

## Open Competition First Prize

“The Beautiful World of Imagination”

By Robyn Stronge



## The Beautiful World of Imagination

The first time I ever went to the theatre I wore my favourite red corduroy skirt and the necklace my grandmother brought back from Thailand for me. Whenever someone commented on my necklace, or even if they didn't, I would love to tell them that it was from Thailand. Somehow the foreignness of the object made it seem much more precious and much more interesting. I carried a purse because all ladies carry purses even though I had no idea of what you were to put in it. I scoured my room the afternoon before the play looking for useful objects to put in it. I didn't have any makeup, car keys, or a wallet, so I put a Nancy Drew novel and a tube of chapstick in mine. You couldn't just carry around an empty purse. There was no point in that.

It was December and it was very cold. However, I hardly noticed it. I was too busy looking at the twinkling lights, the shop windows filled with Christmas decorations, and the beautiful people who go to see Christmas plays. They looked so elegant and happy in their long coats and elaborate updos. I wanted to be like them. I wanted to go out for fancy dinners and wear expensive clothes made of silk. I was too young to feel like an imposter in their world that night. I was just excited to join them. If only for a little while, I was elated at the prospect of being part of their world.

As someone who was forced to pound out scales and something resembling music on an out of tune piano every day, my grandparents thought I would enjoy seeing a musical. I felt honoured. My brother played the piano too, but he wasn't asked to go to a play. They just asked me. I thought it must be because I was so mature. It was probably because I was so quiet and could sit through a dinner with a group of seniors without speaking unless spoken to.

I remember the minutes before the play lasted forever. It felt like Christmas morning: the prospect of what was to come was overwhelming. Everyone else was just taking too long

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getting ready. I was too excited to read my book and almost resorted to jumping up and down in my seat. I looked around and ran my clammy hands along my skirt smoothing the fabric. I saw no one was nearly as excited as I was. The dissonant sounds of the orchestra tuning could be heard over the quiet rumble of the theatregoers making polite conversation about the weather and their winter vacations. If I listened closely, I could drown out the voices and hear a few bars of a Christmas carol from one of the members in the string section. The sound of the lone violin struggling to be heard amidst the other instruments distracted me as I waited for the play to begin. I tried my best to polite and cultured, so I followed the example of the other ladies in the theatre and tried to read my program in demure silence. I saw one lady, her hair in perfect curls surrounding her made-up face re-apply her lipstick. Her long fingers with bright red nails were wrapped around a compact mirror. I pulled out my tube of chapstick and tried to mimic her movements.

The lights finally dimmed and the curtain raised. There was a sense of magic in seeing a story brought to life right before my eyes. The music from the invisible orchestra floating somewhere near the stage was perfectly in time and in tune. It accompanied the high clear voices of the actors as they belted out their songs and danced in time to the music. Only afterwards did I find out that the musicians sat in a pit. I felt bad for them. Wouldn't they want to see what the actors were doing? I watched as the male lead danced with his female partner and swung her around as if she weighed nothing. In my eyes they were so clearly in love. I didn't want to know if they hated each other off stage or that they weren't actually a couple. The thought never even crossed my mind as I watched them. They looked so beautiful and graceful, much like their audience. Everything they did was perfect: they didn't trip, they didn't stumble over their words, and their whole attitude was saturated with a sense of hope. They were

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convinced that everything would turn out alright in the end. Despite the misunderstanding and jealous ex-lover I knew they would have an amazing Christmas and a happily ever after.

When the curtain closed, the lights came on, and the actors came out for their final bow, I politely clapped along with everyone else. I noticed the female lead holding the hand of her love interest and of the man trying to pull them apart: the ex-boyfriend. Then I realized in one agonizing moment that none of what I had seen was real.

My grandpa, in a moment of chivalry, helped me into my coat. My grandmother flung hers on without waiting for help. She almost hit the lady beside her if the face with her outstretched arm. I stayed close to my grandparents as we filed outside. The sky was not quite black and the stars were hidden from the glow of the city lights. It was colder now. Or perhaps I just I noticed it more now than I did before. The wind made my eyes water and through the tears, I saw the beautiful theatre-goers. Dressed in perfectly tailored clothes, their high heels clacking on the sidewalk. They swayed gracefully as they moved reminding me of the dancers in the play.

