

Second Light Network

2007 Poetry Competition

Judge: Carole Satyamurti

1st Prize: Pat Borthwick

Apple Pie

Blades peel hand-sized green apples.
Mother. Daughter. The routine of Sunday
overflushed with my first kiss.

Twin spirals work down to the countertop,
a silence sharp as lipstick red. Then
to your even sharper question, I answer truth,

name the film we saw and my new friend.
Dicing cold lard, you accuse me of lies.
I detail the plot. Again, you insist I lie.

Once you told me I'd get pregnant
if I talked to a boy on the phone,
that boys only wanted one thing

and that was never love. Scales clank
as you stack their honest weights
and flour-clouds thunder upwards.

Truth. Lie. Truth. Lie.
Our words balance against each other's
then roll away, sticky as dough balls.

You have the rolling pin, work pastry
with shoulders as tense as a bow
over the white ceramic dish.

It drapes like newly laundered sheets
as I slice crescent moons of apple in
then watch your pinch of cinnamon

sprinkle darkly down. And finally, the lid.
Then me, as usual, trying to shape the scraps
into some special smile for each of us.

2nd Prize: Kate Foley

Thrift

Sometimes you see them in a promenade shelter
sitting bolt upright, always facing the pier.
His thumb makes small circles

on the swollen knuckles of her hand.
Or perhaps it's she who wipes custard
from the faint rasp of his chin,

as he sits in the taint of clothes, communally
washed and the penetrating ghost of pee.
They're hoarders. They know how

to make a very little go a long way.
The faint quiver of shadow
at the corner

of her mouth may mean 'smile'
and the twitch of his eyelid
could signify 'wink'.

Pity is too easy, as they repeat
in their various permutations of grey
the road sign, Elderly People Crossing,

for they have learned thrift. How to weigh
out each tiny gesture towards the other,
how you translate a long silence

into the currency of kindness.
Their sort of love is tough as a Kevlar vest.
They lay out the last ounce cannily, on care,

making it last.
Hadn't we better start practising now
for that tender paradigm shift from words to touch?

3rd Prize: Doreen Hinchliffe

The Regular

They set their watches by him. On the stroke
of eight he came in every night for years
returning from a job he never spoke
much of, to do with people in arrears.

He'd lean against the bar, reserved, withdrawn
but never rude. His wit was dry, sardonic,
delivered with a smile, his humour born
of insight, just as clever and ironic

as that of a philosopher or scholar.
Guinness in hand, he'd stop and hesitate,
gazing at contours in its creamy collar
as if, like tea leaves, they could tell his fate.

The details of his personal life stayed grey,
devoid of any colour, like his clothes.
He had a wife, a teenage son, he'd say,
the rest he was reluctant to disclose.

He'd drink for hours, motionless, at borders
of unconsciousness, ignored, unseen,
till, roused by cries of *time now please, last orders*
he'd take his pint and play the fruit machine.

That Friday he struck lucky, heard the clatter
of chaotic jackpot coins belched free
above the froth and buzz of drunken chatter
and strains of Abba's *Take A Chance On Me*.

Cupped hands heaped scattered silver, then scraped the pile
inside a plastic bag that someone gave.
He left with just the flicker of a smile,
the customary farewell nod and wave.

Next day they found him (didn't find a note)
stretched out behind a disused railway shed;
the windfall coins still weighing down his coat,
the windfall plastic bag around his head.

