FOURTH PLACE WINNER

Kristen Thies
Wellington High School, 11th Grade
Teacher, Flora Rigolo

I’ll Mourn for Me
You were born almost two months early.
Your frail body fit into my two hands,
and I watched you from outside a glass coffin
as your lungs began to work
and your heart began to beat in sync
with mine.
Your father left before you first words.
It was just you and me.
I taught you how to ride a bike,
but not how to practice empathy,
I suppose.
Was I a bad mother?
Because I refused to see the signs,
so bold and neon?
Was it the lack of a man in your life,
Or the fact that I taught you how to shoot a gun?
I was just trying to be your dad
and your mom.
I was just trying to teach you how to be a man,
but I guess I tried too hard.
I put the razor too close to your throat
and didn’t pick you up when you fell.
I’m sorry.

FIFTH PLACE WINNER

Eden Brown
A.W. Dreyfoos School of Arts, 12th Grade
Teacher, Brittany Rigdon

Perfectly Balancing
Strike a pose,
hold it.
Simple enough, just
Don’t be too loud
or you’re showing male privilege
Don’t be too soft
or you’re performing femininity
Don’t be desperate,
they’ll think you’re faking it
Don’t be happy,
They’ll question your transness
Be perfectly polite to those
Who are trying to kill you,
But don’t ask me to remember
Your name after you’ve said it
Your life is my choice, not yours
Sorry, I just don’t agree that you
Are a human being worthy of
respect, just my opinion, sorry
There, now you see? You’re one of
The Good Ones, perfectly balanced
by the opinions of a million people
Who absolutely hate you, bastards
Who will not determine my life, I am an avalanche
mountain
And a flickering candle-flame,
No one will own me, enthrall me to their will and chain me
Like Andromeda to be devoured by their
expectations
And I promise never again to be
Perfectly Balanced

We are grateful to Poets & Writers who have generously awarded a one-year subscription to all contest winners of the Annual High School Poetry Contest.
A Note Left on the Universe’s Front Porch

Thank you for listening to us sing through Sunday nights, wild and pitching, dipping amber-wing calls marred with tiredness and the sugar high of maple syrup. We know we’re off-key but we keep singing, hoping that someone, somewhere, will echo back. Thank you for almost-silence, hearing shared breaths, damp honeysuckle air that chirps with cicadas, shifting water, safety in closeness. This minute is enough, and the next is just as sweet. We will lie here until the doves awake and the sun burns like midnight oil.

Thank you for emptiness, the space in a sandbox, all the worlds we could only make with words and brushstrokes, telling us the sky is not a blanket but a map and we will follow it to its nebulous edges. We think we are stardust but forget that so is everything else. How defiant to be human in a universe of stars—to love and be loved more than the cosmos, to find goodness in the lightning chasing a thunderclap. Thank you for the handwritten beauty you tucked into each pocket of the earth, tangerine desert sand and arctic seafoam, for giving this world a thousand times over and showing us what we’ve always known. We are not alone.

Woman at Point Zero

Lie still, hold still, and don’t start a riot
Do as they say and be quiet
As a good girl should
As a good woman would
Spread your legs
Lie still
Don’t move
It’ll be over soon
Maybe then you’ll know the life of a woman

They can’t see the indifference in your eyes
Eyes which are black
The coldness of your heart
The way that they’ve left their mark
Never again will you view your body the same
Your body brings you pain
Yet, your body brings them pleasure
There is nothing to be gained
There is no measure

She’s trapped in her own body
Held prisoner
Them, the executioners
Her body, the poison
Enslaved without a reason
Oh, what a treason

Come on girl, won’t you get it right
Know your place
Paint your face
Well behaved
Stay awake, let them in
It’s nothing new, that’s the way it’s been.

Roots: Trapped in the Land of the Free

The sun’s flowers gaze over their cousins: children planted on the ground. Love radiates from clay skin. They’ve run away to the fields, hoping to find solace, but they got lost. Porcelain dolls play in children’s tan hands. The children wonder what they’re missing.

¿Quién soy? one of the boys asks, as he shifts a pale stone mask in his tree bark fingers. The soil screams. You are mine, but the sound is muffled.

¿Por qué no me parece a ellos? the other boy poses, hands shivering against the snow of a doll’s china skin. The soil whispers. My flowers grow in different shades.

¿Alguna vez seré como ellos? You will remain where you are rooted.
Voy a marchitarme donde no puedo crecer.

And in an instant, all that they are is blown away: Sonrisas to frowns. Conocido to forgotten. Inocencia to guilt. Amor to hate.