I was so entranced with the people around me I almost didn't see him. He was sitting on the cold sidewalk, wrapped in an old blanket with an old baseball cap beside him. It was turned over and there was some money in it. People barely noticed him. They simply gave him a wide berth and continued on their way. I was struck for a moment with terror and my heart seemed to stop beating as my grandmother suddenly gripped my hand. Her hands wrapped in soft leather gloves crushed mine as we scurried past. It was as if the presence of this man provided a sudden burst of energy fueled by the desire to be as far away from him as possible. I had never before seen a homeless person up close. His scraggly beard and blackened teeth shattered the images of the beauty that surrounded me.

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I don't think I could describe why I was afraid. Only to say that my irrational fear outweighed my sense of pity. What surprised me the most was that my grandmother seemed afraid too. My grandmother who seemed able to do anything she wanted. My grandmother, who frequently travelled to far away places on mission trips to help those in need, rushed passed a man sitting on a cold stone sidewalk. I felt the warm metal of necklace against my skin. The clasp scratched against my skin along the back of my neck. She had told me it was made by women who had nowhere to go. Those women were homeless, just like this man. Then I thought that maybe it wasn't that she was afraid. My grandmother wasn't afraid of anything. Maybe it was because I was there. If I hadn't gone, would she have stopped and talked to him? Would she have helped?

We never spoke of the man. We never discussed that night or the situation of homelessness that plagued the city but I never forgot seeing him there. Sitting on the sidewalk quietly wasting away as people passed him as though he were no more worth their attention than that filth. Perhaps this was life. I so wished it didn't have to be like that. I so wished that life was more like the play: the thing that wasn't real. I wanted everything to turn out perfectly in the end. I wanted that unwavering sense of hope. That play was no longer memorable now. The beauty fades in comparison to the grotesque. Perhaps all I wanted then was for that man to be a little less ugly. So he could fit into the beautiful world of my imagination.

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# Open Competition Second Prize

“Reading the Rags”

By Mikayla Trainer

## Reading The Rags

Back again. Same time every Friday. I find myself back at my town's token thrift store, run by jovial and inviting old ladies, who are all only a little bit too curious in their customers' personal lives. In a dynamic world full of change and chaos, having constant, routine rituals like this brings me a sense of security. The same old and cheaply constructed building opens its doors to me for the brief hours it's open. I gladly oblige, entering with the same curiosity that tickles at me sheepishly every week. The same sour scent of aged fabrics lets itself into my nostrils, and a nostalgic smile emerges from my lips. I nod at Mary, the old lady at the cash register with tiny, wired spectacles. She straightens her glasses, squinting at me closer, and smiles.

"Welcome back, love. We have a whole new haul of treasures for you to sift through. This dress here would look lovely on you! Perfect for your frame.", she greets me, gesturing to a gaudy, sequined dress that hangs on display. I swallow down a grimace that tries to form; I don't want to hurt her feelings.

"Ah, nice!", I exclaim half-heartedly, and continue on into the store anxiously. I let out a long held breath from the awkward interaction as I arrive at a rack of men's shirts. I begin my search for a gem. I place my hand on the first shirt that catches my eye: an olive green golf shirt with light yellow stripes. As my fingers run across the scratchy, lightly tattered fabric, a series of images play through my mind.

