

Cultural Daily

Independent Voices, New Perspectives

2017 Jack Grapes Poetry Prize Contest: Finalists

Cultural Daily · Wednesday, October 11th, 2017

The 5th annual Jack Grapes Poetry Prize Contest was the toughest ever to judge. We received over 600 poems from all over the U.S.A. and abroad! So many truly fine poems; we were hard-pressed to decide on the winners.

Here they are:

\$250/First Prize: Lee Rossi “Pastures”

\$150/Second Prize: Kelly Grace Thomas “The Polite Bird of Story”

\$100/Third Prize: Meg Eden “Her Arms Are Calendars”

\$50/each 5 Finalists:

(in alphabetical order)

Steve Henn “A Melody”

Tony Gloeggler “About Time”

Natasha Moni “We have all been that woman on the bottom of the pool”

Beate Sigriddaughter “Emily Watches Her Husband Bring Kate A Glass Of Water”

Rebecca Schumejda “Anniversary Poem”

Additionally, we wanted to include these ten, **Honorable Mentions:**

(in alphabetical order)

Elaine Alarcon “An Absence”

John Bellinger “Whither”

Olivia Collins “Blood Orange”

Peggy Dobreer “Is There A Doctor In The House?”

Evelyn Duboff “Smoke”

Debra Franco “I Will Not Die In Paris”

Peter M. Gordon “My Therapist Told Me to Change My Socks”

Arminé Iknadossian “Ossuary”

Tanya Ko Hong “Confronting My Father’s Mistress”

Janaya Martin “Long-term Relationship”

The 6th Annual Jack Grapes’ Poetry Prize Contest opens on July 1st, 2018 and runs through August 31st, 2018. We eagerly look forward to reading your poems!

Alexis Rhone Fancher
Poetry Editor
Cultural Weekly

[alert type=alert-white]Please consider making a tax-deductible donation now so we can keep publishing strong creative voices.[/alert]

ABOUT TIME

After my father's funeral mass,
friends and family gather on
the church steps to hug and cry,
complain about the priest's
African accent and how he knew
nothing about my father's life.
They give directions to the gravesite,
to our house while I walk around
to the schoolyard. St Ann's school
has been closed for years
and the schoolyard seemed
so much bigger when I was twelve
and it was filled with hundreds of kids.
Girls in long lines rocking back and forth,
trying to find the right rhythm for jump rope,
skirts flying as they sprinted, leapt, floated
as I hoped to catch a glimpse of their panties
for a second or two. Circles of boys flipping,
scaling baseball cards against the wall.
I was always a first round draft pick
for punch ball, the only fifth grader
who could send a Pennsie Pinkie flying
over the roof. Down by the lunchroom rail,
Regina Rowland broke my heart
for the first time and showed me everything
wouldn't turn out the way I wanted
when she said that Tommy Schmidt
had already invited her to Rye Beach
and she didn't know how to tell him no.
Nuns in black habits took turns patrolling
the grounds like prison guards, black beads
clicking, bouncing as they rushed to break up
a fight. The bell rang at 8:45 and everyone
froze until one of the sisters pinched her clicker
and we silently lined up in size place by class.
I walk back to the church, whisper something
to my youngest brother that makes him nod.
I put my arm around my mother, lead her

to the limousine, open the door for her.
 I watch the altar boy kick the door stop,
 pull the church door shut and see my father
 on one knee telling me to smile, stand up
 straight as he focused his Kodak camera
 that muggy day in May when I made
 Confirmation, became a man like him.
 Tears fall out of my eyes and my sister
 says it's about time I did some crying.

***Tony Gloeggler** is a life-long resident of NYC and have managed group homes for the developmentally disabled for 37 years. His books include One Wish Left (Pavement Saw Press) and The Last Lie (NYQ Books). Until The Last Light Leaves (NYQ Books) was a finalist in the 2016 Binghamton University Milt Kessler Poetry Book Award.*

a Melody

This one time I fell in love with a Melody
 She floated onto the yellow school bus and sitting together
 we rode to Chain-o-Lakes State Park
 We took photographs of broken branches and young leaves
 and we took photographs of swampwater and bug clouds
 on the ride back she lay her head on my shoulder
 humming and pretending to sleep. She wore purple tights
 and black skirts daily to school and never shaved her legs
 one afternoon we ate ice cream together
 and she kissed me lightly over the automatic gearshift
 of my hand-me-down Ford Escort. Once we held
 each other on the bridge of a playfort at Jefferson
 Elementary School and she asked me to prom.
 I was that boy who was too cool for high school
 too different and by inference superior
 a rebel in my own mind and I said no.
 The dumbest things we did 22 years ago
 may haunt us in our middleage, kids, listen: Beware.
 I'm sorry Melody. Melody, I'm sorry,
 wherever you are or whoever you may be now
 I should've never not gone to prom with you.

