



mosman
**Youth
awards
in literature**
2021

Winning Entries

A collection of award winning short stories and poems from the 2021 Mosman Youth Awards in Literature



winners

Primary Prose

First Prize	The Fishing Girl by Caitlin Ong
Second Prize	Hope by Violet Bloxsom
Highly Commended	Wolven War by Beau Booker
Commended	The Lonely Pine by Alice Surace

Junior Secondary Prose

First Prize	Cancer, Alphabetically by Chantilly Ho
Second Prize	Little Lyra Lane by Kaia Tham
Highly Commended	All That Glitters by Cate Atkinson
Commended	One year, eight months and eleven days by Poppy McKinnon

Senior Secondary Prose

First Prize	Dear friend By Matilda Meikle
Second Prize	Marigolds by Olivia Layton
Highly Commended	Ghost Girl by Sarah Cassidy
Commended	Her scones by Aileen Bak

Junior Secondary Poetry

First Prize	Athazagoraphobia by Jade Cummins
Second Prize	Frost by Imogen Robertson
Highly Commended	Two Trees by Ivy Hatherall
Commended	Hymns of self/hymns of other by Amber Li

Senior Secondary Poetry

First Prize	Motorcar by Isaac Elms
Second Prize	The Ship by Sunday Meikle
Highly Commended	Uniformity by Maeve Cox
Commended	The Place This Once Was by Ashley Hanna

As part of Mosman Council's Centenary Celebrations in 1993, the Mosman Youth Awards in Literature were inaugurated by Helen Egan, Marie Pitts and Cheryl Thomas, three friends who shared an interest and background in the education of young people.

These Awards, encouraging excellence in writing, have been made possible through profits from *Ferry to Mosman*, a book of black and white photographs and descriptive text, depicting the suburb of Mosman in the 1980s. This was a local bicentennial project. In recent years the Awards have been supported by sponsorships from local individuals and organisations.

The Ferry to Mosman Committee retired at the end of 2009 and handed over the organisation and running of the competition to Mosman Library Service.

Entry forms and information are available at the beginning of each school year through schools, libraries and Mosman Council's website at www.mosman.nsw.gov.au/youthawards

Two judging panels, whose members vary from year to year, generously give their time and expertise in deciding the winning entries. Certificates and monetary prizes are awarded at Presentation Night, held in August at the Mosman Youth Centre. All shortlisted entrants, families and friends are invited to attend.

Since its inauguration in 1993, this competition has become a fixture in Mosman Council's calendar of events. Entries are received from students attending local schools in Mosman, the North Shore, the Northern Beaches, as well as country regions in New South Wales. Its aim has always been to encourage young people to be interested in writing prose and poetry.

Acknowledgments

2021 Judges
Carol Jenkins, Deborah Kalin, Linda Lokhee, Zena Shapter and Michael Sharkey

2021 Sponsors
Lions Club of Mosman, Rotary Club of Mosman, Northern Beaches & Mosman College, Oracle Books Mosman and Constant Reader Bookshop.

This contest is organised by Mosman Library Service.



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The Fishing Girl

Caitlin Ong
Winner – First Prize
Primary Prose

Have you ever wondered what it must feel like to be satisfied? Truly satisfied with a warmth in one's belly, comforted by a hot meal, warm blankets, alive and well without a care in the world? Or is life a journey of cold winters, a lonely existence hunting for one's next source of sustenance to live one more day?

Adrift and floating on a worn and weathered plank, with the frayed nylon line loosely wrapped around my finger, I could almost taste the flesh of the cold fish, still salty from the sea water, oh how the stomach pains would go away after just one bite!

And then, the line tightened, pulling me forward and under...

I am a young fishing girl. We all fish now.

The year is 2090. Seventy years after mankind was plagued by a pandemic that altered our futures forever.

That virus was COVID-19 and whilst at first the nations of the world united to find vaccines and a cure, millions still succumbed to the ravaging effects of an incessant and merciless disease that would destroy and overwhelm every nation.

