, a loose end. You like things neat and tidy and *fixed*.”

Louise headed for the door. “I wish you knew yourself as well as you think you know me,” she said. With her hand on the doorknob she added, “Be careful. You’re not very steady. Don’t fall and break your leg again.”

“Oh, okay.” His booming laugh followed her as she slammed the door.

... Nick and Julie went willingly to bed that evening, exhausted from sun and sand. Louise was about to get into her own when the doorbell rang. Two police officers stood on the porch. Louise looked at their faces, and knew.

*by Bernice Byers*

Parrsboro, Nova Scotia



# SECOND-PRIZE WINNER

## The Visit

In a haunting, dreamlike scene from early childhood, I see Mother standing, awkwardly holding the screaming baby. Her face is flushed as she reluctantly welcomes her sister-in-law into the house. The woman who has just entered, has come with her husband from a big American city. They have driven to Manitoba to collect an inheritance left to her by an aunt. Fifteen hundred miles, the woman says—an unimaginable distance to Mother.

They have to shout above the baby's protests. He is furious over having been separated so unceremoniously from his mother's breast. She fetches a "sugar tit" (a clean rag soaked in milk and sugar) to calm him. Then she attempts to lay him in the bassinet. This outrage sparks further screams. He has been awake and howling since five in the morning. Colic, Mother explains.

Although it is nearly noon, parts of the cream separator as well as the breakfast dishes sit, unwashed, on the kitchen table. The chair with the fewest items piled on it is hurriedly cleared and offered. The woman is hesitant about using it, but brushes away some crumbs, sits, and crosses her silken legs.

There should be conversation, Mother knows, but she has no idea how to make small talk, and her range of subject matter is limited in any case. What does one say to this vision of urbanity? There is no doubt that news of the lengthening days, which has prompted the hens to start laying again, would be of little interest. Or that the onrush of water from spring flooding has blessedly left the cellar untouched.

The three-year-old appears from the "other room," the name given to the only other room on the main floor of the small farm house. She is shy and has been keeping her distance. Her hair, like her mother's, is auburn and curly. Also, like her mother's, it has not been combed since the day before. The chocolate from a hoarded Easter Bunny is smeared across her face, and a liberal amount clings to her flannelette nightgown. She shelters behind Mother's apron.

In contrast to the sister-in-law's white ruffled blouse, Mother's is askew, having been buttoned up too quickly following the guest's arrival. There is also a smattering of baby vomit over the shoulder and down the front.

Mother wonders how a person can walk in such high heels, but openly admires the city shoes. She is told they are of top quality and very expensive. Costly, because of the difficulty in acquiring a decent fit.

Mother nods as though she understands perfectly, and thinks of the rundown bedroom slippers she is still wearing. There are no children to inquire after, so she asks about the couple's health. She is told they are holding up well despite their stressful life, although the husband has a bad stomach.

A huge one, too, Mother and daughter notice as they glance furtively out the big east window. They see Father and his brother admiring the shiny black car in the yard and Mother comments on it. A Buick, she is told. The newest model on the market. Adds that she, herself, would have preferred another colour.

Mother realizes she should invite them to lunch, opens the cupboard door, and searches frantically among the scant supplies in a futile effort to locate something that would be worthy of such exalted company. As if reading her mind, the visitor explains that they had a late breakfast at a fine restaurant in Winnipeg and have only a short time to stay. She rises, inspects her smart navy-blue skirt for stray cat hairs. There are other calls to be made, and their time in Manitoba will be brief.

They are shouting since the baby flared up again after only a brief respite, and the three-year-old is whining and begging to be picked up. The small girl, sensing that the family has failed in some obscure way, needs to be comforted.

It ends, finally, and the visitors leave. Mother, holding her little daughter by the hand, stands on the front step, waving, as they drive away. There are tears of humiliation in her eyes. She doesn't know that she is far more beautiful than her sister-in-law. But Father knows, comes and holds her in his arms, tells her so.

*by Wanda Ryder*

Portage la Prairie, Manitoba



# THIRD-PRIZE WINNER

## Tonight: Marie Gogo

Fog hung from the city's lapel like a three-day-old boutonniere. Even the rain couldn't bring it to life. I lifted my collar and walked Cook Street towards the waterfront, determined to escape student poverty and find freedom in aimless wandering.

Instead, I was becoming oppressed by the weather. At every street corner the drizzling rain flashed like needles under street lamps. Each lamp, poised on the cilium of its stalk, looked to me like a white follicle slick with moisture. I shivered with disgust, surrounded by a magnified biological landscape of dark thistly hair adrift in a rank mucosity. A passing car, pulling rain off the street with a hiss, added to the nightmarish impression.