*An elderly man stands poised with a slim and thin golf club that glistens in the early rising sun. The grass that blankets around him wears a shade of green that would make his green shirt jealous. A couple of other early morning golfers are sprinkled around the field. Everyone on their own, but all collectively indulging in the king's game. He places his hand to his forehead, focusing in on the hole. He notices it is quite a ways away, and he exhales in preparation for this difficult yet exhilarating task. He takes a couple of thoughtful steps in place, adjusting his position. He places his club's head gingerly next to the unbeknownst golf ball. He gradually swings his arms back, building up the tautness and anticipation. Then, in one grand and smooth gesture, his club collapses into the little egg, sending it soaring across the field. He takes a couple of excited steps forward, his eyes following the ball's trajectory. It flies gracefully through the sky, and as it begins to fall, the man's eyes widen. A little satisfying 'clink' is heard*

as the ball lands perfectly in the hole. Childlike excitement bursts from this man with an elated cry. Other golf-goers nearby notice his achievement, and they cheer and clap him on. He blissfully trots over to the hole, wearing a dignified smile. He gives off an air of pure delight eminent from him. He delicately picks up his successful ball, inspecting it closely for a moment. He is well aware of the golfers around him who watch him closely, so he makes each of his gestures seem purposeful and eloquent.

“Nice shot Ronald!”, a fellow golfsman compliments him.

Ronald nods thankfully at him, tipping his baseball cap. As he walks back to fetch his club, another golfer yells out to him.

“Hey buddy, what’s your secret?”, he inquires.

Ronald smiles unsurely at first, glancing down. He takes note of his striped green shirt. He scrunches it up in his hands and replies.

“It’s my lucky shirt!”

I smile warmly.

“This is one lucky shirt.”, I mumble to myself.

I take the shirt off the rack, inspecting it closer, now with a new appreciation. I place it over my arm, nodding to myself that I have found my first purchase. I continue on, travelling into another aisle. It is teeming with bright summer dresses. My eyes scan over the load of bright and garish dresses, until a more muted dress makes itself apparent. I take hold of it’s silky fabric. It is a soft and quiet yellow colour, complete with a sweetheart neckline and long, sweeping sleeves. I hold up each sleeve in each of my hands delicately, and a tasteful movie plays in my head.

A young lady walks towards a set of grand, ornate gates. She pulls anxiously at her sleeves, covering her tiny, clammy hands. She picks up on light, chipper chit chat from the backyard. She leans comically far to try and peer in, but nearly trips on the fabric of her dress that dangles on the ground. She stumbles as the front door opens. She notices the sound of the door closing and collects herself. She adjusts the neckline of her shirt neurotically. A figure appears in front of her on the other side of the gate. While skewed by the design of the gate, their perfectly sculpted face still manages to take her off guard. They cock their head in amused confusion at her.

“Um, who are you?”, the woman says in a voice of velvet.

She straightens her posture to match that of the fancy woman.



*"I'm Elaine! I'm here for the uh, cocktail party?", she states, unsurely. It takes the woman a moment of raking through her mind before recognition pops into her eyes.*

*"Ah, Elaine! Harold's acquaintance, yes? Do come in, everyone is already out on the patio in the back. Feel free to snack on some hor d'oeuvres while dinner cooks.", she gabs, opening the gate with elegance.*

*Elaine enters, clutching at her handbag as she admires the sumptuous decorations that are displayed on the front deck. Elaine thinks to herself how the decorations that cover the front deck collectively cost more than her entire house. She quickly scans the woman's outfit. She displays a shocking white cocktail dress that is embellished with gems around the waist. She also sports matching white heels with gems that cover the entirety of the shoe's surface. Elaine slinks inwards; her dress looks like rags in comparison to hers. Suddenly the women takes a turn to the right, towards the back patio. A part of Elaine wishes they had entered through the front; she could have marveled at the richly goods inside. She finds herself in a backyard patio, teeming with elite people, all buzzing around eagerly. A large, ovalar pool of crystal water holds a handful of partygoers, who all lay calm and composed in blow-up tubes. Elaine turns round to find the women who lead her in has run off, and she feels a wave of anxiety swell through her. She stands nervously on her lonesome for a couple of minutes before one of the other party attendees addresses her.*

*"That is a lovely dress, miss!", a man in a pinstriped suit yells to her.*

*Elaine is taken aback; she looks around behind her to ensure it was indeed her the man was speaking to. He chuckles at her bewilderment.*

*"Yes, I was talking to you! That is a gorgeous colour on you!", he points out, walking over to Elaine.*

