



CATEGORY: Too Full Already is the Grave

WINNER (Under 16):

Will We Fall?

The breath from our chapped lips in the distance,
Our men at war seeking power and resistance.
Would our ghosts from the past become fate?
Did we leave our plan a little too late?
Could we possibly survive this battle of blood?
Could we walk past this land of death and mud
Until we reach England's green and grassy land,
Holding our God's peaceful and trusting hand?
Of course we will some beautiful day,
Or maybe, just maybe, it was meant to end this way.
The guns are now far too loud...
It's time to make our country proud.

Olivia King (12)

WINNER (Over 16):

Aftermath - a villanelle in memory of Virginia Woolf and Septimus Warren Smith

Maybe they'd hoped there would be dancing
But strident voices squawked across shattered landscapes
As words flutter sideways and miss the mark

Because the narrators could not be trusted
And civilization was marching in the wrong direction
Maybe they'd hoped there would be dancing

Fragments of memory hung in the air like scrolls of smoke
Conversation sagged and surrendered to the dark waters
As words flutter sideways and miss the mark

Because there are times we cannot bear to speak
And there is no way to get inside inscrutable lives or outside the body
Maybe they'd hoped there would be dancing

She, and he, like so many others, had witnessed dreadful sorrows
But nothing that has been said meets the case
As words flutter sideways and miss the mark

Clouds gather, curtains billow, waves kiss the shore, the sea sighs
And mothers' sons are still killed in the battles of the world
Maybe they'd hoped there would be dancing
As words flutter sideways and miss the mark

(Virginia Woolf was deeply troubled by the way World War I destroyed young men's lives. In her 1925 novel Mrs Dalloway, the character Septimus Warren Smith is a returned WWI veteran, deeply traumatised by his experiences in the trenches, who commits suicide to escape his 'shellshock'. Woolf's own mourning and melancholy and her mounting despair in World War II appear to have prompted her to kill herself by drowning in 1941.)

Alan Beattie

HIGHLY COMMENDED:

The Widow

In a window of glory sits a lady; neither a mother nor a wife,
A ghostlike image of sadness that epitomises her life,
Framed by curtains black she smiles out on all of town,
So many hush by her dwelling afraid of a grief stricken frown,
Children glare up at her looming house with pitiful admiration,
She is a survivor; one of many in this murderous nation.

Each day they see her laughing and sipping a glass of iced tea,
Often they hear her singing, songs of joy she recites with glee,
An odd life she lives, so many believe, for she is not lost in woe,
Their honour for her is lost, and one day so is her place in the window.

Curious children scurry up her drive and look through the glass,
The torch reveals a ghastly image and the gang run away so fast,
Treading back up the path we look to see their find,
Items crowd the rooms with large pictures of her men behind.

In the corner of the room there is a wooden chair that lies on the floor,
Above hangs our widow who lost her heart in the war.

So many believed this widow was basking in pride and grace,
But the suffering of her tragedy was written all over her face,
Each day she looked out at the living for she inside was dead,
Then she gave up her struggle, the day upon which she wed.

Katie Bryson Wheeler

Killed in Action

A stone of remembrance,
of war's wasteful violence.

Sea of sorrow, grave after grave.
Thousand nameless names claim,
every one gone, none left to save.
Our great nations so full of shame.

The world's worst wound is wide,
and none of them left to confide.
In the end there's no use for pride,
in the end we are all on one side.

Will their names live on forever?
Who then shall remember them all?
When we do not, never say never,
until the nations' next massive fall.

A cross to symbolize the sacrifice,
a world-war to end the whole fight.
But why did it have to happen twice?
And thousands left to face the night?

Humans, countless and in their prime.
No real reason why they all had to die.
In such an indescribably cruel crime.
Because their fathers told the old lie.

Florentina Winger

Homage to love

Crown of Sonnets in 5 parts by B. Burgess

For Robert Von Ranke Graves 1895-1985

I

Yesterday's old glory was without bounds,
onwards through the night, sleepless with hunger,
unearthing comrade's graves, yawning slumber.
Muskets flash no more on Great fields like these,
unity at last with the shattered trees,
silencing the stillness of that sweet kiss,
those gentle hands of yours on my shoulder,
Beautiful you ! A passion so wasted,
even the birds are heaped with the dying,
Bedraggled futility of escape,
raids that never end would have been my love,
and Cupids spear, this jagged bayonet,
vainly scratching heart shapes in the timber,
early on that morning of November.

II

Early on that morning of November,
vestiges of beauty caught in the clouds,
effigies of Angels torn on barbed wire,
none-such had seen a vision in the mire,
Tremendous scope, all juxtaposed beyond
ornamental, sublime hypocrisy.
The Captain, shaking, tells us not to smoke,
he appears to know we're all here to die,
every one of us simply ignore him,
Grieving a love of his own and a kiss,
running through fields of flowers as we did,
aiming blindly at the planets of love,
virtues could not honour this peace of mind,
Elysium and invites of the kind.

III

Elysium and invites of the kind,
never could that illusion be so near,
dressed for a feast at the tables of hell,
I, the object of your heroine pride,
now gone that Sunday stroll that changed the world,
gone that fierce lion that you so control.
That happy ever after that we dreamed
has been dropped off to walk the long way home,
early as it is, this day is changing,
guns that would have awoken every soul,
laming the hour of the death knells toll,
only dreams behind these murderous eyes,
running through a tangle of victory,
yielding to the demands of history.

IV

Yielding to the demands of history,
overhead a blackbirds peaceful warning,
ultimately seconds stop the thunder,
running again the blood that had frozen,
Tilting the score with a banner of hope,
rumours around, a Marshall had started,
unison finding a meaning in all,
encoded riddles quickly deciphered,
Surrendered they had ! The end of the war!
Ended it had, still a long way from home,
life lines of soldiers erupt with 'Hooray! ',
freedom at last from the breach of the flames,
belfries sound the 11 o'clock bell,
evil had finished its errand in Hell.

V

Evil had finished its errand in Hell,
voyages of any kind could not leave,
even one part of those horrors behind,
recruited to those fields, as if they did,
yearning to forget for you I lived for,
arriving at my loves door in Blighty,
nearing the shadow of that phantom kiss,
days were years only hoping to hold you,
accounting the worth of being in love,
nothing again seen of never again,
your eyes are all I see beyond the blast.
Were you also that angel guiding me
and protected me from thunderous sounds,
yesterday's old glory was without bounds.

Brian Burgess