

Abegail Morley

Save As Writers Poetry Competition 2012

I'd like to thank Luigi for asking me to judge this year's competition, which has been both immensely rewarding and challenging. I was pleased by the number of entries which shows how well regarded the Save As Writers competition is. I know from Luigi that there were international entries, as well as those from the UK, but was surprised and pleased to discover that Kent poets were amongst the winners.

Coming up with a shortlist was difficult because the standard was so high. I have judged a number of competitions recently and can honestly say this was the hardest to narrow down to just three winners and two Highly Commended prizes. I hope the competition goes from strength to strength and thank everyone who entered for supporting Save As Writers.

Highly Commended:

Two poems that were pipped to the post, but should be mentioned are *Insomnia* and *Snipe*. Both explore a single theme in great depth giving the reader enough detail to place themselves directly into the scene. *Insomnia* has some stunning lines, opening with the beautiful image "the hours curve in uninhabitable / vastness" and ending with the killer line "Pray / for a bright dawn crashing down like a guillotine." *Snipe* immediately draws the reader into reeds that "crosshatch the dark muddy banks / as they shift...." – a really visual piece and well-executed.

Third Prize: *Goodbye Bengal*

This poet knows exactly what she is doing. What seems an uncomplicated poem has layer upon layer of meaning. In its controlled three stanzas, the poet offers the reader a dilemma which can be interpreted in differing ways on further readings. She effortlessly explains there is only room for one book in the suitcase - the Qu'ran or Tagore's *Sanchayita* - an emotional, physical and philosophical choice. It begins quite simply "He packs and unpacks / the small suitcase" – *Goodbye Bengal* is a well-crafted, unadorned piece.

Second Prize: *i.m. E.F., who lived next door*

A good piece of poetry holds the reader in awe. This is such a poem. What makes it doubly so is the poet's expertise at including a rhyme scheme that creeps up on the reader without their knowing. This is hard to pull off, but this poet has. Written in two parts and in tercets (apart from a single trailing last line in each part), the poem has a conversational tone that adds to its strength. It opens:

"Befriended half-stranger, I would like to claim
(with the guilty politeness of the one still living)
that our first meeting in someone's dining-room

was unforgettable."

So begins the story of two lives crossing and the loss of one, with the fantastic final line: "then hold out your hand and wish me an equally good night".

First Prize: Four Square

A fabulous poem that found its way to the shortlist from first reading. It focuses on the simple act of taking a photograph, hence the four square: "Here's a photograph of you dancing / and singing on a rock beneath the north face / of the Vignemale." What the photographer ends up capturing is not just the person, but everything else unseen and unheard, "the spiral rocks parcelled your voice / and amplified it back or caught the clack / of your sticks on the bone-hard scarp" - startlingly exquisite. The piece is linguistically stunning, there are horses that "scraped their backs on the cedars" and later

"the season drives down the snows
into rivulets and calls up twelve orders of flowers,
wild mountain strawberries and herds
of yellow-chrome butterflies nosing the Buddleia".

This striking poem has great energy, each stanza building on the one before. It leaves the reader slightly uneasy, as if they have stumbled on and been swept up in a private moment. Astonishing.