*He takes her arm, inspecting the fabric closely.*

*"And what gorgeous fabric! So darling.", he compliments.*

*Elaine wears a sheepish smile over a reddening face.*

*"Oh, thank you! It used to be my grandmother's.", Elaine explains.*

*The man's face lightens up.*

*"So it's vintage! Wow, this is quite a gem.", he gawks in awe of her dress.*

*Suddenly more and more partygoers file towards Elaine to compliment her dress. Light banter blossoms amongst the newly formed group, and Elaine smiles softly to herself.*

I hold the dress up to my frame, swaying softly left and right as if I am also a fancy partygoer. I decide I can't let this beautiful heirloom go to waste, and I sling it over my arm. I religiously sift through the other various bits of clothing, but nothing catches my eyes until I reach the aisle of shoes. The aisle is mostly made up of tacky and tattered running shoes, but a pair of bright orange rain boots capture my attention. They appear too flashy at first glance, but upon further inspection the orange colour seems more of a charming burnt orange. They are a little worn and display a couple of scratches that indicate they were once well loved. I squat down and place my hands at the toe end of the boots, and I am taken away.

*"Reuben! No playing outside today! It's pouring out there; you'll track in mud.",*  
*Reuben's mother calls from upstairs in her room.*

*Reuben stands by the front door, on his tippy toes peering outside at the show of rain. He slumps down, wearing a pouty face as his mom calls to him.*

*"Okay mommy", he sighs, leaving the door and waddling up the stairs. He plops his bottom down on the couch, gazing out the window longingly. The light pitter patter of raindrops plays like music in his ears. The cool colour palette of the outdoors simultaneously calms and excites him. The sun peeks out from behind a mass of clouds, and causes a soft light to refract from water droplets to his little oculars. The rhythmic beat of the rain falling matches Reuben's rising heartbeat, and he jumps up from the couch in a burst. He can't sit here any longer, ignoring the beckoning of mother earth. He tip toes gently on the sides of the stairs to keep them from squeaking. He sits himself down on the floor, gently picking up his brand new orange rain boots and gingerly placing his feet in them. He wiggles his toes contently; he is elated to take his new kicks for a joyride. He stands to the door, reaching up to grab hold of the doorknob. Using both hands, he muffles the sound of the knob creakily turning. A louder than expected creak makes itself present, and Reuben freezes. He notices the sound of his mother's footsteps, and prepares himself to bolt. Suddenly, he hears the sound of the bathroom light flicking on, and the door closing shut. He quickly cracks the door open as little as possible, and slips out without another sound.*

*Reuben stands at the doorstep, admiring the sparkling puddles and blurry raindrops triumphantly. A little smile blossoms on his face, and quickly morphs into a big grin. The fresh smell of new earth shimmies into his nostrils, and like a dog following the*

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smell of meat, he follows the aroma out from the dry safety of the doorstep into the inviting storm. The rain doesn't hesitate to drench his crusty shirt and form his hair into noodles that stick to his forehead. Salty beads of sweat from adrenaline mix with the fresh coolness of rain driplets along his arms and legs. Reuben looks down at his bright orange boots, taking note of how much they contrast the colour scheme of his new environment. He smirks, deciding to do his best to make his boots fit in with the wet and mucky outdoors. He spots a tempting puddle, which appears to be an appropriate depth to cause a satisfying splash. He takes a running start, hops, and collapses his new booties into the mucky water. It sprays everywhere, coating his boots in a later of grime. He giggles in satisfaction, and quickly yearns for another puddle. He finds an even more sizely pool of raindrops and skips directly from one to the others, bespattering everywhere. He laughs loudly, trotting from puddle to puddle happily. After approximately ten measley minutes, Reuben takes notice of the front door swinging open and his mother's voice booming.

*"Reuben! What did I say? Get back in here, now!"*, she yells.

Reuben scurries up the driveway, still riding the adrenaline high of hopping around in the rain. He smiles sheepishly at his mother, who grimaces at his boots.

*"Oh, look what you've done! You're ruining your new boots!"*, she exclaims in annoyance.

