

FIRST PRIZE

Still, I Stand

Trees, susurrations of leaves. Stale
bark and morning dew on bushes, roll heavy mist, a bush crinkled
by passing small creatures, four swift legs on hunt scent.
Earth's dust and pebbles stifled
beneath my feet. Sharp, chirping
birdsong freshens the breeze,
loud gasp of wind breaks restless morning, carrying
a slight scent of salt. Turning,
a ceaseless desert of roaring currents
clashing upon the seashore.

Still, I stand, soaked dry.

The parched waves,
washing awe onto my cheeks. Quicker and quicker,
grabbing sand, yanking at land,
I taste desire in the iron claws of the sea.
More, more. MORE.
Eventually, as the last wave breaks surface—
clenched, one final desperate handful of grainy sand—
seas turned placid. Ocean relinquishes its grasp,
grows calm.

by Calvin Liu (Grade Nine)
West Point Grey Academy
Vancouver, British Columbia

FIRST PRIZE

Leaving

Walking away is a hard thing to do
You realize that nothing is permanent
In the present, we work hard to make our conditions ideal
Make sacrifices, change ourselves, gain friends, lose some
But one decision at any given moment can change everything you've worked so hard to create
And what are we walking into?
Why leave something that was working?
Is it the promise of what lies ahead?
The thoughts that keep you up at night wondering what could've been?
But don't put your narrative into past tense just yet
Leaving is daunting
It's jumping into water without knowing how deep it goes
And what about the cliff you jumped from?
It will never be the same
If you ever choose to return, the wind will have eroded the side
The grass will have forgotten the weight of your footsteps
If nothing is permanent, leaving means saying goodbye to the world you made for yourself
But it also means creating a new world
And maybe this one will be even better
And maybe you will find pieces of it to carry with you
Little seeds you can tuck away in your pocket
And sprinkle them on your path

by Maxine Pollock (Grade Ten)

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Mill Bay, British Columbia

FIRST PRIZE

Sea (Sick)

You were the proudest captain of a thousand mighty seas
One day fighting with the waves
Another teasing early tides
Back when I was just this tall
With no idea of your demise at all

Your limping leg I saw as wooden
And your smile was a little crooked
Every wrinkle: a crevasse to me
But your sailor I swore to be

Then came the day when the waves
Which once tickled the hull
Rose from ill-tempered waters and broke on the deck
Into vengeful currents that came for your neck

I saw you feel helpless and mighty no more
Your wooden leg bound to the floor
The proudest captain could not handle
Watching the waves and crewmen battle

But how could you forget how to read the stars?
The salty water wiped your sky clean, bit by bit
Until you forgot their names and the places in your heart which they lit

I was one of those twinkles in the dark
So out of ago, against time
I'm sorry I tried to forget your name before you could forget mine

Dear old Captain, retired
In some cold, dry bed you now lie, tired
With no memory of the sea
Nor Grandma, Mom, or me

If I pull the anchor, raise the sails
You just take my hand and grab the rails
You'll see: you're still the proudest captain the seas have yet to see
It's yours, just let it rock you for eternity

by Marie Francoeur (Grade Eleven)
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FIRST PRIZE

Moving Boxes

I am haunted by the ghosts of
The skeletons in my closet,
Of how happy we would, could, should have been.

In another one of the infinite universes,
We are allowed to be happy without conditions.
I don't lose four people to you,
And you don't break my heart
With the force of a nuclear bomb that
Tears apart my rib cage and
Shatters my heart into pieces.

In some version of us,
I am worth more than a handful
Of ill-remembered days and unfulfilled premonitions,
And I don't have to wonder what
You meant when you said,
"Goodbye."

In a version of events where the skeletons are buried in the yard,
There is no knowing in my bones,
There is no gnawing at my bones
By the ghost of almost-loves and
Half-present, missed opportunities.

So, our hometowns never leave us.
They inscribe themselves onto the bones, the flesh,
The part of me that will always love the golden nostalgia
Of days we can never get back
That are now dust-wrought skeletons in the
Parts of my childhood room with the shadows of monsters.

I am screaming at the glass for your ghost to leave me alone
And wondering how much the fee is to carry
The moth-eaten skeletons in my closet away from this town.

by Heather Law (Grade Twelve)
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Fort Nelson, British Columbia

SECOND PRIZE

The Point

Hanging from a tree, a swing creaks and sways,
just a simple piece of plywood that hints of better days.

Perched atop a cliff, above a restless Alta Lake,
the power of nature comes to light, both sleeping and awake.

Rushing through the boughs, the wind howls a tune,
both mournful and full of beauty, like wolves to a full moon.

The chirping of the birds, the skittering of the squirrels.
As beast and bird arise from slumber, melodious cacophony unfurls.

I feel the dew-soaked ground *squish, squish, squish* beneath my feet,
still cold and bitter, before the sun's scorching heat.

