

Senior Secondary

RUNNER-UP

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My Mother Won't Let Me Write About Home

[A contrapuntal poem – to be read 3 ways; read the poem down on the left hand column first, then next the second poem on the right hand column, then finally the entire poem from left to right as an entire poem]

During 1987 - 1989 in Sri Lanka, followers of the JVP movement would terrorise people's homes, and threaten the population to shut all house-lights off by 6 PM

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| <p>Your country won't listen but we still hear the dead roil warm under the dirt humming to an old love song / we want to break we want to singe, soft as a hymn whispered circling above our heads / death-belled hum of vanishing / my mother asks, who are you going to blame / don't let there be a name to call or one we sew into our chests / a tiny fist inside us wounding our throats / <i>don't talk, don't say somewhere, someplace better</i> they climb to the surface, gasp – find us her body; give us a flame torch & lead us home, & yes, home as in the stain, as in the graves / <i>remember you're safe / stop talking about</i> , a country ritual / can hold us / can drag the warmth / out of us / only some can live in the dark names we passed between our mouths, limning all the ones we learnt to swallow, ones all tongue, light, all smoke & breath fogged against our</p> | <p>so I'll only say this once my mother, awake in the kitchen the black sky open under a sheet, she lights a match: threat, a plane; she is afraid to speak, afraid of blame; in this poem don't let there be a body found dumped in a lake quivering & alive, the scream only <i>a word</i> but the bad memories have to live so why not let them haunt this body? kneeling, all the dead names still knot inside of her single clot of blood on our unmarked <i>home</i> / there are only so many ways, we can mispronounce our grief before its beasts out in the night, culling them for <i>names</i> we lifted to our lips they kiss the ground, their heads rising our fangs, blood-bright & our only mirrors, windows</p> |
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Judge Comment:

Carefully chosen language, powerful imagery and flowing rhythm combine effortlessly to produce an outstanding piece of writing in a distinctive and technically brilliant format. Well done!