Reuben rolls his eyes with a giggle, kicking off his boots. His mother eyes him in disdain. He exhales, picking them up, wiping them off with his sleeves, and placing them back in their original spot.

*"They're not ruined, mommy. I made them better!"*

I giggle to myself, picking up the pair. They're a lot more well kept then I would've expected from a young boy. I place them beside my feet; they are clearly too small. I take them with me anyways. I make my way back to the front, placing my chosen items on the counter. Mary snorts at my finds.

"These are... lovely dear. But they're a little odd, don't you think? Wouldn't you rather that sequined dress?", she states, pointing out the garish dress again. I chuckle.

"They are a little strange, yeah. But I like them.", I respond, purposefully ignoring the dress.

"Why, dear? What's so special about a dress, a golf shirt, and children's boots?", she questions while bagging the items.

I smile to myself.

"They've been loved dearly, and I think that's what gives them their value.", I respond simply.

She looks a little confused at my response, but nods knowingly anyways.

"I wonder how you could know that.", she says, mostly to herself, while handing me the bag.

I hand her the required change and head for the door. As I leave, I am left alone with my own thoughts, no longer anyone else's. The pursuit of visiting this place may be constant and routine, but the things I find are ever changing. There may be a lot of trash that ends up here, but the few treasures that hide make all the sifting and sorting worthwhile. Someday, I'll donate my dearest finds back to this place, and, maybe, some unsuspecting soul will hear its story.

## Open Competition Third Prize

“Bend in the River”

By Frances Cole

*THE BEND IN THE RIVER*

Mid April. Spring is taking it's time. There is still a good deal of snow on the ground. Last night was cold but by this afternoon there will be warmth in the sun.

I made myself another cup of tea and took two biscuits out of the bag. Not my usual breakfast. I'm allowing myself a few days of indulgence – eat what I want, when I want.

I think about Joe for a moment. He'll be on his way to work. I wonder if he slept last night. I need to get past the guilt. I didn't give him much warning. I had spent a couple of weeks slowly moving only what I needed so he wouldn't notice anything missing. Luckily, the house is only about forty-five minutes away so it was easy enough to nip up and back before he got home from work. I told him last night that I was moving to Mum's house – alone. I know he didn't understand. So, I left. As I drove away, I wondered if he was sad or if he was angry. I'm not sure which I would have preferred.

This wasn't a frivolous decision. Mum has been gone since September and when my sister told me in the Winter that I could have the house, I had thought maybe it would serve as a weekend getaway. My sister was well married, as they say, and had no interest in the house. She didn't need money and, since I was the one who had taken care of it after Mum died, my sister thought it only fitting that I should have it. I'd like to say it was a generous act but the truth is and lucky for me, she couldn't be bothered with the task of selling it.

I had gone up quite a few times in the Winter to make sure everything was in order, clear a path through the snow, make sure the roof was okay. The neighbours had been doing their best to keep an eye on things, checking that the heat was on and the pipes weren't frozen, but they were getting on in age and had their own property to take care of.

Joe had visited Mum with me on occasion but he had not been to the house since she died.

During my visits in the Winter I started to feel at home. Peaceful. Calm. I was spending more hours each time I came but I never spent the night. One day I decided – I was going to live in my Mother's old house. I was going to fix it up and make it my own.

It was going to mean leaving my job, which was not a big deal, and leaving Joe, which was although it never occurred to me to ask him to come along. The small inheritance Mum had left would keep me going for a while, along with the bit of savings I had of my own. I wasn't unhappy with Joe. I just needed to have some time to myself for a while. I thought about it long and hard and then decided that I would be selfish and move after the Winter.

I haven't lived alone since Joe and I moved in together eight years ago. We had already dated for a couple of years and, looking back, I think even then we had become a bit of a habit. Moving in was his idea and I went along with

it, even though I was quite content living by myself and seeing him a couple of times a week and almost every weekend.

His apartment was larger than mine so it made sense to move in there. I put most of my belongings into storage and took only what I needed and what would fit. His furniture wasn't bad. Not my particular taste but I could live with it.