The morning breeze ruffles my hair,
brisk and sharp, little pinpricks suspended in air.

The smells of the earth waft into my nose;
the scent of the trees, sweet like a rose.

The earthy scents of mushrooms are there,
a party of smells, both foul and fair.

A stunning place of serenity,
there aren't many places I'd rather be.

Me and my dog's destination on the trek that begins our day,
where woes leave my body, and a peaceful bliss comes my way.

by Samuel Baker (Grade Nine)
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Whistler, British Columbia

SECOND PRIZE

Guilt Has Found Its Home Here

I am a rotting shed in a backyard of disgust, nails poking out and roof caving in, someone no one would even dare to look at sometimes. Instead of all this, I am trying to welcome in the feeling of forgiveness, and yet still, guilt has found its home here.

If memories are supposed to be my light, then why is everything still so dark? Why can't I see past my palms? I cannot be the only one unable to find a light switch, right? Light only shines on the parts of my past I refuse to call my own, and yet still, guilt has found its home here.

I bet the thrown-out bedsheets are still soaked in tormented comfort from nights I want to forget. I burned the clothes that watched. A newly painted bedroom became a crime scene in a week, and yet still, guilt has found its home here.

I am home for something, something I'd like to get rid of. Home for the words I'd wish she didn't say and the words I wished I did. Not even just words. Trauma isn't comforting to have waiting outside on the couch, and yet still, guilt has found its home here.

I am my own disappointment. I am disappointed in myself for speaking so freely about it sometimes. I am disappointed in myself for saying anything. No matter how long it took me, it should've stayed in my basement, in my bedroom, on my bed. I know that I am not supposed to be at fault, and yet still, guilt has found its home here.

I am not supposed to be what she has done to me, but everything I write I am only a faucet of a victim. An overflowing sink, a clogged shower drain, a forgotten bath. I never wanted to drip off this much wrong, staining what was once gorgeous. And yet still, guilt has found its home here.

Please remember that I wasn't always a memory. I wasn't always flashbacks of hungry eyes and aggressive hands. Spoiled movie nights and guilt trips. But I now seem to be only that. And yet still, guilt has found its home here.

by Jayson Kyliuk (Grade Ten)
Central Memorial High School
Calgary, Alberta

SECOND PRIZE

the coronavirus is not the chinese virus

i am at walmart when i see them
salivating at the mouths and thrusting barbed insults into malleable flesh,
casually blending racial slurs with offhand remarks
about bat eaters.

i seize a glass jar of gherkins as the sour claims of us being filthy
begin to surface, floating on a pond of insults
more potent than pickle brine.

i want to twirl in the chip section and let threads of houndstooth whirl
among non-stick pans and shiny cookware sets
until some form of dark sorcery
metamorphoses their comments into a cloud of powdered sugar.

instead, i press folded bills
into the hands of a fluorescent worker and say nothing.

the silence stabs at me pointedly like the bite of a horsefly.

hearing them talk about “barbaric asians”
makes me want to compose with my jar of organic tomato sauce
into a small pile of loam.

the raw feeling only stops when the citrus sun deserts me
and the pinpricks of unease cease when the sky is black
as if smeared with thick tar.

the anger is last.

it does not subside until the sliver of waning crescent moon
abandons me.

by Aileen Luo (Grade Eleven)
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Richmond Hill, Ontario

SECOND PRIZE

Love Song for Sassoon

I sat with Sassoon in a poppy field while he told me 'bout a man he'd loved—
Was a quiet day; I was lazy with sun and mud.
Kept my mouth shut when he said they've got us bleeding for no good reason;
Should've told him hush, prob'ly,
Should've said they'd call it treason.
I am drenched in grey shirt, grey sky, grey pants:
I picture him
In white rooms in neat robes in a trance.
He will spend his days with men who've bitten off their tongues,
Men with gauze bodies,
Men with half lungs.
Maybe he'll meet another poet while he's there;
They can read each other manifestos
And breathe the country air.
When I think of him, I wonder if it's how my mother felt
When I told her I'd enlisted:
Hero in a Sam Browne belt,
Fool who could've resisted.
The world was black and white when I could see in terms of enemies,
But Sassoon says our leaders are killing us,
And Sassoon is a friend to me.
I may bleed out before I see my friend again,
I may lose my mind.
I hate him for abandoning me,
And I love him mad blind—
I curse his name when I fall asleep,
But I don't think he minds.
He's got his poetry
And his excuses for leaving me.
I've got my responsibility
To the young men he left behind.

by Eva Rachert (Grade Twelve)
St. Margaret's School
Victoria, British Columbia

THIRD PRIZE

The North Wind

Water is deep, the sky is high
Not sure whether to dive or fly
Stuck in the middle without any ground
Looking for a home but have nowhere to land

Feeling belonged after years of searching
But just as I settled, I had to let go
Walked through the mountains, drove down the blocks
But I'm back here again, the circle won't stop
The wind goes east to west, north to south
Stars appear, but the night is blank

