

# Cultural Daily

Independent Voices, New Perspectives

## 2017 Jack Grapes Poetry Prize Contest: Finalists

Cultural Weekly · 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]

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## 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 Gloegler 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.*

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## **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](http://therealstevehenn.com); [@mrsteveghenn](https://twitter.com/mrsteveghenn); [indiana\\_sad\\_man](http://indiana_sad_man).*

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## 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](http://www.rebeccaschumejda.com)*

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## 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](http://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/>.

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## **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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