***Steve Henn**'s latest collection is Indiana Noble Sad Man of the Year (Wolfson Press, 2017). Two previous from NYQBooks. "a Melody" is one among a lifetime of stories where he disappoints women. therealstevehenn.com; [@mrsteveenghenn](https://twitter.com/mrsteveenghenn); indiana_sad_man.*

Anniversary Poem

Partial eclipse on a cloudy day, lottery ticket hesitantly purchased, loss then regret, what we expect versus what happens, house gutted and no time or money to piece it back together. Equity. Love,

do you remember how thirteen years ago today my little brother helped write your vows? Or how you felt almost ten years later when we heard about what he did to the woman he loved? No,

no, No hung in the air like a sickle above an empty field. Sun cracked lips. Draught. Weather does not fluctuate according to moods. Swallow, swallow, Swallow that place where an object

gets between you and another object. You don't tell me you lost your ring somewhere between sheet rock and insulation, but I know to look at our love through a pinhole in a piece of cardboard.

I wish I didn't weigh every moment of my freedom against his captivity. Walls can be built or broken down, a ring can be found or replaced, but time. . . Only once and once only. Love,

we thought life would be different, but we're here. My little brother spends hours each day watching his shadow mock him, a sadistic guard outside his cell, the value of a mortgaged property after deduction of charges against it.

Rebecca Schumejda is the author of several poetry collections including Falling Forward (sunnyoutside press, 2009), Cadillac Men (NYQ Books, 2012), Waiting at the Dead End Diner (Bottom Dog Press, 2014), Our One-Way Street (NYQ Books, 2017), as well as five chapbooks, most recently Common Wages, which she co-authored with Don Winter. She received her MA in poetics from San Francisco State University. She lives with her family in New York's Hudson Valley. www.rebeccaschumejda.com

EMILY WATCHES HER HUSBAND BRING KATE A GLASS OF WATER

Kate has lovely skin
the color of hazelnut. Her hair is rich
and long. Her dark eyes sparkle
youth, longing, confidence.
The left corner of her lips
lifts with imperious amusement.

Emily, considerably older, remembers
a former husband mention once:
what makes a woman beautiful is

the promise of sex. It doesn't have to be
fulfilled. The promise is enough.

Several men hum around Kate
in a dance that displays
their beauty, their strength, their
captivated veneration.

Now Emily watches her husband
bring Kate a glass of water.
Kate acknowledges with a nod
and eyes wide open with surprised
appreciation.

Emily's husband told her once
what makes a woman desirable
is a certain air of helplessness.

Emily shivers helplessly
in her brave strength and competence

Beate Sigriddaughter, www.sigriddaughter.com, is poet laureate of Silver City, New Mexico, *Land of Enchantment*. Her work has received several Pushcart Prize nominations and poetry awards. In 2018 FutureCycle Press will publish her poetry collection *Xanthippe and Her Friends*. She orchestrates a blog, *Writing In A Woman's Voice*, <https://writinginawomansvoice.blogspot.com/>.

We have all been that woman on the bottom of the pool

after Mindy Lahiri

after the wedding that was never meant to happen—
the one on our office floor never minding when it last met a vacuum.

We eat bear claws on the regular, hoping sugar might buffer injury.
Don't remind us about the properties of glucose.

Acidic is that running commentary on how we'll never fit
into a super model's dress. Zero has nothing on us.

It isn't even a real number.
We are one. First-generation.

We're Indian.
We're American.

(Don't even mention ABCD
unless you want to talk about the movie...)

Remember that bit about Ellis Island and the land of the free?
Neither do we, but we dream. Yes. We dream.

We're doctors, moms, enterprising daughters
of immigrants. We graduate, have families

now or maybe *Later, baby*.
We disappoint our aunties.

We are here watching you watch us,
but not in that creepy horror movie way.

Like you, we write/rewrite our desires
plus, we do it in something strappy

while being frisked for the right
to re-enter our own birth country.

**Later, Baby* is the name of Mindy Lahiri's business on *The Mindy Project*.

**ABCD* is an acronym for American Born Confused Desi.

Natasha Kochicheril Moni, a first-generation American born to native Dutch and Indian parents, is a writer and a naturopathic doctor. Natasha's poetry books include *The Cardiologist's Daughter* (Two Sylvias Press, 2014), and forthcoming chapbooks, *Lay Down Your Fleece* (Shirt Pocket Press, 2017), and *Nearly* (dancing girl press, 2018). <http://www.natashamoni.com/>

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