They thought they had won when the number dying lessened each day, but they were wrong. The virus mutated and zoonosis occurred. Chimpanzees and gorillas and monkeys were affected first, but then other land animals and eventually insects all succumbed to the new variants and strains. One by one every species on earth was consumed by the deadly COVID-22 strain of the virus and by 2025, as the bee population dwindled, so did the vegetable and plant life supply.

Only marine and aquatic species seemed to survive the deadly new strain that would cause the extinction of all the animals that were once on Noah's Ark.

The world declared war on itself as nations fought for muchly prized sea waters - the only source of food. International waters became battlegrounds as major super powers dispatched naval fleets to proclaim their sovereignty.

Swirling and caught in the undertow, I could feel my lungs gasp for air only to feel the rush of water enter instead.

I panic.

Icy cold-water swirls viciously around me. My vision blurs and the bubbles of air cluster around me. I fight harder under the immense influx of water that has now completely consumed me.

'Help...'

It was the golden locks of hair, shimmering, angel-like that comforted me first, followed by a pale, ghost-like face, long paddle-like ears that flipped and flowed with the water that made me feel strangely safe.

A hand, at least what I thought was one, six digits and webbed, placed an apparatus over my mouth.

Like a being raised from the dead, I gasped and a sudden rush of life returned.

Still floating deep under water I could see my rescuer clearer now. Two arms, two legs with flipper-like feet, clothed in brown skin-tight futuristic looking armour, coursing with sparks of electricity.

And then the pounding headache began, before a soothing voice resonates in my mind –

'We are the first inhabitants of this Earth. We are the guardians of the sea.'

I struggle to move and speak, and I could hear my own thoughts...

'Wait, who ... or rather what are you? How am I even hearing you?'

before the welcoming voice responds,

'Some know our species as the Myrdellions, in the past we have been called Myrsapiens, or Deep Dwellers of the Sea, by your kind that chance encountered us, but we have little time. Come.'

Coursing through the deep blue sea, the Myrdellion and I glide effortlessly at speed before coming to an immense, technologically advanced, underwater city, gloriously lit, coursing with Myrdellion life.

'This is my home. Your kind is destroying the sea and consuming all of the animals and fish in the sea – our friends and our families. Your kind needs to be stopped. We engineered a virus that we released to the land dwellers near the land mass you call China,'

"COVID-19", I thought...

The Myrdellion nodded, before continuing,

'But we didn't expect the virus to mutate and destroy other species as well, nor did we expect your kind to further destroy the oceans and its inhabitants as a result. Now we need to stop this before it is too late, and you will help us.'

'But I am just a mere fishing girl', I thought.

'Precisely – a murderer. Now give me your arm and let me show you', the Myrdellion insisted.

A sudden electrical shock from the Myrdellion incapacitates me.

I can still feel the cold water flow around me, but a warmth now surrounds me, something I had not felt for a very long time. The initial pain from the electrical shock seems to subside and consequently has released me from the pounding headache that had hindered me.

Opening my eyes once more, I could see a sea of red, I look around to see three or four Myrdellions around me, and looking further I could see the source of red around me... I was bleeding... and I couldn't move!

Panic stricken, I lose consciousness once again...

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"Are you ok?" a voice asks.

My vision is hazy. I look around aimlessly still dazed and heavily confused.

"Where am I? What did you do to me?" I manage to splutter out.

"You are on the U.S.S. Obama, a naval vessel. We just rescued you floating on our waters. You are trespassing on United States waters and we will charge you and send you back to your country of origin."
My rescuer responded tersely.

I gave half a nod. Comforted that I was at least trespassing and not dead.

Had it all been a hallucination or dream?

I start to move but feel immense pain from my ribs. My vision still affected, I feel my ribs only to be startled by a pair of gills where once the side of my ribs had been bony and smooth.

What did they do to me...?

