

'the prescription' Prizes in Creative Writing 2023

The Royal College of Physicians and Surgeons of Glasgow

JUDGES' PRIZE

The Competition received a number of entries inspired by Sankel's Dog Collar, a popular item in the College collections. They commended this poem, awarding it a special prize for the *'simplicity of language balanced with a skilful account of the relationship between Sankel and his audience...a heartfelt interpretation of human interaction with our animal friends.'*

Winner: Rieve Atkinson

Item: [Sankel's Dog Collar, c.1883. Ref: 203/77.41](#)

I am Sankel

He knew what to do,
had seen as a pup
a dancing bear rearing
up to its full height
and swaying there like
an awesome mountain
of shaggy brown hair,
then twirling slowly
a stately pirouette
for its stunned audience.

Now he too rose up
balanced on back legs,
turning sedately
to penny whistle
or mouth organ tune,
gathering smiles, claps,
trying to match the music
with careful movements
so they would put more
coins in his collar-box.

His legs ached with effort,
but in every single bar
the men surrounded him,
raised their glasses up
saluting Sankel's skill,
laughed as he balanced
a blue ball on his nose
then tossed it in the air
to catch in his mouth,
before it hit the floor.

He loved them; they him,
gave him bread and cheese,
arrowroot biscuits,
bought a handsome collar
engraved with his name,
staggered home to tell
their bairns of Sankel,

remembering him well
when waiting to be seen
at the Eye Infirmary.