Across the street, an electric sign announced a new bistro: *El Hoyo* (The Hole). Leaning against its window was a square of cardboard that read, "Tonight: Marie Gogo."

I opened the door and a rush of cold air startled a dozen rice-paper globes that swagged like fobs of tight skin above the tables. I sat near the kitchen. Twin cafe doors swung a musky bouquet at me.

"Anything to eat?" asked the slender waiter.

I glanced at the chalk menu on the wall. "French onion soup," I told him. "With garlic bread and a beer."

The waiter bounced through the cafe doors into the kitchen. I sat back and surveyed the room.

The plaster walls were gofferred, perhaps by fingers that scrolled them in moments of high madness. Twelve tables under checkered cloths spread away from a small stage that held two amplifiers. Wires snaked to a microphone and a guitar, which leaned against a stool behind a sheet-music stand.

There were eight customers in the bistro. Eight men. They canted over tables and spoke in low tones. Dripping candles hung dissolute shadows on their faces. I watched one man punctuate a pronouncement with a shallow wag of his hand.

The waiter returned with the beer and soup. I marauded the soup's melted cheese with a peninsula of garlic bread.

A pretty girl stepped away from the bar. I hadn't noticed her before. Tall and nervous, she approached the stage and lightly stepped over the swollen cables to sit on the stool. She cupped her long blonde hair and passed it over her shoulder. It fell the length of her back. Then, she picked up the guitar and passed her arm through its strap. Her neck made a swan's arch as she gently blew into the microphone. She smiled, embarrassed. Her foot reached a switch on the floor. She blew again and a fleecy sound swept the room, magnified by the speakers. Then clear and pure, Marie Gogo began to sing.

I was stunned. Her voice was like wind searching the perfect chimneys of the world's own heart. It dove through the simple facades of the songs, plunged deep into the lyrics, gathered up their gold, and then, breaking free to the surface, Marie Gogo released the legacies of her journey with a quick toss of her long blonde hair. During one song her passion swelled to bursting behind a soft frown and she freed it with one long, beautiful, clear high note, crystalline and perfect as an insect caught in amber.

I found myself drawn into her songs. Then, slowly, as if travelling delicate patterns of memories to a common source, we drifted towards each other until we were joined by a process I cannot name. For a moment, I did not know where Marie Gogo's heart began and mine left off, whether her pathos used my personal history or her imagination. My throat constricted and I raised my hand, startled by my hair's coarseness.

After each song a death-like silence crowded the room. No one applauded. No one was even listening.

I looked around and experienced a sudden sensation of repugnance. Standing abruptly, I nearly overturned the table on my way to the door.

I needed to leave, to escape the terrible incongruity and find a place where the sadness of a beautiful voice, caught between painful memories and the unutterable toil of living, wasn't considered an intrusion.

The door flung open. I stepped out onto the wet street and turned up my collar against the reedy-voiced waiter calling for his money.

*by Randy Kerr*

Victoria, British Columbia



# HONOURABLE MENTION

## **Ziggy and Amos**

Dr. Adams is having a bad day. He hates the sealed windows covered with thick plastic against the radioactive dust. He longs for the unfiltered softness of past summer breezes. Outside it is boiling hot. “Damn them all,” he mumbles to himself. “Stupid, stupid politicians. Idiots!”

His gaze shifts from the windows to the corner of the examination room where, like an anxious parent, he watches Ziggy and Amos get leisurely out of their beds, stretch, and move towards their bowls of goat’s milk. Dr. Adams tries to take good care of them. He scrounges pieces of meat and fish whenever he can, worries that he has to keep them confined. Occasionally, he lets them step outside to a fenced yard where they are intrigued by the pale, tissue-thin butterflies that still flit about.

Dr. Adams wishes he knew when it was really safe out there for Ziggy and Amos. He sighs and remembers the sudden floods and violent earthquakes, the wounded planet groaning and heaving. That was a more hopeful time, he thinks, when the experts consulted the Native elders to forecast the weather from the plants and animals. This was long before the nuclear reactor exploded, its fireball spewing out plumes of radioactivity into his Rocky Mountain town.

Dr. Adams often feels helpless although he pretends otherwise to his patients. Today his first is a middle-aged man who shuffles into the room, removes his equipment, his precious mask and oxygen tank, and sits down stiffly, wrinkling the worn sheet that covers the bed.

“Take off your clothes, please,” Dr. Adams says, turning away and averting his eyes. The man looks over at Ziggy and Amos strolling about and, for a moment, is hopeful. He has heard of their gifts, that they respond to people with love, are sensitive to their illnesses. Some even say they are medical intuitives, almost as reliable in unearthing disease as the scanner of cold steel that stands in the corner.