Hope

Violet Bloxson
Winner – Second Prize
Primary Prose

A paw or two in your face, a squished tail, warm and cosy. That's what it must feel like to be in the middle of a dingo pup litter of seven at bedtime. The smallest dingo pup wriggled and twisted to find a comfortable spot as she settled down for the night. The night sky was like a vast black canvas filled with millions of tiny dots all shimmering, completing the painting. The enormous round moon glowed, lighting up the den. An icy breeze swept across the land but the pups were happy to be snuggled in a pile.

The dingo pups were 5 months old. The bigger ginger-coloured pups were rowdy and always fighting, nipping tails and rumbling together. The smallest dingo pup was different. Her fur was the colour of sand, her eyes sapphire blue and her ears big and fluffy. She was gentle, kind and a little bit shy but that never stopped her from exploring her home which she liked to do on her own.

The dingo family lived not far from Uluru in the Northern Territory. It was a fun place for a dingo pup. So many places to explore, so many creatures to chase and so many scrumptious foods to enjoy. The days were scorching hot, like being in an oven, but the nights were freezing cold. This was when mother dingo would leave the pups alone in the den so she could hunt for their breakfast.

The smallest dingo pup had just drifted off to sleep when she heard the noise. It was like a shuffling sound in the sand. But it was getting louder, closer. She knew she should stay in the den, this was mother dingo's rule when she was away hunting, but the smallest dingo pup was curious and just had to know what was out there. She rolled over, collapsing the puppy pile and quietly crept outside. It was freezing and she shivered all over.

Further and further she went, following the sound and sniffing the earth. She hadn't noticed she had passed the boab tree, which was the furthest point from the den the pups were allowed to go, a long time ago. Suddenly she realised she could no longer hear the shuffling sound. She also realised she had wandered too far and that she didn't know which direction was home. She was cold and scared so she followed a moonlit trail to the nearest patch of spinifex grass to make herself a bed for the night.

The smallest dingo pup squinted. The sun was coming up now, already warming the open plains. The sky was coming alive with swishes of pink, orange and blue. She rubbed her eyes and looked around. Nothing was familiar. Everything was strange. Mother dingo would be home by now calling everyone for breakfast, she thought. She missed her mischievous brothers and sisters - Daisy and Kalani, Sunni, Bandit, Hunter and even Dinki who especially liked to bite her bushy tail. She didn't know what to do and started to cry, tears leaking from her pretty eyes.

"Got ya" snarled the ranger who snatched up the smallest dingo pup. The ranger was tall, gruff and covered in tattoos. He smiled, not in a nice way, showing off grimy teeth and large black gaps where other teeth were missing. He shoved the smallest dingo pup into a tiny metal cage which he then flung into the back of his van, headed for the Open Plains Animal Shelter.

When they arrived at the shelter, the smallest dingo pup was moved to another cage, not much bigger than the first one. There was just enough room for a small scratchy bed, a bucket for water and an empty food bowl. The smallest dingo pup was terrified. She missed her family and was still adjusting to her new surroundings.

The Open Plains Animal Shelter was a lively environment. All sorts of native creatures in cages, some injured, some lost, just like the smallest dingo pup. There was Elli and Jelli, twin baby wallabies who had lost their mother due to poachers; Spike the Thorny Devil who had been found with a twig down his throat; Mr Montro the Bilby with a broken foot; Bluey the Blue Tongue Lizard who needed a bit of extra help these days; and Precious the Splendid Fairy Wren who was recovering from a broken wing.

While many people came through the shelter looking for animals to adopt, it seemed nobody wanted a dingo pup. Days, weeks and months passed and the smallest pup was beginning to think she might spend the rest of her days in her cramped cage. But when visitors arrived, she always sat up straight, crossed her paws and wished for the best.

