

Rosemary Dobson Prize

For an unpublished poem by an Australian poet, valued at \$3,000.

Winner: 'Always Sometimes Never'
by Andrew Slattery, NSW

Always Sometimes Never

Driving Grandad to the retirement home, I miss the turn-off
so have to go around and come back. I gave him a paper bag
with writing pads, envelopes (stamps already on them)
and a bag of blue pens. His large ears are parenthesis around his head.
Upon a time there was a once. The twentieth century
put a rift through your brain. The sky spits dead birds to the ground.
We climb the steps and I can almost hear a river running beneath your breath.

I walk behind you and notice your arms bruised like a forceps baby,
and the little mountains at the back of your head. If I stopped now,
you would go on without me, wandering, like a wheel breaking off a car
and roaming the world on its own. We're north of imagination now,
it's all just thunder and sliding glaciers. A nurse administers a needle
and the man turns away, the way a house closes its eyes when it's being renovated.
The world takes us back in installments, first your sight then your legs.

We each suffer our own mountain. Hearing-aides sit behind ears like commas.
The lost are lost and will always be. I keep meaning to study up
and find out what it is we have inside us. My fingers are ten wishes.
You keep old roads open by driving on the new ones. Back to the house
and the watertank is three storms full. The rugs become darker
each time our shadows pass over them. Glassbutton rain pins to the window.
Death will come quickly like a cat jumping onto the bed. All the dots

on the staves in the books inside the piano stool are huddling like grapes.
Stars are built on plates. I keep forgetting this isn't my world. On the table,
the retirement home brochures I tried to push as "a holiday."
It's been a strange world. I could lean against the bookcase
and a secret panel open up. The books said "get what you can, try to keep that,
and add to it if possible," and they searched hard for the word
to convey that what is gone is gone forever.

Not published here at the request of the author.