

Adult Category

Cletis Pratt

*And Samson said, Let me die with the
Philistines.*

- Judges 16:30

by Joseph Bathanti

First Place

First man I ever saw in irons, wearing nothing
but a pair of filthy white long john britches,
was Cletis Pratt, two guards, casually gripping
his upper arms, escorting him back to the population
after two weeks in single cell – same as the hole,
officially termed *Administrative Segregation*.
They had shaved his head.
He looked like Karl Marx.
He looked the wrath of Nazareth.
His big black beautiful beard was nappy and clotted
with what looked like lint, but he had gone grey in the hole,
and fat with outrage, eating thorazine and salt peter.
He'd never fooled around with weights,
had had a chiseled impossibly perfect onyx body,
where now pounded a gut and two silver dugs.
Hobbled by a short span of chain and two shackles,
another chain circling his waist to which his hands
were buckled, he couldn't quite keep up,
though the guards weren't hurrying him.
Sweating and winded, he bobbed and minced
like a dazed fighter – too exhausted to lift his heavy hands
to protect himself, to ask for mercy, to just go down –
his first day back in the gym, starting to train
again after a jolt in the penitentiary;
needles in North Charlotte;
needles on Hay Street in Fayetteville,
82nd Airborne, all the medals and insignia,
the Purple Hearts, his stunning beret.
Two tours in Vietnam.
Ten fucking lifetimes ago.

Witness

by Penny Harter

Honorable Mention

In an old story a blind boy saw it,
the flash of the first atomic bomb test over Nevada.

The storyteller said maybe he saw the radiation,
or maybe he wasn't really all the way blind.

In another story, there were pigs in little cages
placed near the explosion to see what would happen
to their skin, and as they writhed in the light
some of them began to smoke.

Maybe that smoke rose into the blind boy's eyes
until his tears rinsed his darkness downstream,
or maybe that radiant smoke spoke to the child
like a voice from the burning bush, saying,

May your eyes be opened.

Trees with No Branches/

Flowers with No Names

- for Nobuo Miyake, Takeharu Terao
and the Hibakusha

by Kathleen Hellen

Honorable Mention

One::

A finger like a bone rose out of smoke and pointed
to the sun the world went white
a thousand winds rushed in

Two::

Glass that didn't shatter melted bodies
bloated buildings shrugged
collapsing in the radiance of waves

Three::

Something in his eye besides his eye turned in
tattooed pattern of his wife
blackened husks the sleeve of skin

Four::

Heads as big as human grew in keloid cherry
blossoms stem on top
maggots hatched in wounds that wouldn't heal

Five::

Man or woman? Indistinguishable
the end beginning

Youth (13-18) Category

My Brother, the Soldier

by Megan Elliott

First Place (Tie)

Bombs go off in brains
Neurons fire imaginary explosions
To pounding eardrums
Mom slumps in the wooden kitchen chair
Elbows on the table
A glass of wine or two or three
And tears and tears and tears
He'll be gone for Christmas again
We open presents silently
Avoiding each other's eyes
And his name
Mom gets drunk
And says "Fuck the war"
Dad and I do the dishes
I walk outside in the chilling air
Tiny Christmas lights twinkle secrets at each other
They are grenades exploding in the desert
I write a letter in my head
I tell him a joke about mom
I ask him to come home
I wish him Merry Christmas
Maybe he'll be home this time next year
Hopefully he'll come home next year
He has to come home

Love's Lullaby
by Hanna Hurr
First Place (Tie)

A mother cradles her child against her thin breast
And gazes sadly into deep shining eyes, a mirror of her own
The infant cries, wanting milk
But there is none to give
The woman has not eaten in days
And her breasts are dry as the bone-cracked land that surrounds them
She whispers into his ear

A single word

Peace

Suddenly the stars rearrange
Painting perfect patterns in the inky sky
All around the world, cities fall silent
Apologizing for their constant pandemonium
Mothers look at the sky, listen to the stars, and whisper

Vrede

Hetep

Rauha

Irini

Heiwa

Soksang

Rongo

Amani

Santiphap

Ukuthula

The word flows from mother to child
Cracked lips to soft ears
The newborns remember without understanding
Years later, as the world writhes in war
The word ricochets in the grown children's minds, and they drop their weapons
Silent, thoughtful. They turn their heads to the sky, and again, the stars sing.

Eulogy in Autumn
by Megan Mikhail
Honorable Mention

It's October here.

The leaves cling to the tree outside our window like a gossamer gown,
sewn in the brightest shades of fiery crimson and sour-apple green.

The wind tickles my nose just so, whispering your name in my ear
and filling me with a longing I cannot silence.

I miss you, little brother.

I can see you in the passing clouds, in pools of moonlight, in my own reflection.

I see the hatred too, that pulsing beast that struck you down,
carrying you beneath its fury-white wing until we were a world apart.

It's October here.

Men go on killing other men, just for the release of it.

Women go on living in the sewers like so many rats.

Many days I cannot believe that the world still turns without you.

It seems like the balance of gravity should have tipped from the hole you left behind.

Maybe one day we'll all float away, weightless and giddy from the loss.

Maybe I'll find you tucked away in a corner of space,
just waiting, whole and smiling and reading a book.

Maybe.

It's October here.

But where are you, sweet Nicholas?

Do the trees change color there,

or is it always summer like we sometimes imagined it would be?

Do you miss the snow falling in soft drifts like cotton

while we bundled up in front of the fire and sipped sweet, hot chocolate?

It's cold, but there's no snow yet.

It's October here.

Youth (12-Under) Category

In the Form of Rain

by Celeste Fox Kump

First Place

War is a fire,
anger,
fear.
It crackles,
burns,
sputters,
kills.

Its eyes
red,
angered,
wild.

Its teeth,
black,
jagged,
sharp.

They rip,
tear,
hack,
threaten.

And yet,
with all the power and menace,
peace comes,
in the form of rain.

First it sprinkles,
rains,
pours,
and slowly but surely the fires of war are put out,
and there is peace,
in the form of rain.

Oh, If I Could

by Kimberlee Bagby

Honorable Mention

Oh, if I could,
Stop all the wars
And make world peace...
I would

If I could,
Give everyone in the world
Money and food...
I would.

If I could,
Give everyone
In the world a house...
I would.

If I could,
Stop all the tragic
Deaths...
I would.

Oh, if only...
I could.