It was just like any other day at the shelter and the smallest dingo pup had just finished her breakfast of dry, crunchy kibble. The sun was rising quickly and the smallest dingo pup was sitting quietly, watching the other animals. That's when she noticed a young girl with her Mum talking to the ranger. The girl had chocolate brown curls and bright green eyes and was wearing cute denim shorts and a singlet with a crocodile on the front. The smallest dingo pup's tail started to flap up and down and her heart started to race as she noticed the girl looking her way.

"Mum, look, they have a dingo pup! Can I meet her?" the girl gasped. She excitedly ran over to the smallest dingo pup, her fingers reaching through the cage. The girl knew immediately she was going to take the smallest dingo pup home.

"Now, what shall I call you?", the girl whispered as she gently picked up and cuddled the smallest dingo pup who was reaching up to lick her face, "I know, I will call you Hope".

Wolven War

Beau Booker
Winner – Highly Commended
Primary Prose

Prologue

A mother wolf limped across the open plain with a pendulous figure hanging from her mouth and she looked around at the dreadful scene. It was scorched with fire and frozen with ice because of the battle that had taken place earlier that night. Wolves bodies were strewn across the earth, trees were burnt, frozen and some still aflame. Blood was streaming down her back and her vision was clouding. But hope was not lost. Her pup was still alive.

She lay her pup down and said to her "Lupa. Run. Live your own life, run and never look back." The little pup looked up at her in terror. "But Ma!" she cried "I'm not a real wolf yet." "Shhh my little one." She replied "I named you Lupa for that means wolf. You were a wolf as soon as I birthed you." Lupa's mother started to cough and wheeze. "Run Lupa, you know how to hunt so use that skill." her mother started coughing again. "You still have a life my little one, you are the last of the Aurorasky pack, the part of the Froststar and Scorchstar pack that did not divide." Lupa's mother whispered "You are of noble blood. Blood of fire and ice." And with that, the blood running down her fur eased and her mother gave her last howl and died.

It had been moons since Lupa's mother had perished, leaving Lupa on her own. She was heading south to the Moonrise territory to seek refuge. Of all the packs, the Moonrise were the most hospitable. Their leader, Alpha Mooncrescent, and his wife, Lady Nebula, led their pack wisely. They were not involved in the War of Flame and Frost. They would take in a pup from the Aurorasky Pack.

Lupa could smell their scent close. As Lupa was walking she heard a rustle in the bushes beside her. Lupa got down low, prepared to pounce, *one step at a time* she thought and then . . . she pounced and landed on a jackalope! The two tumbled, landing in a small clearing. The clearing's sides rose up into the forest like a small pit. There was a small pond with blooming white lilies. Coy swam in the pond occasionally breaking the surface otherwise the water was like a flat piece of glass. Around her were stone pillars and slabs with words engraved on them. Although lichen and moss were growing up the stones she could still read the words clearly.

*Flame and Frost of wolven land,
Ripped apart by greed's dark hand.
Great Wolf come forth of borealis lights,
Shall light the way in darkest night.*

Lupa threw back her head and howled. Above her the Aurora Lights blazed like ghostly fire, swirling down from the heavens to dance around her. Lupa's fur floated up. Suddenly the light disappeared, her fur fell back down. But she felt something was not right, some of the light had not faded. She looked around and saw white and blue fire trickling down the sides of the clearing like molten lava. Then there were howls. *Froststar Pack*. The fire was Pyronitrogen, a rare skill of the Froststar Clan. It was not good news that they had Pyrofroster. Lupa saw wolves at the top of the clearing, with tinted blue fur and malevolent grey eyes.

"A little lone pup," The leader crooned, "What are you doing out here by yourself?" Lupa was silent glaring defiantly "Kill her" the female wolf said, her voice turning menacing, "Bring out the Squallers." Two large wolves came out of the group and howled into the air. Suddenly the air rippled, gusts of sharp, cold wind started blowing, dark clouds assembled and a blizzard blasted down. The wolves advanced. The snowstorm intensified. All they could see were Lupa's eyes glowing like the Aurora Lights and then she was gone.

