

Dina Yehuda

1st prize

## **Sabras**

No soft shiny leaves for us,  
proud of our sharp spines  
and prickly scales,  
hardened by drought  
we hoard the rain.

Not popular like roses,  
not expecting to be loved  
for our soft fragile beauty  
we have grown arid hearts

have taken the desert  
into our stony skin  
its versatile wisdom, each striving  
grain of sand

truth is not beauty  
nor beauty truth  
we are the unbeautiful truth  
and that has its sweetness too.

Judy Koren

2nd prize

## The Creator of Memories

The potter's wheel, spinning hypnotically  
 created jars, plates, vases, figurines  
 on which he'd paint idyllic village scenes  
 or white-sailed fishing boats on a blue sea –  
 all fantasies (the sea outside was green  
 or stormy grey): life as it should have been.

Although he never talked to a child like me  
 I'd watch him work for hours through the pane,  
 immersed in counterfeiting cobbled lanes,  
 vistas of bays, azalea-shaded walls:  
 images from the nineteenth century  
 of life becalmed, without the sudden squalls.

He didn't make mere tourist souvenirs  
 or pretty ornaments to set on shelves,  
 his strategy went deeper: to create  
 within their minds a story to relate  
 to others, and especially to themselves,  
 that would survive the tempests of the years.

Was he happy, spinning his fairy-tales  
 of shaded alleys, narrow car-less streets  
 and quiet fishing harbours filled with sails,  
 selling illusions, dreams, as memories  
 of paradise in timeless slow retreats  
 a two-week refuge from realities?

And was his object only to create  
 in others, memories of such a life?  
 Perhaps his pots and vases were *his* chart  
 for sailing through modernity's dark strait;  
 perhaps he dreamt of living free from strife,  
 perhaps he held that vision in his heart.

Michelle Malis

3rd prize

**on love**

like a kick, like a knife, like a fist vector on its way to the face. the turn of your head  
when someone speaks your name, the turn

of your phrase when you answer. my darling touches peaches like guitar strings, my  
darling holds books like sheets. like a street cat shakes its knowing shoulders.  
understanding is the gift of prophets and i do not possess it, but what comes from one  
person always lands on the tongue of another and his is a pomegranate syrup voice. the  
taste of ash like boysenberry stains the hands, the viscous thought that drips like dates,  
that stains like beets and stays to claim its land on foreign ground where once  
ashurbanipal's reign declared him last great king and then he fell and now we stand with  
thoughts of greatness which began not out of regal passion, but a pair of hands whose  
fingertips do read the markings in the clay that say

you sit now where your honey grows on trees and people taste so sweet as rum and days  
do pass without return but think of it no longer.

i do not. i've long foregone the past, it reeks of others and i seek now not what i can yet  
seek out in blinding desert dust but what i've found in blinding desert light. i'll count my  
goods and count you out among the rediscovered texts of ancient nineveh, now iraq,  
now untranslatable but deeply felt by those who touch the cuneiform by hand and hear  
the horses neigh their sadness when their lord commands the fall where a great city  
stands.

Diane Ray

Honorable Mention

**Casa Bianca *Mikveh* Speaks***Giudecca, Ortigia, Siracusa, Sicilia*

In my clover leaf of pools my people purified.  
*Tevilah* cached deeply for nine-hundred years.  
 They made me before setting one stone of synagogue.  
 I was carved into quietude sixty feet down.  
 Under rippling arches in limestone, *tevilah* flowed.  
 Iron mongers, shippers, how my people prospered!  
 Dipped in my quiet, my lamp-lit hypogeum.  
 They lived set apart, yellow-belted and turbaned.

Silk reelers, doctors, how my people prospered!  
 Twelve years, twelve torahs paraded to King Martin.  
 They were called 'The King's Jews, yellow-belted, turbaned.  
 Next year's parade plan: Torah cases, empty!  
 Twelve years, twelve torahs in homage: Enough!  
 A *converso* warned King; the Jews' portent: flooding peril.  
 For planned sham obeisance before a Christian king.  
 But by legend Elijah in a dream forewarned.

Sami, *converso* rat, lost all claim to *shem tov*.  
 Torahs were rushed back in casings: *Shalom* saved!  
 Since Elijah had warned in a dream: Sami foiled!  
 But nothing would foil import of Inquisition.  
 Nostalgia for twelve Torahs slipped back in casings.  
 My Jews tasted freedom in the first blush of Renaissance.  
 Inquisition foiled open-living Jewishly, Jews living.  
 A just viceroy gutted wild anti-Jewish claims.

