

2025 Xanadu Poetry Contest Winners 🐾



Congratulations.

Poetry is a wild and powerful soldier of consciousness. Poetry has muscle and heart. It has blood and brains and conscience. Poetry is the attempt to express that which is *seemingly* inexpressible in any other way. It tries to name the unnameable. It should heal wounds and *cause* some if necessary. Poetry should wake the reader up.

You *woke* your readers up.

We had over 150 entries. So many wonderful voices. So many unique experiences. A great deal of raw honesty and reflection. I wish there was a way to meet each poet...thank each participant.

You stood out. Far out. You demonstrated soul, skill and sophistication. Thank you.

I will be in touch.

Be well,

Pip

2025 Poetry Contest Results

1st prize: Sienna Leaver: *Smaller Than A Promise*

2nd prize; Samantha Guttler: *Peculiar Decorations*

3rd prize: Katy Valle: *Humanity and Water*

Special Mentions:

Ava Hedstrom: *Sugar High*

Ella Brenner: *Daisy*

First Prize

Smaller Than A Promise

Sienna Leaver

A psychic reads my palm, tells me
I will make myself smaller than a promise,
assures me I can hit the switch,
change the tracks if I care.

But here I am anyhow, spinning beside
you. We search for faces in dirty mirrors,
rhythmic rain for answers, dandelion stems
for luck, reason in footsteps overhead
as the room circles back into focus. Our findings?
Everything tangible becomes an elegy.

So here you are—
First, testing physics, letting momentum carry you,
swapping your body for gravity. Then hollowing
out its contents, catching a wishbone
through the neck.

When I call out, every street is
knotted to touch the sky. No divine
intervention in a place like this,
not even from a palm reader.

Even so, I wait by you, a promise,
smaller and smaller.

Second prize

Peculiar Decorations

Sam Guttler

You — the worst gift I've ever received.
Never meant to be given.
How many years now have you sat there on my shelf,
in that heart-shaped cell?
Metal, etched with blue and white doves —
a poor imitation of the glimmer in your eyes.

A felt box to keep you warm,
buckled shut from the outside — as if you might try to escape.
Still, I dare not leave it open.

I hope I have been hospitable enough to you.
I held you against my chest to let you feel the cadence of my heart.
I want you to remember how it felt for it to beat.
Yours wasn't always made of steel.

What little I have left of you —
I'm scared to give to the wind.
But I wasn't taught
to be so selfish.
Once I find the courage,
I will bring you to the water.

Soon you will be seventy-one percent of the Earth.
Then, reabsorbed.
Shapeless, as your spirit.

Where the Sun will bounce off your many bodies —
kissing the cheeks of brave swimmers.
Poured into tiny plastic buckets,
shaped into fleeting castles,
only to dissolve again.

And when I find the courage,
everyone will experience you:
study you,
need you,
love you.
Just as I did —
just as I do.

Every time I dust your box,
I am sorry —
for not letting you go sooner.

Third Prize

Humanity and Water

Katy Valle

Humanity
Is beautiful
In the ways
Rivers sing about.
The gentle flow of water
Depicts in its chorus
Human nature,
At its finest,
A never ending ability
To love.

Humanity,
Wanting to be
The infinite ocean,
Wanting to feel
Monsoons of emotion.
There is beauty
In the water we worship,
The water
That softly cradles
Our fates.
Never forget,
You are alive;
In water
We are forever,
Beautiful.

Two Special Mentions

I

Daisy

Ella Brenner

I am grown in a greenhouse—
Designed for perfection.
My leaves are poised,
Perky petals pointed
Towards my source of light.

The florist began to change
The light, pointing it towards himself.
I turned my petals,
Feverishly photosynthesizing
From the florist's fake sun.

Suddenly he *plucked* me from the soil.
Stripped of my outer petals,
I lay naked on the botanist table.
My leaves were carefully cut,
Yet the loss was just as strong.
Slowly I was changed into a plant
Almost foreign to myself.

I wish I was a Lily of the Valley.
Wild and free—
Maybe my poison could have scared
That florist away.
But now I must sit
Plucked naked on the table,
Longing for the sunlight
Which I had grown up with once.

II

Sugar High

Ava Hedstrom

I'm not much of sweet tooth,
sugar makes me sick.

Yet, maybe your sweet taste
distorted my gums,
so the heaviness
in my molars became
my everyday.

Or was it the orange-flavored kiss
you left behind,
that made me okay with
hard candy stuck,
jammed in between
my crooked teeth.

It's normal, I told myself.
While, pieces of my enamel
turned into your meal,
letting you settle
in between my teeth.

Sugar coated and filled,
sticking to my cracked lips
infesting, rotting, staining,
slowly clawing at my nerves
eroding all the away to
the bone.

The mint toothpaste
wasn't enough
when the mirror told me,
the aches and bad breath
isn't love.

So I let my fingers
crawl into my mouth,
twisting out my decaying tooth
from the root
with a— *snap*.

The gap in my smile
left the edges of
my tongue iron sickened.
So now, your orange candy,
will never taste sweet again.