

## SECOND LIGHT POETRY COMPETITION WINNERS

### Hannah Lowe:

It was a great pleasure to read the poems for the Second Light poetry competition this year. The topics and themes were wonderfully varied – poems of history and memory, about the family, the body, work, and many that deftly linked the personal to a wider context, where the singular moment or encounter evoked the social, cultural or political.



### First Prize, Short Poem Category, Cathy Whittaker

#### Eleanor in the Garden

*Eleanor*  
her father shouts  
from his big-cushioned chair,  
*come here,*  
she doesn't want to  
his voice reminds her  
of church bells  
demanding her attendance.  
*Eleanor*  
he bawls again  
the house reverberates.  
She's in his square garden  
can hear the traffic passing  
but the gate to the street  
is locked.  
She might have escaped  
with Hugh the clerk in the office  
but her father said  
*he wasn't good enough,*  
and Eleanor crept mouse-like  
round his words.  
*Eleanor. Come. Here. Now.*  
A megaphone of imperatives.  
But she doesn't go,  
sits upright  
in her rusty garden chair,  
watches the blowsy rose petals fall  
on the scorched grass.

first published in *The Night Heron Barks*, 2020.

**First Prize, Long Poem Category, Daphne Milne**

**Instructions for Bottling Ships**

1.

On a chart like a mariner's map  
hand-drawn before print began  
my father's neat script  
lays out the plan

for a tea clipper built long  
ago in Ritson shipyards  
now miniaturised  
inside a Dimple bottle

A steady hand  
and cigarette is needed  
to burn away  
construction lines

The boys peruse the ash-  
smudged diagram  
gaze wide-eyed  
breathless at their great  
grandfather's work

They have a pond  
where they watch tadpoles grow  
look underneath the water mint  
to find the black-skinned newt  
take photographs of dragonflies

It's not a pond for sailing ships  
but one day the younger boy  
will find his own bottle  
and using my father's plan  
will put a ship in it.

2.

A steady hand and a cigarette  
I was six  
when father taught me  
to develop photographs  
and how to smoke

Player's Navy Cut  
the red tip gave  
exactly enough light to see  
the baths of developer  
stop and fixer

smells of chemicals  
and cellar-stone  
and the cold always  
the cold took up residence  
in heart and bone

My father's plan allowed  
no deviation from the rules  
no latitude for childhood hope  
hard hands and harder ...

I have the Player's tin  
a ship inside a Dimple bottle  
My grandsons' photographs are all in colour  
they're six and ten too young to smoke

3.

Every spring froglets hopped  
out of the darkroom  
up the cellar steps  
following the memory  
mapped out by earlier generations  
Family life bound by lines  
strong as ship's rigging

Upstairs my father practised origami  
birds which flapped their wings  
but could not fly  
frogs that hopped but never croaked  
unlike the bleached corpses  
in the developing tray  
who failed to reach the outside world  
pale ghosts who left  
phantom handprints  
on our negatives

like the faded signatures  
scrawled across certificates  
of birth and marriage  
immoveable as a ship  
inside a Dimple bottle  
sailing nowhere