Fallen leaves in mid-July
Not knowing how to say goodbye
Unknown faces in a big crowd
No one I know seems to be around

Feeling nostalgic in every new place
Rain falling down like weeping willows
There are no cages, but I feel stuck
A long-forgotten doll, longing to belong
Moon and sun, sunset to sunrise
Eclipse taking away my daylight

My bags have been packed
Memories piled up like haystacks
Homesick for a home that wasn't mine
But they won't forget me, those waterfalls

They say no one is to be trusted
But they're the ones leaving
My hopes won't evaporate
While sailing into the wind

Through the fires, I will find me
My heart is now my compass

by Aylin Kohan (Grade Nine)
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THIRD PRIZE

The Ballad of COVID-19

The world braces itself as impacts begin to show
I wake with a yawn and flop out of bed
Panic spreads like wildfire, but we must go with the flow
I put on my slippers and scratch my head

Lights shut off as restaurants take a hit
I munch on my stale cereal as I read the box
Piercing sirens, flashing lights, one too many hospital admits
I wash my hands and glance at the clock

Fans quaking in rage as sports shut down
I hurry to the TV—can't miss my ten o'clock soaps
Adventures ruined as travels earn a frown
I pet my dog with gentle strokes

Citizens are appalled when they are told to stay inside
I tidy up the house even though no one comes here
Overloaded with uncertainty, but they must abide
My dog trots up, and I scratch her ear

Schools are closing, everyone is affected
Sharp barks come from my dog as the mailman knocks
Frustrated shoppers, no toilet paper to be collected
I look at the ticking clock and realize it's time for our walk

The economy is dented as jobs are lost
Strolling down the street, I wave to my neighbour
So much money the pandemic has cost
Walking with my dog is hardly a labour

We must prepare for the unexpected
We come back from our routine stroll
There's no guarantee you won't be affected
I sit down for lunch and fill my bowl

What will happen next there is no way to know
I think about the past months that were much like this day
Our only hope is that from this we will grow
So much sameness can come out of change—life's funny that way

by Maya Longauer (Grade Ten)
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Richmond, British Columbia

THIRD PRIZE

I Never Said Goodbye

His smile was the glowing sunrise that greeted him every morning as he woke—
His eyes were as rich and soft as the earth's soil.
His laughter was so contagious and pure—
So childlike, despite his senior years.

Encompassed by an onerous profession,
He supported his ailing partner through laborious duties,
And his visits to his grandchildren's games and recitals made their eyes twinkle with happiness.
He found time for the ones he loved and wholeheartedly answered their every beckon.

And yet, like a thunderbolt coming from a clear blue sky, his affliction arose unexpectedly.
Despite quitting, the strain from his years of smoking crept up on him;
His diagnosis had stolen the lively man he once was,
Leaving him sun-starved and incapacitated.

According to his daughter, his past was a portrait lacking colour and clear lines—
His memory faded like the dying light of the afternoon.
The sombre surface of sickness suppressed his sterling sophistication—
He resembled a ghost and behaved accordingly.

His white, cold, and vacant exterior was like the walls of his very own hospital room.
The powder blue and ill-fitted polka-dotted garment
Left his back ignominiously exposed and replaced his usual, eloquent attire.
His heavy and red-rimmed eyes failed to focus on his melancholic visitors.

In his final days, I spent my time euphorically
When I should have been paying a visit to him.
Immersed and involved in insignificant incidents—
If only I could have seen him one last time.

Oh, Papa, you have all of my heart!
My love for you is as deep and clear as the Pacific.
The thick gold ring fastened to the sterling silver chain
Around my brother's neck reminds me of you each day.

But reminiscing isn't enough.
I should have been there, and I—
I should have been by your side. I am truly sorry,
I never said goodbye.

by Kayla Hall (Grade Eleven)
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THIRD PRIZE

If I Should Have a Daughter

If I should have a daughter, what kind of world will she live in?
I cannot help but wonder what type of life she'll be given.

Will she climb the highest branches and reach towards the sky?
Or will she stumble over tree stumps, their roots bled dry?

Will she look up at the sky, catch snowflakes on her tongue?
Or will ash rain down, poisoning her lungs?

Will she be woken by birdsong and fall asleep as crickets chirp?
Or will the humming of machines cause the sound of nature to be usurped?

Will she look out her window, make a wish upon a star?
Or will the moon's glow be disrupted by a smoky scar?

Will her beauty be reflected by water's rippling waves?
Or will its depths be murky, its shallows full of waste?

Will a smile light up her face as she runs, laughs, and plays?
Or will the fields be overrun by concrete and decay?

Will she be free and happy, independent and strong?
Or will she be faced with the horrors of the world we wronged?

I cannot help but think, with worry and with scorn,
That her childhood has been taken from her before she has been born.

by Jessica Borean (Grade Twelve)
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