“No machinery today,” Dr. Adams announces. “The electricity is off again.” He turns towards Ziggy and with the sweep of his arms motions him to come forward. Amos goes back to his bed.

“Lie down,” the doctor says to his naked patient.

Ziggy knows what this means—he has been trained to it. He leaps up and begins his examination by sitting on the patient’s chest. Then he shifts his body and settles beside the man’s head. He begins to purr and puts his warm striped paw on the man’s shoulder, the way that cats do when their owners are sick. The man feels Ziggy’s whiskers brush his cheek as the cat’s paw, its claws retracted, moves over his face, past his chin and on to his neck—then the sensation of Ziggy’s rough tongue licking a spot between his clavicles.

“Good news,” Dr. Adams says with relief. “Ziggy has marked your thyroid. That’s the easiest to treat.”

With effort, the man reaches out to stroke the cat. Ziggy arches his back, jumps down and with his tail proudly erect walks over to Amos. Amos seems not to notice him. He is carefully cleaning his fine white coat, waiting for their next patient to struggle through the door.

***by Beverly Rasporich***  
Invermere, British Columbia

# HONOURABLE MENTION

## The Summer House

It was an extremely cold, stormy Sunday in January. Forty-four-year-old Billy Summer stood in front of his great overweight mother who was sitting at the kitchen table, where she had earlier placed her favourite teacup. She looked like a plump old snowman of a woman. Squatting in a low chair, staring at her son through black olive eyes that were stuck in her white flabby face, she pulled a heavy wool blanket tightly around her shoulders with one hand, and tapped her walking stick on the floor with the other, hurling insults at him the entire time.

Billy had worked on the furnace most of the day, but he simply could not get it going. He had tried to explain, but she refused to listen. Standing there, in his soot-covered work clothes, he meekly bore the brunt of her ill-tempered remarks.

He held a wrench in his left hand, and he smeared soot all over his face as he rubbed his sore eyes with his right, giving them a squinty look. His nostrils were wide in his blunt nose, and he had a harelip. Billy was thin, but although he was almost five feet, ten inches tall, he looked shorter because of his partly balding head, round shoulders, and small bulging paunch.

His black, disfigured face, staring at her, seemed to provoke his mother's anger even more than the cold and storm. She began to stab him in the stomach with the end of her walking stick for emphasis as she screamed, "It's your fault. I've told you repeatedly over the past three months that the furnace needed fixing, but you wouldn't listen. Now I'm freezing in this old house. It's your fault."

Billy just stood there, shivering, with his legs shaking, not only from the cold, but from crouching for so long in the damp, low-walled basement. He stared at her as if contemplating what to do next. Between the shouting and catching her breath his mother suddenly banged the table with the palm of her left hand. This action sent her favourite teacup crashing into pieces on the floor, causing her to scream, "Now look what you've made me do."

Like the wrath of the storm, with all of her strength she rammed the metal tip of the walking stick into his paunch hard enough to puncture it.

Dropping the wrench Billy gaped at her in astonishment and disbelief for a moment, and then he doubled up, topped over, and fell on the cold hard floor next to the shattered teacup. He didn't see the shocked look on her face, or feel the walking stick fall on his leg.

There was a cold silence in the kitchen as she pulled the blanket ever so tightly around her broad neck and shoulders.

*by Alexander Boutilier*

Fall River, Nova Scotia





# HONOURABLE MENTION

## Who's There?

We could hear the rain lashing against the windows, feel the fury of the wind seeking a crevice through which to enter our cozy home. Thunder earlier had shaken the air inside and outside the sturdy building. No longer was lightning flashing across the sky like some giant hand flicking a switch to illuminate the world outdoors, competing with the bright electric lights and blazing fire within. Despite their noise and force, the wind and rain seemed almost peaceful compared to that previous display.

Still, we were unable to believe our ears when a knock sounded on the door. "It must be the wind," someone said. But then it came again, louder, more insistent, and with such a curious rhythm that we all stared at the door as if expecting something to materialize through it.

The third knock jolted me into action and I sprang to open the door and unlock the mystery of who could be out on a night like this. A friend or a stranger? Was someone lost and frightened? Who might be challenging nature? These questions and others darted around in our minds and flew wordlessly back and forth between our startled gazes.

I opened the door.

She was a curious-looking little person—when we had time to get a good look at her. My first quick glance, however, took in only her bright sparkling eyes and warm friendly smile. It wasn't until long afterwards that I remembered she was scarcely even damp. Someone running in from a car in our driveway would be drenched: hair dripping, clothes drooping and clinging, and shoes awash. Only a few drops glistened in her long, dark, wavy hair.