Lupa awoke in a wide open plain. It was the Plain of the Moon, the most ancient place in all the territories. With a full moon rising all wolves would be more powerful under its light. The Froststar pack emerged out of the snow covered wood on the far side of the plain. The Scorchstar pack came out of the forest of Neverburn trees. They were smoke black wolves with gleaming yellow fangs and red eyes that had an evil intelligence in them. Lupa realized her destiny. She had to stop the final conflict. Suddenly her eyes glowed white and she spoke in an ancient voice.

*Frost and Flame shall scorch and chill until each one gives a final cry,
The Great Wolf of the Borealis sky
Shall stop the storm of flame and frost before each one will howl and die.
From fire and ice this wolf will birth,
When the Great War has done its worth
Then awaken shall the earth,
The Great Wolf is of Alpha hime,
And shall train heroes in great years time.*

Lupa was the Great Wolf of the prophecy. Froststar knew it. Suddenly all the wolves were charging at Lupa. The packs had chosen sides, Moonrise had allied with Froststar and Nightfall had joined forces with Scorchstar. Lupa fought through wave after wave of wolves, but even she was not powerful enough to fight all four packs. As she fought she slew many wolves but they began to overwhelm her. Her coat was stained as red as fire and her tail was torn. Then out of the forest slunk other lone wolves. Like Lupa their parents had died in the war. They were Aurorasky wolves like Lupa. They had come to her aid when she needed them most. The prophecy bound all lone wolves together in times of peril. Although they numbered only twenty and some were still juveniles, they fought like hell unleashed. When the battle ended, many wolves were slain. Froststar and Scorchstar fled to lands beyond civilization. Lupa became the Alpha of the packs unifying them. Lupa fulfilled the prophecy of the Great Wolf.

The Lonely Pine

Alice Surace

Winner – Commended

Primary Prose

From small seeds, great things may grow. It is this simple first step that initiates the plant cycle of life. The evolution of modern trees has taken thousands of years but is it still possible to take a step back in time. There is the existence of an ancient forest in the Australian Blue Mountains which has remained hidden almost for eternity in an isolated Box Canyon with jagged rugged walls that stretch upwards to the horizon. This gigantic gorge was the result of millions of years of sedimentation that had been laid down in tortuous layers of brilliant crimson interspaced between rustic cream sandstone and wavelike copper threads. A river of rushing water would have twisted in a snake like fashion slow carving this cavity in rock. Centuries of deposition provided the fertile earth to nourish life in the undergrowth. Some canyons are forbidding and inaccessible, this is one of them. Shielded within this valley is an exquisite jade green pine canopy, a microcosm of the past that has been held in a suspension of time for 150 million years, until now. This silence place held a lonely yet peaceful existence. A chance finding had briefly opened the doorway to this secret garden of a bygone era, but thankfully common sense has prevailed and the exact location in recent times has remained sensibly shielded from the curious glances of prying human eyes.

This magnificent ecosystem and its natural terrain sadly could almost have fallen victim to the raging anger of a bushfire started as a bolt of lightning which struck the undergrowth. An act of an Angry Earth suffering a fever that is growing in warmth. In an instant there was created that acrid smell of danger in the air. The wind whispering its warning of what was to come ahead. A fire so great and furious it raged for many months, violent, hostile angry flames of demonic red and brilliant orange. An inferno devouring all it its path, hungry and with little mercy for the precious nature of life. This fire travelled many kilometres transforming resistance to its path to powdery fragments of dull grey ash. The echoes of the lashing flames of this fire could be heard licking the perimeter of the rim of this hidden canyon that had flourished since the reign of the dinosaurs. But through an act of fate this canyon and its precious flora was preserved. The fortuitous act of discovery of this exquisite canyon a few years prior had afforded it humanities protection from the ravages of the relentless flames.

