

First Prize

Alice West, Surbiton High School

Deep Lane

I wrote a letter this morning
to Chasm, Back Garden, and childishly dreamed
it rode into the core of Earth's palpitations where I could see it no longer.

The hole, eight inches wide, still stands
among other newer vessels, the pulse of the heart in my chest.
I never knew where it led –

And once we brandished a twig
to probe, I suppose in curiosity
(I have always been determinedly curious,
popping questions like grapes swallowed whole).

There was always something and nothing in the hole
and when it stirred I would shriek and run into the house,
insides leaping to dizziness, cascading -

I remember making my own decrepit tunnels in sand dunes, running
my hands through the crumbling channels,
and later eating sandwiches with feet buried.

My mother said I was a *nightmare*
as she scrubbed my scalp bleeding brown, after I learnt
that chasing rabbits down rabbit holes
belongs only in stories.

I still remember the taste, wet grit beneath bitten fingernails,
wide eyes gazing into midnight earth, lost inside the grins without a face
who never knew why rabbit's hollow was so impenetrably real,
and always dreamed of where it might lead.

Deep Lane

by Mark Doty

Deep Lane

Trying to pick radishes before the rain begins,
though the verb's not right; *pick's* a quick and singular jab
of an action, when what's required

is to squat and peer among the ragged leaf-towns
for dome-tops risen dusty ruby or scarlet, eggshell or violet,

and then to grasp the whorl at the base and yank
upward, lightly, so the whole plant lifts
in a sweet-scented loose clump.

good mineral dirt falling from the white roots
and the accomplishment at their center: jewel-toned

Russian somehow, artful, varied, contradicting Leonardo,
who wrote that nature foes nothing unnecessary;
how would he account for this two-toned cylinder,

voguish red giving way, near the tip,
to a ghost-swath of muslin...

Then the first unsettling rumble
through the spatter
that's begun to muddy

then wash our hands, gathering body
until it suddenly seems to pass, like a wave, through the
clutches

of radishes we're holding,
and then we can feel it, in our own hands:
the force that rings the air,

drives through silt possibility from nothing into wet dirt-
speckled presence:
the two impossible bundles of thunder we're holding.