"Come in, young lady," I said. I blushed a few seconds later when I could see her in better lighting, for she wasn't young, but she had an ageless look about her.

"Many thanks, young man," she responded in a cheerful, sing-song voice. "I knew I'd found the right house when I saw smoke coming from the chimney." At the time, that made perfect sense. Only later did we discuss that smoke would scarcely be visible in the daytime in a storm like that, let alone on that dark evening. We had a lot of time to wonder about those enigmas—later.

Soon our guest was sipping hot soup daintily, while we watched her shamelessly. Those lively eyes, captivating smile, and melodic voice had us spell-bound. We wanted to ask what she was doing out there in this miserable weather, whence she came, where she was headed, and if someone would be worried about her. But our questions went unasked.

Instead, we found ourselves responding to her queries and, soon, she knew all about each one of us, while we still knew nothing about her, except her name. "Just call me Carmella, my dears," she chanted. "I am so lucky to have found you just when I needed you."

How quickly the evening flew by—and how rapidly the days of that memorable summer drifted past. And still Carmella stayed with us. We soon stopped asking her questions about others who might be wondering where she was. We just glowed in the light of her smile, lived for her compliments, and revolved our lives around her comfort and well-being.

I'm not sure when things began to change. None of us can identify a particular moment when harmony changed to discord, happiness became fear, love ... hate, and life became a misery to be endured. Where we had been her willing slaves that first summer, we now did her bidding no matter what it was. Our home was in her unquestioned control, our minds and bodies following the instructions of her iron will.

It was only a matter of time before the police were staking out our place; only a matter of course that we should get caught as we returned with the loot of yet another robbery. Caught red-handed ...

The police never did find any evidence that we had been responsible for the rash of other burglaries in the area. It had all disappeared without a trace, just as Carmella had.

We never saw her again, but we have all the time in the world to reminisce, trying to put the pieces of the puzzle together. The sunlight filtering through the bars of the window reminds us of happier times, before a strange little lady took control of our minds, cost us our freedom, and stole away our futures.

*by Kay Knox*

Clearwater, British Columbia



# HONOURABLE MENTION

## Mickey, Joe, and Dad

*In memory of my father, Arturo Ricciardelli (1902-1976).*

My father never lost his thick Italian accent. After twenty-five years in Canada, his mastery of English was far from the standard of the king. So we often simply could not understand what he said. Almost as often, this problem created frustration and anger. Add to this unhappy situation the fact that my English-born mother raised us as God-fearing Anglicans in the Church of England in Canada, and you have a near life-long separation of father and children.

Like most preadolescent boys growing up during the early years of the Cold War, I was fascinated by all things American. As a result, I developed a passion for baseball and, in particular, the mighty New York Yankees. My story begins, appropriately I think, during the 1952 season when a young centre fielder from Oklahoma named Mickey Mantle was facing the daunting task of filling the spikes of the great Joe Dimaggio.

It was Friday of Labour Day weekend with back-to-school Tuesday looming darkly on the horizon. Overcast skies and oppressive humidity kept me indoors that day. Just me sorting out my baseball cards upstairs and Dad in the basement installing a toilet in the laundry room. Nobody else home except for Enrico, our little cat.

The carpet on my bedroom floor was the playing field at Yankee Stadium. I'd begun placing the cards of my beloved Yankees at their regular starting positions. Little Enrico had decided to conveniently take up a sprawling position in right centre between Mantle and Hank Bauer. Then, I heard Dad calling from the basement, "Lorenz, come on a-down, 'elp-a you fadda." Feeling much like Ralph Branca did as he went to the mound to face Bobby Thompson in last year's NL playoff, I picked up a couple of cards for good luck and truded off to the laundry room.

"Old-a da renga unda da tengk." Don't panic now. Okay. "Renga" must mean wrench because he's handing me one. "Tengk" is probably tank. Armed with this information I proceeded to look underneath the toilet tank for something I was to hold with my wrench. Aha! A nut and bolt. Same thing as on a bicycle seat. So, lying on my back on the concrete floor, I held that little wrench in position with all the strength of Charles Atlas.

At the top, Dad inserted a long-handled screwdriver and twisted the bolt securely into place. We then repeated the task on the other side of the tank with equal ease.

"You gotta good-a 'ands, my son."

Was this Dad talking? He hadn't said anything like that to me since I won the spelling competition in grade one. "You good-a boy too, *figlio*," he added, lighting up a cigarette.

"Figlio, Dimaggio. That's got a nice ring to it." Then boldly I said, "You want the tank lid?" It was over near the wall. Dad motioned yes.