This menacing threat of Nature's wrath through her flaming breath was a lasting threat. This canopy chronicling creation needed protection to ensure its secrets would be safe. In this ancient forest it is the simple pinecones that allows the wind to pollinate the forest floor. A sapling pinecone could be germinated and nourished as a beacon of hope to be transplanted outside this forest. A desire now existed to carefully propagate these magnificent plants further afield to create biodiversity and to safeguard them from extinction.

A new pine sapling can be a creature of habit. Once planted and anchored in soil there is a tendency to stay put, fixed in one place to Mother Earth. From the germination of a seedling there is an element of surprise on that fateful day when the sapling initially pierces through the soil to experience its first nurturing rays of the gentle sun. There exists hope in each plant for a safe respectful environment to become its permanent home. Once the main trunk starts to grow the branches then multiply creating form with various pines needles providing character topped with a multilayered pinecone at the tip. From the isolation of the lonely Box Canyon to a new existence for the next generation planted there is a need for a sapling to grow a sense of this connection to its new home. Certainly, appreciating the purpose of one's existence would particularly valuable if your lifespan would likely exceed 1000 years as your slow skyward growth continues to be over 50 metres high. A tall tree's existence could symbolise a shrine of remembrance, but to what.

Daily watering of the young tree is a gratefully welcomed relief as the days turned to months and roll into years. As a curious transplanted pine tree grows in isolation it has much time to continue to contemplate its sense of purpose. After many years around the foundation of one noteworthy growing pine, there appeared a ring of brilliant Red Flanders poppies cradling its base, providing a sense of companionship, however small. This poppy population was eventually joined by an array of aromatic rosemary bushes that could almost be heard chattering in the breeze.

Then one fateful day, April 25th to be exact, at the cusp of dawn, piercing the eery silence a bugler could be heard echoing the Last Post from the hills above the Botanical Peace Park where this pine sapling had been planted many years ago. This action would provide meaning to this isolated trees existence, at last. There is the legend of the Lone Pine, that solitary tree on the Gallipoli Peninsula in Turkey, which marked the Battle of the Lone Pine in 1915 to ponder. A crowd was now gathering around this living monument to the fallen, a Lone Wollemi Pine. Always there, always will be, a survivor. Now it was no longer a Lonely Pine, but a Majestic Tall Tree, lovingly cultivated and saved from extinction. A fitting and lasting memorial to the Australian and New Zealand soldiers who fought in the battle of Gallipoli and in the other Great Wars. A whisper of the Ode of Remembrance was heard to be resonating from the crowd gathered at the tree base by Candlelight as they marvelled in awe at the unique beauty of this timeless Wollemi Pine.

Cancer, Alphabetically

Chantilly Ho
Winner – First Prize
Junior Secondary Prose

A- Auburn hospital. Sanitized, cold, and pale, like someone had leached the life out of it. Everyone there was so nice to me, and yet I hated it. Your visits were the best part of my day.

B- Beanies. That time that I lost my favourite purple beanie and you went all the way to Paramatta to get me a new one. I will be wearing that beanie till the day I die.

C- Chemotherapy. It hurts. I've long gotten used to the sharp jab of the needle, the stuff spreading through me. But I hate the fact that I rely on that to squeeze a little more life into me.

D- Death. I'm going to die, Kat. No matter what those doctors say about a cure – I'm going to die. I probably won't even live long enough to watch the second season of Outer Banks.

E- Empty. I feel so empty and it's not just because of the chemo sucking my energy away. It's because I know there is only enough life left in me to keep my heart beating.

F- Friends. Thank you for being my only friend, and always being there for me. I'm sorry that I held you back from getting new ones. I know that you rejected Lilac's birthday invite to spend the day with me.

G- Guardian angel. I will come back as your guardian angel. I will haunt you, and watch your every move. Jokes! But not really, so you better stop crying.

H- Highschool. I never thought I would say this, but I want Highschool. It's the time where you're supposed to make friends for life, have so many first experiences, and become an adult.