Eggplant wed to olive oil, *Caponeta alla Giudia!*  
 Iron mongers to merchants on the winds to Levant.  
 A viceroy, Herculean, raised a case for reprieve.  
 But expulsion it was or conversion or death.  
 Ship building to trading on the winds to Levant.  
 They tucked me in blankets of earth before leaving.  
 For expulsion it was for them, conversion, or death.  
 The Bianca *conversos* upstairs sang me lullabies.  
 ...In my clover leaf, unearthed, my living-waters flow.

*After 500 years, the mikveh's five pools were unburied, still pristine.*

Elisa Subin

Honorable Mention

**Ultimately, It Wasn't the Paint Color That Did Us In**

I remember picking at the grass cloth paper covering the walls in my parents' dining room. Boredom, combined with an early distaste for wallpaper. You'd told me about your parents' purple velvet walls, and I figured you would understand. We married young and painted our walls white. Cream. Ivory. Eggshell. I don't remember. I read that there are more than 150 shades of white. In the aisles of the home improvement store, we pretend argued over the virtues of Whisper White versus Cotton Ball versus Casper White. In the end, we had to admit, it would make absolutely no difference.

Helen Bar-Lev

Honorable Mention

### **The Bomb Shelter**

I don't like this room  
tho I've beautified it  
with paintings and purples  
and moved my bed into it  
and lit lavender incense,  
added an amethyst for protection

it is my studio where  
computer and treadmill reside  
and on the desk drawing paraphernalia  
and a painting in progress,  
where creativity should be  
buzzing around like electricity  
and yet, and yet...

this is not my bedroom  
where grapevines and pomegranates  
obliterate the border  
and each morning  
the rising sun announces the time  
and I awake with a smile  
for the tranquility of it

now I wait in this shelter  
for the war to end

Mark G Hammerschick

Honorable Mention

## Quantum Entanglement

Where does light end?  
Where does it start?  
Why does the smell of coffee  
transport me to infinity?  
Gravitons, photons, quanta  
unleashed into the all  
how I wish I were a photon...  
massless with no electric charge  
the basic stable element of us  
as it hurtles along at  
186,000 miles per second  
and I can't find my car keys  
in the dark  
yet the light is still there  
flowing strings  
of quantum entanglement  
that bizarre, counterintuitive phenomenon  
that explains how two subatomic particles  
can be intimately linked to each other  
even if separated by billions  
of light-years of space  
in the gloaming  
separating time and space  
kind of like your eyes  
depthless  
cradled in transverse wavelengths  
iris points oscillating at right angles  
to the direction of their advance  
entangled strands  
of strawberry hair  
and as the sun hits  
those eyes explode  
supernova  
big bang residue  
suddenly we know what heaven is  
and in that knowing  
our hearts converge  
connect and coagulate  
and the light just is  
as it always was  
and will forever be...

Judy Isenberg

Honorable Mention

### **The drummer**

An old building in Jerusalem, the room  
 Cramped and difficult to navigate.  
 Some sit around a table, I perch on a plastic chair.  
 Conversations continue as he starts to gently tap.  
 His eyes, twin entrances to a dark cave  
 Where his ancestors dwell.  
 A liquid core; a well of unbearable knowledge.  
 Gazing too long or too hard, my soul  
 Is slowly reeled into its ancient depths.

His hands seek the drums like hungry fledglings,  
 Smoothing the surface as if remembering a familiar landscape,  
 Fingers feeling the sound in each area  
 To locate the sweet spots.  
 His hands turn and twist, flexible as a pair of acrobats.  
 My heart pounds to his insistent pulse and then  
 He starts to sing.

The anguish of his forbears forces its way out  
 In a scalding melody. Instinctively his eyes close.  
 Searing, supplicating sentences produce a turbulent power.  
 Louder and louder the roaring river runs,  
 Scooping up my soul like a glistening fish.  
 My heart rotates in its socket, squeezed  
 Until silvery drops emerge.  
 Finally, the hungry birds are satisfied; their fluttering subsides.  
 The drumming slows down. The song is finished.  
 His eyes open, but the cave remains shut.  
 His hands relinquish the drums  
 And they resume the form of upturned wooden bookcases.  
 Moving to the table he clambers on to the chair by his father.  
 Anxious for his fair share of grape juice  
 And as much cake as his brother.



Elana Wolff

Honorable Mention

## Catalytic

When I weary of being woman,

I think of the golden cherubs  
on the lid of the holy ark,

their ever-touching wings

above their faces & the space between.  
How in a single instance

fire issued swiftly from that space,

arowed along the tent of meeting,  
entered the priestly nostrils of Aaron's

sons, Nadav and Avihu,

& burned their souls  
for offering alien incense.