I was glad I was moving in with him and not the other way around.

Mum's furnishings had seen better days. The place had the musty smell of old age. I opened all the windows and let in the cool air. I took down all her lacy curtains and threw them into the washing machine. Then I went through the kitchen cupboards and discarded anything I knew I wouldn't use. I had eliminated most of the food items soon after she died. It doesn't take long for the wildlife to figure out where a free meal is coming from.

I stripped the beds and vacuumed the mattresses. There were sheets in the linen cupboard but they didn't smell any fresher than the ones I had taken off so I started doing laundry. By the end of the day all the linens were clean, the beds newly made, the curtains rehung. While the laundry was taking care of itself, I had wrapped a rag around the broom and swept all the cobwebs from the ceilings and corners, from the tops of the curtain rails, from around the kitchen cupboards. I had mopped the floors with Mr. Clean.

By dinner time, I was proud of myself, I was exhausted and I was happy.



I had stopped at the small grocers on my way up the night before. They don't stay open late the way they do in the city and I was lucky to get there in time. It's an ancient place and the locals still refer to it as the general store. It's well stocked and I picked up some fruits and vegetables and a couple of frozen chicken breasts, along with the basics – milk, bread, eggs, butter and a large bottle of water. The water in the well is fine for cooking but I'm not brave enough to drink it, although Mum did. I had plenty to keep me going for most of the week. And I treated myself to the bag of chocolate chip cookies.

I made a stir fry of chicken and vegetables and opened the bottle of wine I had brought up with me. I deserved a glass after my productive day. I sat at the kitchen table with my dinner, my wine and a magazine and two cookies for dessert. It might very well be the best meal I've ever had.

By nine o'clock, I was ready to sleep and sleep I did. Until almost nine the next morning. I woke up feeling exhilarated and ready to tackle a new project. The stress and guilt of the past couple of days had wafted off somewhere.

The house sits on an acre and a half located on a bend in a river. A small marsh lies behind the house off to the side and in the Spring, it is filled with frogs and turtles. In the evening, the frogs sing as pretty as the birds do in the morning. A road runs along the opposite side of the river with a sideroad that forms a bridge across the river and then continues on behind the house.

The kitchen is at the front of the house and faces towards the river and the road on the other side. Technically, this is the back of the house but it has been re-arranged over the years so that you enter the house through the porch and into the kitchen. The actual front door is rarely used.

Cars on the road across the river can be seen from the kitchen or the porch.

The house is one story with two bedrooms, a large kitchen which also houses the laundry facilities, a living room and bathroom. A few years ago, I had helped Mum find a handy man to take out the bath and install a walk-in shower. We put a little stool in there so she could sit while she bathed. She would let the neighbour know when she was preparing to do this and again when she was done. There is a basement but it is old and, while not particularly damp, it is dark and musty and not a place where I like to spend any length of time. It houses the propane furnace and the pump room as well as a cold cellar where vegetables can be stored over the winter and that is the only reason I venture down there.

A storage shed on the property houses gardening equipment and furniture.

The porch is attached to the house like a lean-to. It is wooden and enclosed on the bottom half only on three sides with the top half covered with screens and canvas sheets that can be rolled down to keep out rain and give a bit of protection on chilly days. There is a screen door on the fourth side that leads out to the path to the garden areas and the driveway. The room is in a sheltered area with lots of trees which give it a good bit of protection

against wind and snow. That's the only reason it is still standing but it is definitely not winter friendly.

I made myself a fried egg and some toast and a cup of tea and thought about what to do next. Joe hadn't called and I was grateful for that. I didn't feel like trying to justify myself or to make him understand what had just happened. I wasn't sure myself. All I knew right now was that I had done the right thing and I felt good about it.

It was too early in the season to do anything outside so I walked through the house and made a list of what needed to be taken care of. Most of it would have to be painted. The house was old style with doors on each room and each room was a different bright colour. I pictured the whole place in a nice soft cream. Boring I know but I find it calming. Joe's apartment was painted in browns when I moved in and after much discussion, he allowed me to paint it a light taupe – a compromise between his dark and the lighter tone I would have preferred. Even he was amazed by how much brighter the place looked afterwards.

