



2018 Bruce Dawe Poetry Winners

Winner

First Blood: A Sestina

by Natalie D-Napoleon

There was a time when the girl
never thought about the colour blue, or blood,
could be amused by the flicking of a lit match,
the delicate shiver of a spider orchid;
summer holidays stretched out, days dropping time
like a missed knitting stitch.

But her body was not hers, a stitch
of animal, a pinch of dirt, a girl
is made of words plus liquid minus time
and what she does not have; blood,
defines her. Like an orchid
about to bloom she unfurls, unlit match

between her teeth, nobody to match
her un-kissed lips, until the stitch



is pulled and the thread of the cloth orchid
undoes, just enough to reveal the gone girl.
Nobody told her there would be so much blood!
Her mother had tried to mend the old time

ways, when girls were never told in time
about periods, as if knowledge alone could match
an image of her baba scrubbing the blood
out of torn rags, her hair greasy, a stitch
unwashed once every month. Cold water, girls
know, washes out blood, and orchids

should be kept indoors and warm, orchids
are to be protected from a cold breeze. In time
the blue liquid in the TV ads for girl-
products made sense, red stains to mismatch
the pastel spots on her skirt enough to stitch
shame to her chest. Blood



**is not to be seen - except the blood
of war or violence. Blood 'n Bone drinks the orchid,
the fetor forcing the girl to sprint until a stitch
bites her side and the breath of time
stabs; finding a way to strike the match
of bloom and decay in the body of a girl.**

**She came to see a stitch in time
could not repair the stain of first blood, spider orchids
are too delicate to touch, and nothing can hold a match to a bleeding girl.**



Highly Commended

lawn

by Shona Hawkes

perhaps this suburban lawn
this strip of needy grass,
is a last, lost cry for field and fen
buried deep in our skin
and carried across the sea

maybe this is the little that could be saved
as our ancestors fled their lands and all those wars
which are mostly not called war

picking through the weeds,
this first playground is also where
I learned to tell the difference
between legitimate and illegitimate immigrants
and small hands would strip the necks of native millet



here I made a sword from a stick
and we practiced running away from each other

with hose and tap we dreamed water
and paid on credit
here I studied how to put a rake through a snake
and how to trap a cricket

our mascot, the letterbox, spilled words

cutting grass, men taught us that this land is labour
and refuses to be what we want it to be
we poured kerosene down the holes of bull-ants
cats delivered the bodies of birds

the street was a long line carved by fences
we locked dogs in our yards
so they could yell at strangers



I would lie and look up, naming the stars
and learned to see what I wanted in the shifting clouds.



Highly Commended

hearing the world

by Louise Wakeling

mid-mountain, you feel the weather coming in,
palpable, drifts of fog and nimbostratus
infiltrating from the Southern Highlands.
pass the village sign and you know you're home,
behind you now the four-car prang,
blue flashing lights, the glitter and crunch
of debris on the road, the rubber-necking
at what has kept you idling for an hour.
tonight, you're unscathed, though clouds
are gravid with tomorrow's snow

all the forecasts agree an extreme weather
event is on the cards, though the Bureau
calls it a 'cold front', not 'Antarctic vortex'.
pity – you like the drama and magnitude
of it, global weirding with a vengeance.

still, it takes you by surprise next morning,
like in Oxford all those years ago,
your first sight of snow, fat postcard-robins
on silvery branches, hyperreal, the whole world
transformed, and you, in that moment.

step into the garden on a slide of ice,
dog-bowl topped with a furry pane of glass,



a tarpaulin of snow stretched tight
on the crinkle-cut roof of the old garage.
the dog leaves dark lacunae in her wake,
spoor disappearing into white-out.

you wonder if the Falls below
are laced with ice, a Hokusai wave
about to break and suddenly, driving
becomes a dangerous idea, like strapping
explosives to your chest and walking
onto a crowded street. why risk it
for your workaday routine, coming down
from the mountain to the flat plains
of what you do for a living?

live traffic reports whistle you off the
journey, and you make the call.
you'll never leave off feeling
guilty for the windfall of a day at home.

the cat, incarcerated indoors, peers
behind a Roman blind at ghost-white trees,
an unfamiliar stretch of lawn. the flight
of birds is stilled, their startled childlike cry,
the Buddha fountain silent among
the ivy. short curls crusted with snow
mean renunciation, but half-closed eyes
look inward and outward, long earlobes
hear what's needed in the world



Highly Commended

kunanyi / Mt Wellington

After the storms, before the cable car, 2018

by Anne Kellas

Birdwing

glimpsed in a watercolour sky

– white

turns into winter mist.

Soft rain

on the grey mountainside

slides

in a lessening of less.



Bare stalks of trees near the summit

lean at an angle in the gale.

Time's a soft-tissue injury

a rift

threads broken

in the blanket-weave of leaves.

A vague purple shade of green

seeps into the dark.

I cannot speak rainforest or cloud

nor walk mountain paths.

Language slips from me.

There is no sound here.