Walking gingerly across the concrete floor, suddenly, I felt myself off balance, one foot planted firmly on an untied lace. Down I went. As I hit the floor, the tank lid landed squarely on top of a blow torch. The crack was like the sound of Mickey's bat meeting a Bob Feller fastball. Silence. I lay on the floor, a broken piece of lid in each hand. I was the accidental Moses.

The silence was broken by a plunk as Dad's cigarette scattered sparks over the floor. "Geezus a-Christ!" Then nothing but the sound of little Enrico meowing at the door. As Dad took the broken tablets from my hands, hot tears began to leak from my eyelids.

Finally, he spoke. "Lorenz, whats-a-madda, *mi figlio*?" If there had been any anger in his voice before, there was now only compassion. Tears erupted at the sound of *mi figlio* and I buried my face in his chest. "Don' cry, *figlio*. Dad is-a no mad."

He held me close. More than words, I needed touch—the touch of his hands and his rough cheek on my forehead. For those few moments, as that long-ago summer drew to a close, I felt loved by my father more than at any time I can remember.

At the laundry room door, I turned around. “Ever hear of Phil Ruzzuto?” I pulled the Yankee shortstop from my pocket.

“Yeah, he’s a good-a sing, no?” Dad wiped the sweat from around his dark eyes. I put Ruzzuto back into my pocket.

“Yeah, he’s a great singer, Dad.”

*by Larry Ricciardelli*

Hamilton, Ontario



# HONOURABLE MENTION

## The Chills of December

Normally, December 18th would find Joan Hardy up to her neck in Christmas preparations. As long as she could remember, she loved the bustle and the excitement surrounding the season, and, for her, the greatest thrill came with finding the perfect gift for everyone on her list. Friends tormented her about Christmas being her year-round project; they called her Mother Christmas.

Not today.

Joan also loved her job at the Martinvale Bugle. To her, searching the wire services to find small, interesting news items to fill the daily newspaper was akin to Christmas shopping.

Not today.

Eight months ago today Joan's world turned upside down and became a living hell when Rob, her best friend and husband of twenty years, failed to return from his job as principal of Martinvale Regional High School. Remembering that day sent a cold chill up her spine.

He had been so excited the preceding summer when he was chosen to run the largest high school in the province. Like a kid, he couldn't wait for school to reopen, even though it would be a big challenge.

Joan had been happy for him. Their life was good—maybe not exciting, but good. The passion of youth had been replaced by the comfort of years of love, caring, and trust. Their sons, Pete, nineteen, and Garth, eighteen, were away attending university, leaving Joan and Rob time to devote to each other after all the years of child raising. Maybe they could even take that trip to Africa that Rob had always been dreaming of, but they could never afford.

The day after Rob failed to come home, his car was found near the river, doors locked, keys in the ignition and turned on, with the fuel gauge indicating empty. His wallet, containing identification and credit cards along with forty dollars, sat in his jacket, which was neatly folded on the front seat. There were no signs of a struggle.

The following days were a nightmare for Joan. She would never forget the feelings of loss, utter despair, and total bewilderment. She couldn't believe that Rob was really gone. Any moment he'd come striding through the door—she still wanted to believe that.

Police and rescue personnel did everything humanly possible, but found no trace of her missing husband. Dragging the waters of the river proved fruitless and was terminated after three days. Friends, coworkers, and students all described Rob Hardy as a good man, dedicated principal, and devoted husband. No one could believe that anyone would harm him. Their bank manager confirmed that the Hardys were not experiencing financial difficulties and there had not been any unusual account activities. Each lead became a dead end. Lacking any other possibilities, suicide, unlikely as it seemed, could not be ruled out.

The blurred days slowly became weeks, then months. The case, though officially open, now lay dormant, collecting dust in some unresolved cold-case cardboard box. Life went on for Joan, uncaringly. How could she continue without Rob? When her best friend, Diane, decided to move to Toronto, she suggested that Joan replace her at the Bugle. Joan flatly refused, but Diane persisted, finally convincing her that the part-time hours wouldn't be too difficult, the pay was good, and it would do Joan good to get out of the house.

She was right. Working forced Joan to focus on something other than her own misfortune; it was the best therapy she could ever get.

But not today. Some days she sensed Rob's presence, as if he were trying to reassure her, to give her the comfort she desperately needed.

Joan hoped today's work would ease her blue funk—she prayed it would. After an hour of digging through the news bits with little success (she just couldn't concentrate), she came across this item: "Randy Harvey, former school teacher, came forward to claim a five-million-dollar lotto prize that sat unclaimed for nine months. Harvey said his wife found the winning ticket in a pocket of a jacket being donated to charity. He remembered purchasing the ticket

while on a trip last winter. The new millionaire and his bride, Diane, will decide what to do with 'the rest of their winnings,' while on their six-month honeymoon, in Africa.”