I try to imagine the angle

of that fire—as it issued.  
How it streamed,

then struck. I focus on the cherubs' wingtips,

where they join—  
they're made that way.

When I weary of being woman,

I think of that gripping centre-point,  
the catalytic effect of being thus-

charged, & unremitting.

Esther B Lipton

Honorable Mention

## **The Wish**

The little old lady with white wispy hair  
 Sat on the brown faux leather chair  
 In the bank the tellers were busy  
 Dealing with Smith, Jones and Aunt Lizzie  
 The queue was long and at the front  
 An angry man shouting, quite blunt  
 Accused the teller 'it's all your fault'  
 And threatened her with physical assault  
 The young girl blanched with fear.

I do hate confrontations, said the old dear  
 I sat down beside her and we started to chat  
 Nothing important, just about this and that  
 She liked my hat, a charity buy  
 I envied her real leather bag, I won't deny  
 She lived alone, her daughter not far  
 With five children, no husband, no car  
 I don't see them often, she sighed  
 Likewise, I said, and inwardly cried  
 By way of comfort, but not the whole truth  
 I told her my sole contact was Cousin Ruth  
 And that dementia lurked within her head  
 So knew not if it was time for tea or bed.

We agreed that the joy of growing old  
 Is marred by the loss of friends and family fold  
 By loneliness, poor sight and poverty.  
 In our goodbyes, she said, you'd do me a favour  
 If ever you became my good neighbour.

Now four years on, it has come to be  
 We live at Happy Hospice, the one by the sea  
 I'm room twenty two and she's room twenty three.

Adam Paul Davis

Honorable Mention

## **The Light You Wear**

I know all the kinds of light  
acquainted with your face,  
every wave, every shade  
of spectrum that it basks in,

like rails of ochre sunrise,  
molten silver moonbeams,  
amber bath of midnight fridge,  
flickering blue smartphone screens.

I watch them weave their latitudes  
that ply the softness of your skin,  
thread their shadowed mesh  
between your neck and forehead.

Even photon tribes I've never seen  
embrace you, I still imagine them.  
I can shut my eyes and map  
the yarns of their embroidery:

platoons of airport tarmac lights,  
nearly-blinding nightclub strobes,  
brazen stadium discharge lamps,  
spectral jellyfish tank glow.

And when it comes to darkness  
– there only really is one kind –  
I've also seen it flood your cheeks,  
and turn the shine to ash.

Then I wonder just how long  
I have to wait before I can,  
again, behold those lumens,  
the brilliance that I miss.

Wendy Dickstein

Honorable Mention

## Eggs and Onions

Every Shabbos Hashie plunged the knife  
 into an onion, crisscrossed with a surgeon's skill  
 till chunks like tiny stars tumbled into the crystal bowl,  
 chopped eggs, salt, a splash of oil.  
 He'd pass the bowl to Gertie, his woman of valor,  
 bless the wine, the braided loaf,  
 then the holy meal began with eggs and onions.

Hashie the patriarch had no patience  
 for fidgeting grandchildren at the Shabbos table  
 He would roar at them,  
 they'd quail, then painful silence.

Interned as an enemy alien  
 yet fifty years later every landsman recalled  
 his clout, his charity.  
 On the high holidays his voice would soar  
 as he stood before God,  
 praying with a broken heart.

Learned in the ways of Torah  
 he should have been a teacher  
 but refused to flatter ignorant parents, or coddle their kids  
 Instead, he opened a business: "Do All Travel"  
 yearning to return to a place no longer his.

Once, walking on 18<sup>th</sup> Avenue  
 We passed three black teens who jeered at him  
 "I can't help it. I hate them," he confessed.  
 When we got home he put on an apron  
 and scrambled me some eggs  
 I couldn't believe such kindness.

Hashie's long gone  
 each Shabbos I crisscross my onion  
 and think of him.  
 When the grandchildren visit  
 they ask for eggs without the onions  
 for them onions, like memories, are too sharp.

Reuven Goldfarb

Honorable Mention

### **This Poem Is Innocent**

This poem is innocent.  
It took no captives, fought no wars,  
saved no lives, ate no corn,  
bought no sugar, felled no trees,  
sicked no dogs on anyone  
as innocent as it.

It has no gender, wrote itself,  
lost no mules, explored no caverns,  
sold no birthright nor had any children;  
resembled no one, forgot its name,  
lost its heritage, sought redemption,  
neither succeeded nor failed.