

Judge: David Poulsen

Winner:

Heroes by Emily Wang

There was so much I loved about this story—the meticulously detailed portrait of the eerie future earth in which the story takes place; the unrelenting suspense as the reader becomes aware that something terrible and perhaps wonderful is going to happen though we don't know what it is until the final words; the pace, a never-hurried yet steady march to the next layer of suspense—and the one after that; and the splendid use of language and sentence constructions that lend themselves perfectly to the dark, brooding tone of the piece. Most of all, I love that the writer has constructed an utterly believable story with a well-sculpted, credible main character who has to make a decision, and does--though neither he nor the reader can know for sure the outcome of that decision. What we have is a writer brave enough to craft an ending that leaves us gasping for air, a conclusion that doesn't cheat the reader (or the story) by tying up all the loose ends.

Honourable Mentions:

Inside the War by Rachel Hofford

Thank you Rachael for this poignant and beautifully crafted story of one person's battle against the challenges of OCD. The poetry is intense and wonderful, and displays a craftsman's gift for using metaphor to shine a light on this difficult topic. The subject of that poetry is dark and brooding yet hopeful. I read and re-read the piece and each time was moved by its message and most of all, by the courage of someone willing to take the reader "inside the war."

The First Steps by Kira Momotova

This present tense telling of Sundace Auburns' encounter with a classmate's tragedy and reaction to it, is wonderful storytelling on several levels. With tiny but memorable descriptive details--from the screech of a microphone to ornaments of scarlet and gold curling from the cafeteria overhead lights-- the writer paints word pictures that engrave themselves in the reader's mind. And the story itself is touching without being sentimental and hopeful without being mushy. It's a story that demands a second—and a third—reading.