Rereading the item, Joan felt that same cold chill race up her spine, as the pen dropped from her now-trembling hand ...

*by Dannie MacDonald*  
Dartmouth, Nova Scotia



# HONOURABLE MENTION

## The Field

The field to me appears yellow, a sunny, exuberant yellow with black spots of indeterminate origin. As I walk closer, I see the yellow and black spots begin to coagulate into an impressionist's rendition of a field of sunflowers. Also like an impressionist's painting, the closer I come to the field, the more it becomes unintelligible; colours separate, vision blurs. As I stand right beside the flowers, they seem not to exist as flora at all, but as a mishmash of mixed oil-based paints on the gessoed canvas of some inexperienced painter fresh out of art school. I touch the "flowers" to see if my perception is incorrect—to see if I am just losing my mind—and as I do, a peculiar thing occurs: the flowers begin to melt.

With the consistency of molasses, the yellows and blacks run off onto my fingers and shoes creating a bee-like pattern that spreads upwards, smothering my pants and midriff. I try to rub off the paint, to remove it from my person, but I cannot; it is as though my hands are semi-solid blobs of water beading on the oily, yet resistant, surface of the paint. The colours begin to mix and cover me, face, ears, *et al.* My lower body, legs and feet are now covered in a dark brown substance that has a weathered texture to it, not unlike rock or wood. My arms are covered in the same material, only the colour is a shade lighter. Up until this point I have only been feeling a mild sense of fear and apprehension, but this quickly mutates into something more akin to despair, dread, and a grim inability to comprehend what is happening.

My feet and arms splinter, becoming rigid as boards. My legs and knees lock and become one, merging in the middle. The force of the splintering drives my feet into the dark, rich earth surrounding the flowers and shoots my arms into the sky, seemingly reaching for the sun. The hair on my head falls out while the hair on my arms seems to grow exponentially, changing colour to a deep green that sprouts instead of growing. I try to breathe but realize I have no mouth; I begin to panic and cry. My extremities are disappearing quite rapidly. "What's going on?" I try to say, but having no mouth complicates the matter. Slowly a feeling of drowsiness comes over me—a deep, overpowering sense of having been awake for eons. I feel the wind on my body, lulling and caressing me; I am no longer an observer of this field of dreams, I have become one with it. My eyelids droop and I feel a deep slumber come over me, one which I do not know that I will wake from. The sun begins to set and I know no more.

As the moon rises, the Flowers are bathed in a silver light of overwhelming power and beauty. There is not a cloud in the night sky—not a cloud to disrupt these Flowers from their preferred pastime of moon bathing. A night like any other in the field of Flowers except for one detail ... a tree. The Flowers do not know how it came to be; to their tranquil cognizance it seems that the tree just appeared. It doesn't bother them, of course, for what is another tree in the massive field ... a grain of sand in an ocean. The tree seems not to mind either, and as the wind picks up, the tree begins to sway in the breeze, creaking softly ... not unlike snoring.

*by Tony Stanciu*  
Toronto, Ontario



# HONOURABLE MENTION

## Sage

It wasn't the cocaine that bothered Jenny. Yesterday, she robbed a convenience store to get Kevin enough money for his little habit. The clerk was just a pimply kid. Jenny fired at the video camera first, then stuffed money into her backpack. She ditched her blonde wig and movie-star sunglasses in the creek, keeping the gun for next time.

It wasn't the long periods of silence that bothered her. His conversations always escalated into fights anyway. He never asked anything about her, except whether she had any money.

He hadn't kissed her in months. That didn't bother her either. Kevin was never a great lover and she had started sneaking out to meet his best friend. Ron supplied drugs to Kevin and a little something extra for Jenny.

"You're the only good thing that ever happened in my life. Where would I be without you? I need you to stay or I'll go crazy," Kevin wailed after he got stopped by the cops and charged with possession. He cried whenever he thought about going to jail and the possibility of being violated there.

What bothered her was the way Kevin started to treat her dog. He was yelling and shoving Sage when she got home from the robbery. (She ignored him when he yelled at her, just like she ignored the bedroom light being on all night because he was paranoid someone was going to break in and steal his drugs.)

The dog ran and cowered under their bed. Jenny wrapped him in her arms, close like a papoose. She could feel him shiver and shrink when Kevin staggered into the bedroom.

Maybe it was time for Kevin to enjoy *too much* cocaine. His best friend could drop by unannounced while Jenny was out walking the dog.

