

Leslie Madsen-Brooks

First Place Adult

The tour guide speaks to ghost hunters

She wants to tell them about real things:

the buried cat, dead birds lobbed over standstone walls,

cloistered women, unrepentant penitents.

Prison handicrafts—legal and not.

Drop room, riots, fires. Larceny. Subterfuge.

Instead they ask: “Have *you* experienced

anything?” They mean *apparitions*,

lights flickering, doors closing, a sudden patch

of cold. Spectral phenomena. Visions.

I have seen, she says, prisoners return

—but in all their inked and wrinkled flesh.

Their fingers lightly rest on cell doors’

horizontal bars. They peer

into their past, recall the liberating scent

Of burning lead-based paint. They cock their heads

when correcting tour guides’ talks.

They laugh with grandchildren, fall silent

in the windblown yard. They appreciate roses.

They have no patience for those who would rather

have them be ghosts. They are haunted enough.

Eric Wallace

Second Place

Adult

PRISONER DETAIL at TABLE ROCK

Captive

in filthy creases, cratered skin,

there's only one escape—

assault the eyes,

plummet,

vanish into thirsty dirt,

sizzle with blood-rust, bitter spit and bile.

Who can tell such sweat from tears?

Down below,

we grimly build the pen,

block by block,

stone by stone.

Up here,

we rob the earth of eons,

rape the ancient rock

Here is no clemency.

The sun metes the harsh, relentless punishment,

burns our very souls.

A lucky few hoard rag bandanas soaked in dirty water,
welcome nooses coiled round fiery necks.

Muscles scream,
teeth grind grit, eyes fight flecks of sand.
hands fare the worst, murdered, crushed and bloodied.
Retribution has sharp edges.

Here are the rythms of pain:
lifting, straining, swinging, grunting, cursing.

Here are the leaden arcs of pick and sledge,
clunks of blunted shovel,
dull thuds, sharp cracks,
fracture lines and fractured lives.

Dust plumes curl, rise like smoke signals,
tell of our gray and gritty penitence.

This quarry rings with hollow feats,
echoes yearning, fierce regrets,
fears profuse and rough as scree.

But pity us not.
there is no state of innocence.
convict or citizen,

each and every person
surely, slowly builds
his own well-guarded prison.

Susan A. Hill
Honorable Mention
Adult

ONE EYE-Prisoner 814

One eye, the left,
Watches the periphery,
Low in anger, nearly closed,
Careful, wary,
Armed with a dark brow.
The second eye, the right,
Stares straight ahead,
Open wide, vulnerable,
Clear to faint smiles of light,
Cracking pleasure,
Cleansing the soul.
One ear, the left,
Attuned to the world,
Flares out,
Metal barred, harshly keyed,
Closed, locked,
Captured in barked thunder.
The second ear, the right,
Lies close, listening to
Petals opening,
Moons pulsing silver,
Elegance of falling dust,
Wings brushing the hem of freedom.