I would have to get rid of Mum's old furniture and bring mine out of storage. There was little of sentimental value in the house. Mum had brought her furniture with her from the city and she had never been one to decorate in any particular style, not even eclectic.

I started to arrange in my mind how I would do this. Joe had a truck but I could hardly ask him to help or even lend me the truck and I wouldn't be able to lift most of the items by myself anyway. After some research, I found a

couple of men with a van who were willing to drive outside of the city for a reasonable sum. I met them at the storage unit and, after they had everything loaded, I gave them the address and followed them to the house.

Our agreement was that they would unload my furniture and then take the furniture from the house which, with much grunting and groaning, I had piled into the living room. I had decided to keep the beds since they weren't in bad shape. A coat of paint on the headboards would make a world of difference.

The area rugs and the hallway runner had been chucked with the rest of Mum's stuff. I admit to a silent apology when I watched the men load her things into the van. I paid them and offered them a cup of tea or coffee but they were anxious to get on with their day.

After they left, I walked back into the house. Everything was in the living room. They had asked me if I wanted things put in different rooms but, quite frankly, for what they were charging me, I didn't feel right asking them to do any more than they already had. I had hauled the old stuff into the living room by myself and I was sure I could arrange my pieces as well. I was actually looking forward to it.

By the end of June, I had painted the inside of the house, arranged the furniture and put carpets down. Pictures were hung and books and knick knacks were pleasantly arranged. I had also started working on the vegetable garden which Mum had a local fellow dig for her when she first moved in. She had tended it every year and produced enough to keep her in

preserves and root vegetables for the winter months. Although I had helped her on many occasions, I knew I wouldn't be able to match her output but I had to start somewhere.

There were also a few flower beds which I knew a bit more about and I spent most of the Summer outside working in the yard and enjoying it. I began to notice things about the outside of the house that would need tending in the not too distant future. I was bent and determined to keep things in good order both for myself and for Mum. This place had been her pride and joy.

In the mornings, before it was too warm, I would take a walk either down the road behind the house or along the river. This second path took me through other people's property but no one minded as long as you were respectful. I was amazed at the array of wild flowers along both the road and the river. Every week a new one popped up, yellow, white, pink, blue and purple. They made me happy.

Except for the occasional outdoor visit with my neighbours or a wave to someone while on one of my walks, I had spent the summer alone. I would like to say I took this time to do some soul searching but, the truth is, I just kept busy and didn't allow myself to think too deeply about anything.

I was feeling better, both physically and emotionally, than I had in a very long time. I decided to drop a short note to Joe thanking him for allowing me this time and hoping he wasn't too angry with me. I guess I was expecting a reply of some sort or maybe a call but nothing came. I had made my bed as my mother would have said.

By late September, I had harvested a good deal of my garden, pickled my beans and beets with the help of some on-line videos, had made sure the propane tank was full and prepared myself mentally for the long winter ahead.

I decided to do some baking and freeze it so I would have something to snack on when the mood struck. Four loaves of banana bread, all different, and two batches of cookies later, I realized I was in the mood to cook and put together a vegetable lasagna, a shepherd's pie and a basic spaghetti sauce. I put them all into containers and popped most of them into the freezer, keeping a few servings out for the coming week.

I would need to make a trip into town to pick up chicken and fish to freeze. Once the snow started to fall, it wouldn't always be easy to get out and, while the general store was handy for last minute items, it was a bit too pricy to use for stocking up.

My Summer has been busy. Autumn is upon me although the days still hold a good deal of heat. I spend a lot of my afternoons sitting on the little wicker couch on the porch either reading or just watching the activity on the river. This afternoon I am doing just that when I see a truck drive along the road on the other side. My heart skips a little. I watch as the vehicle turns onto the sideroad and crosses the bridge. I don't get up. Instead, I wait for the sound of the tires on the gravel driveway, the thud of the vehicle door closing, the footsteps heading towards the porch. The screen door opens and there is Joe. I smile. Well, it was probably more of a grimace since I'm

not sure what to expect. My heart is pounding. Joe smiles back and sits down beside me. He puts his arm around my shoulder and gives me a little squeeze. When I look at him, he kisses me on the forehead and we sit together in silence watching the river flow by.