**by Sidney Bending**

Victoria, British Columbia





# HONOURABLE MENTION

## Saving Purple

*For the one who inspired it.*

Allie said she'd come.

Today is my birthday. I blew up the balloons and made the cake all by myself: chocolate. My favourite, and her favourite too. Today's my birthday and Allie said she'd come, but she hasn't.

My parents said that Allie's not coming.

They said she got hit by a car. They said she's gone now. Dead. But I don't believe them—Allie can't be dead. They must be wrong.

Allie's parents were here looking sad and all the grown-ups were busy crying, so I left. I know where to find her. She'll be at the park, on the swings. She loves the swings.

"I feel like I'm flying," she'd told me once. Allie always loved to pretend. Whenever I needed her I could always find her there, going back and forth, back and forth. I know she's there. It's my birthday today—she said she'd come.

As I round the corner, my breathing is fast and shallow but I can't slow down. The park comes into view and Allie is just where I knew she'd be, on the swings. I smile and run to her.

"Hey," she says, sounding perfectly normal.

"Hey," I answer breathlessly, climbing onto a swing beside her.

"Happy birthday," she tells me.

I smile. "I knew you didn't forget!"

"No," she says. "I told you I'd come."

For a few minutes we pump in comfortable silence. As hard as I try, I can't get as high as she can; she always manages to stay just out of my reach. That's my Allie.

"Allie ...," I say, very very quietly, but she hears me.

"What?" she calls out, swinging.

I don't know what I meant to say, so I improvise. "Everything!"

"Or nothing," she teases.

"Or anything."

"Or something."

"Or ... okay, I think we got them all." We smile.

She's swinging above me, tilting her body for better speed, laughing like it's all so easy. She's definitely the same old Allie. But there's something new about her today, a happiness in her words that's never been this strong; bliss to match the cloudless sky. She's always been carefree, but now it's almost like she's past caring altogether.

"Did you know," she asks suddenly, seriously, "that *purple* is the colour that appears most in the world? We'd think it was green or blue, but it's purple. Isn't that strange?"

It isn't strange at all. To me, purple is a feeling, not a colour.

"I love purple," I confide. "It's my favourite."

She looks at me, holding my gaze as I swing forward and she swings back. "I know."

"I hope there's always, always purple," I declare.

"Don't worry," she teases. "I'll save it for you!"

I laugh. "Thanks, Allie."

"Purple for you, but I love blue," she sings out. "Blue like the sky ..."

Yes, like the sky. I throw my head back and watch the blueness swirl giddily above me. It's just the right shade. Pure. Colours float under me. The sun is warm and the chains are steady in my hands, familiar.

I tilt my face towards her, trying to meet her eyes as she swings forward and I swing back. But she isn't looking at me; she's looking ahead, past me, at something I can't see. "Someone lied to me, Allie," I say, feeling vaguely guilty. "Someone told me you were dead."

“Oh, silly,” she answers happily. “You didn’t really believe that, did you?”

I smile. Of course not.

Her hair is a mess, whipped by the wind into a tangle of knots, but her eyes are shining and she laughs, just for the sake of it. She loves to laugh.

Pumping harder, still trying in vain to catch up to her, I look around. Over on the parking lot, I see our shadows on the gravel. The chains of our swings are too small to see, so I can only see our shadows, flying back and forth, soaring forward and being pulled back, every time. Back and forth, back and forth. I watch them for a while, gliding side by side, then say, “Hey.”

“Hey,” she answers, smiling.

“Look at us,” I say. “We’re flying.”

*by Christine Klippenstein*

Ottawa, Ontario



# HONOURABLE MENTION

## A Nickname for Erika

Uncle Isaac has had a few nicknames in his lifetime. He's been called Zack, Izzy, Yzerman, and Ike. I've even given him a nickname of my own: Unkie. My name is Erika but Unkie never calls me that.

In September I was Berryka. Unkie has a large raspberry patch in his backyard. He's always had a bit of a green thumb. Throughout the summer he picked the ripened raspberries and put them into the freezer. On Labour Day we turned all of the year's harvest into fourteen delicious jars of raspberry jam! Unkie gave me seven of them to bring home.

In October I was Rickshaw. I signed up for my school's cross-country running team. Unkie came to one of my races to cheer me on. On the way home we visited Chinatown to eat some coconut buns! A rickshaw driver went running past us pulling his customer in the carriage behind him. Running is tiring enough without a heavy load to tow around. We were impressed!

In November I was Hi-Ho-the-Derry-O. Unkie and I went to the winter fair. We listened to live fiddle music and the bleating of sheep. We looked at butter sculptures and blue-ribbon pumpkins. We ate baked cinnamon apples and homemade fudge. We enjoyed our taste of country life so much that we sang farm songs during the entire subway ride back home!

