

Texts of the Four Prize-Winning Poems, Reuben Rose Competition, 2006

1st. Prize: "Rachel's Eulogy for her Grandmother" by Ruth Fogelman

Grandma, how I miss you! I sat at your knee
telling you my dreams. You
smiled and nodded knowingly,
singing of a land where summer grass is topped with dew –
you read me Aunt Rivka's scrolls
from the land where date palms brush the sky. You knew

loved your lullabies of young men whose souls
soared to heaven as they sat learning in a tent,
and your stories how Uncle dug wells – deep holes –
from which water surged, and oases bloomed, and how Aunt went
and fell off her camel when she saw
Uncle, like an angel, praying in a field. You spent
hours with me as I played with new lambs near the tent door!
And you consoled me when Leah married the man
I loved. You too will have him, a little patience, dear, you said before
the morning star appeared. You persuaded Father; you ran
to my tent that night, held me in your arms and let me cry
into your embrace as you revealed your plan.
Oh Grandma, you consoled me in my barrenness,
you hugged me when I'd sigh
upon hearing that my sister had birthed another boy.
But Grandma, who will console me now? How can I say goodbye?

Second Prize: "Memories of a leper" by Lara Kwalbrun

Alas the itch that spreads like spilled milk
A misshapen tattoo etched on my arm.
Perhaps it will disappear with dawn,
This stubborn stain that resists scrubbing.
The High Priest has made a house call.
Unfolding his linen cloth and instruments
With the meticulous manner of a surgeon.
Bending over me by the window
He smells of incense, fresh and pure,
Silent as snow.
There is murmuring outside the door
An inspection of the white mold, God's graffiti,
Growing like ivy on the garden walls,
Painting the rooms where once we
Laughed pleasantly and told tales.
The verdict has been handed and commanded.
I will live in a temporary tent,
Sewing in the dim light,
The seams of torn cloth.
A shipwrecked man,
Marooned by a marauding tongue.
I see them from a distance on the Sabbath day,
Arms linked. Inside the hollow tent I cry out to God
Who has marked me like Cain, penned curses on my flesh,
Used me for target practice, as I have done
With the arrows of my tongue, daggers
I am a broken shard, a lion in God's sheep pen.
Take these pigeons then, one for me and one for you
We are bound by the feathers I gather.

Third Prize: "After the war" by Johnmichael Simon

Now that the guns are quiet
the hills awaken, don green clothing
Now that the missiles cease their roar
the birds hop out of hiding places
make short trips over still smoldering trunks
Now that the air begins to clear
patches of blue appear
damage assessors arrive, inspect, measure
jot inscriptions in notebooks, make calculations
Now that the guns are quiet
children emerge from shelters
kick balls, ride bicycles, flip skate boards
The grocery store restocks its rows
of yoghurts, cheeses, fruit and vegetables
Now that the guns are quiet
deep in the ground, fingers make tallies
count bodies, dust off prayer books
draw up lists, encrypt messages, mark maps
An army of ants crawls from hidden cracks
warriors carry shiny new weapons
wasps begin the task of hive reconstruction
black and red hieroglyphics
Now that the guns are quiet
lilting cadences cry out from turrets
calling the faithful to prayer
Now that the guns are quiet
somewhere in a cave
a skull winds a turban in coils
hiding thoughts, hiding plans
Until all that remains visible
is a sharp beard and a pair of flat eyes
unfurling from the gloom

Fourth Prize: "How Cupid saved my marriage" by David Silverman

When you were born I was two months
and twenty-three days old. And on that day,
in celestial chambers, the Committee on
Prospective Matches convened a meeting
to discuss the matter of us.

Cupid looked around the table at the
assembled angels, and felt a headache
coming on. He wanted to get home for
dinner, but knew this would not be easy.

Wearily he asked, Arguments?

They all spoke at once:

He'll be a slob! He won't listen!

He'll forget her birthday! He'll snore!

She deserves better, said a prissy
angel whom Cupid had never liked.

Just look at her (a slide of a beautiful
baby girl was projected across a
nearby cloud. The angels sighed
in admiration). The priss checked her

notes: I have a nice boy born just
last week. He's going to be a doctor!

They babbled on and Cupid massaged
his temples, no longer listening. If this
kept up, he would never get home and she
was serving pot roast tonight, his favorite.

These angels were always so sure of the math,
but the calculus of couples defies the rational
laws of nature. Though he had to admit the
match looked bad on the surface, there was
something about the combination of these two
that made him smile. In the end, it was his
decision, and he declared, Enough! They are
right for each other, I'm going home.

But, Cupid, the priss cried: what about the snoring?

They'll work it out, he said, thinking of his own
deviated septum. He could not wait to get home
and tell his wife about his day.