# Open Competition Honorable Mention

“Lost Love”

By Joy Murray



## LOST LOVE

In the land of the blazing sun  
two young lovers meet  
by the winding river  
that flows from  
the Himalayan Mountains.  
In the shade of an Indian Rosewood tree  
they snuggle, holding hands.  
...Content...

Corporal Stuart,  
the tall, handsome soldier  
smitten with the  
East Indian woman,  
outpouring his love  
drops to his knee.  
“Marry me, my love.  
I’ll happily stay in India.”  
With twinkling dark eyes,  
she accepts.

“When do I get to meet your family, Sanja?”  
“Let’s not talk about family now,” she sighs.  
“I’m so happy.”  
Laughing, she jumps up,  
encouraging him to dance with her.  
“This is my country’s dance,  
The Bhangra”  
she whispers, swirling about.  
“I’m not a dancer.  
I have two left feet,”  
he declares.

(2)

As dust trails appear,  
signalling a storm brewing,  
sadly they part.  
Sanja strolls away,  
as he longingly watches  
her blue ghagra,  
gently lifted by the wind,  
with her jet-black hair  
braided down her back.  
“She’s beautiful.”  
He feels blessed.

Once home,  
Sanja excitedly tells her parents  
of the marriage proposal  
from her Scottish soldier.

Within the family, anger arises quickly.  
The father and older brothers shout  
“No evil Western allowed.

No Marriage.”  
As Sanja attempts to leave,  
her father blocks the way.  
Grabbing her arm, he states,  
“You’re going North,  
to my parent’s home.

Meanwhile, days pass.  
On leave,  
the soldier walks to the river.  
It’s spring, known as vasant,  
the rain is heavy.  
The soldier covering his head  
with the short army jacket,  
waits for Sanja.....

(3)

Later, back at the base, he  
inquires of his man-servant,

“Where is Sanja?”

Rajvi mumbles in Punjabi,  
“father has taken my sister  
north,

against her will.

He seeks death for you.”

....Devastated....

He's young,

22 years old.

His entire world  
turned up-side down,  
marriage plans squashed,  
he requests a transfer.

Next posting is Malta, 1929.

Never to return to India.

My Dad

Always, a Soldier.



# Open Competition Honorable Mention

“Hope and Heartache”

By Carolyn Campbell

N

## HOPE AND HEARTACHE

Where did you come from  
You were unexpected in my life  
You changed the world around me  
I see clearer through your eyes

Blinded by you

You found a passion in me  
I didn't know was there  
You fill me up completely  
I don't need to surface for air

Can't breathe without you

Absorbed completely by you  
Where do you end and I begin  
You'll always be able to find me  
You're in my heart and under my skin

Don't know how to be without you

There's nothing left for anyone  
I gave you all I am  
How do I stop being  
You expect more than I can

I won't survive you

Blinded by you  
Can't breathe without you  
Don't know how to be without you  
I will not survive you

# Open Competition Honorable Mention

“Ireland”

By Madison Walsh



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## A poem by Madison Walsh

In the dying of the light, the memories sleep  
In the pasture below, the bleating of sheep.  
Out in the woods, two lovers will meet  
And something tells me I'm home.

Down by the ocean, the memories sleep  
The waves crash and roll, hiding a secret so deep.  
The salt on the wind continues to creep  
And something tells me I'm home.

Out in the towns, the memories sleep  
The red-haired beauty walks on down the street  
Saying hello to every person she meets  
And something tells me I'm home.

Down in the valley, the memories sleep  
Lush green meadows, so lullingly sweet.  
Up in the sky, a magpie does cheep  
And something tells me I'm home.

In the dying of the light, the memories are sleeping  
If you're looking for beauty you need not keep seeking.  
Ireland's a memory I'll surely be keeping  
'Cause something tells me I'm home.