In December I was Erikazoo. Unkie's dining room table was all set up for a festive, family get-together. On each of our plates was a shiny, silver party cracker! "Pop" went all the crackers and out came all the gifts. Mine was a kazoo! After supper we all had a carol sing with Aunt Heidi playing the piano and me on my Christmas-cracker kazoo. Joy to the world!

In January I was Rickerbocker. Unkie's boss gave him free tickets to a basketball game. Our home team Raptors were playing the Knicks. I made a sign that read "Go Dinos!" We were a boisterous bunch of fans all night. The entire crowd even did "The Wave!" At halftime I asked Unkie what a Knick was. He told me it was short for Knickerbocker, a long-ago nickname for the people of New York.

In February I was Icarus. I was terrified over my public speaking assignment on a character from Greek mythology. Unkie had a plan. I called him on the phone every night and practised reciting my presentation. I peeked at my note cards less and less with every call until finally I had it memorized. On the big day I was still a little nervous but all of my rehearsing allowed me to fly high just like my speech subject—without the crash landing of course.

In March I was Amerika. Unkie and I were in the library researching information on the country of Peru. My friend Miguel is from there and I wanted to discover as much as I could. From an atlas we learned about South America, the Pacific Ocean, and the Andes mountains. From an encyclopedia we learned about the Incan empire, the Amazon rain forest, and hairy, long-nosed armadillos.

In April I was Eureka. That's what Unkie yelled out when he found the missing puzzle piece we were looking for. It was hiding underneath the area rug. The puzzle was of a garden portrait painted by the famous artist Claude Monet. We spent an entire afternoon putting it together. We were so inspired by its beauty that afterwards we took out my water colours and tried some artwork of our own.

In May I was Vitamin E. Unkie had to have an emergency appendectomy. It started out as a pain in the right side of his abdomen and, before he knew it, he needed surgery to remove his appendix. I went to visit him in the hospital the very next day. I brought him a chocolate bar and a magazine for a gift. I told Unkie the doctors must have prescribed the right recovery drugs because he was looking very good. Unkie said it wasn't the medicine making him feel better—it was me.

It's June and I'm Puffin. Unkie knows it's my favourite animal. I'm going to see them again this summer when I'm in Newfoundland visiting Nanny and Poppy (that's what I

call my grandma and grandpa!). Nanny teaches me to knit sweaters and I help Poppy make grandfather clocks in his wood shop. We fish and swim whenever the weather's nice and at night we go for walks along the bay. I have the best vacations there. I'll miss Unkie though.

I can't wait to get my new nickname when I get back.

*by Vince Girdi*

Toronto, Ontario



# HONOURABLE MENTION

## By the Weight of Our Bodies

The willow tree stands by the red barn, which used to be a blacksmith shop. An old wagon that once was hitched to a car or a truck sits underneath. I hear our laughter dancing in the air. The wind whispers through the long hair of the tree.

I am playing with my friend Bobby on the old wagon, running back and forth, tipping it from end to end, sometimes balancing in the centre. Both of us move to one end so the wagon-tongue crashes to the ground, crushing grass. Then we run the other way and the back end tips down. *Thud! Thud! Laughter! Thud!*

The wind is blowing my hair. I feel the wagon bang onto the earth.

This time I run right off the back onto the grass, turn, and run back up. Bobby runs with me, the wagon-tongue banging to the ground. Together we weigh more than one-hundred pounds ... plus the weight of the wagon. We must be making a dent in the earth. Can they feel us on the other side of the world?

*Thud! Thud! Laughter! Thud!*

*Thud! Thud! Muff!* This time I hear a small sound under the tongue of the wagon. A muffled voice.

“What is it?” I say, as Bobby jumps to the ground beside the wagon. I see black tufts of fur sticking out from beneath the wagon. A scream escapes my lips and I run into the house. Where is the kitten? Frantically I search the house for our kitten. We just got him!

“Sammy! Sammy! Where is Sammy?” my voice fills every room of the house. Somewhere deep inside I know Sammy is not inside. He is outside under the wagon. I let him out before going to play.

A little while later, Bobby knocks on the back door. With tears still streaming from my eyes, I open the door only a crack. I see his round pudgy face telling me he had to make sure it didn't suffer. Its head was squished by the weight of the wagon, by the weight of our bodies.

My father buried Sammy in the garden under the place where the potatoes grow. We marked the spot with an X. Later we made a small cross to stand, slightly higher than the plants.

Somewhere deep inside, my body squirms. I'm eight years old and I know things will never be the same.

**by Michele Burnett**  
Scarborough, Ontario