I- Iceberg. Sometimes I feel like a piece of ice that has split from the big iceberg of humanity. I spend my days quarantined in a room, the only human interaction I get with nurses and doctors.

J- Jacaranda. When I told you that my favourite thing was Jacaranda, you snipped off your neighbour's Jacaranda branches and placed them all around my hospital room. I was wrong then. My favourite thing was you.

K- Karma. Sometimes I wondered if I got cancer because I did something bad. Like that time when I didn't have enough money to buy that necklace, so I took it. Or when I slapped that kid for hogging the swing....

L- Last words. These are my last words to you, Kat. You are my best friend and I love you so much. You were always there for me even when I couldn't, and I will never forget that.

M- Memories. The one thing that is infinite in this world is the amount of joy shared between us both, entrapped in our memories together like a mammoth fossilised in ice.

N- Number. You know how you complained that you were ever only going to be known as a number; your bank account, a member of some club, your computer's IP address. Well you better go out there and become someone who is not just remembered by their number but for the good that they did.

O- Operation. After my first operation, it was you who had waited 6 hours for me to wake up, not anyone else.

P- Piano. That darn instrument that I've been playing since I could talk. I soon became one of the best pianists in the state – and I did that so I could become your accompanist and stay by your side forever.

Q- Quill. I can still recall the day you started collecting quills and everyone said it was just another hobby you would soon drop. Who knew that you would have 53 quills? That's the same determination you showed when you were there for me, Kat.

R- RATS. I had just started chemo, and I still performed in the musical. At the end when a chunk of my hair fell out, everyone was silent. I had never felt as bad as I did then, but somehow this is my foremost memory.

S- Sixteen. I must have had the lamest birthday in Australia. No party, no friends – just a pile of used books and you. When you turn 16 you're supposed to have a huge celebration; I can only ever imagine.

T- Time. Every day I lie in my bed, watching my sad life drain away. The clock next to me, ticking seconds away that I'll never get back. So Kat, don't waste your life away anymore.

U- University. I know that you will get into any university you want, and so you better do that. Chase your dreams. Do what I couldn't do and live a happy, long, fulfilling life.

V- Vienna. When we were 6, we planned our trip to Vienna. You were going to sing in the Vienna State opera, and I was going to accompany you. We should do that sometime.

W- Whales. Remember that time we went to watch whales? They seemed so free and happy, just spinning and leaping out of the water like an Olympic gymnast. In my next life, I want to be a whale, the whole ocean to myself.

X- Xavier. That cute boy that we liked in junior school – I heard he's at your highschool now. Talk to him; you guys are the perfect match for each other. At least, do it for my sake.

Y- Yoghurt wars. When I first got diagnosed, you started putting yoghurt everywhere to cheer me up. In my bed, under my dinner, even in the shower head. It's my favourite memory and you made me so happy then.

Z- Zumba. When doctors recommended that I do some Zumba to become fitter, it was so embarrassing to enter the classroom with my EKG machine and IV drip. You decided to buy one off ebay and join my class with those sticky-taped to your arm, so I wouldn't hide in the corner the whole lesson.

Love, B.

Little Lyra Lane

Kaia Tham
Winner – Second Prize
Junior Secondary Prose

Some say that it was loneliness that killed little Lyra Lane. Others whisper that it was grief that murdered her. And still some yet insist that Miss Lane is perfectly fine. But all of them know the truth. All of them elbow it away for the fear of feeling guilty. But they all know. They all know that they killed little Lyra Lane.

Lyra used to come to school in a half-mask, one side of her face smooth flesh, the other flowing swans melting into moonlight. Now, she wears nothing to hide herself, swapping twirling swans for melted rubbery red skin. The younger children scream when they see her. Part of me wonders if she delights in their pain. Hers was way worse, after all.

On the night of the accident, the emergency services searched the house. No bodies were found. But as if she was a cup of coffee, a monster drank the best of her that night, leaving only the cold dregs of her behind. The police didn't find the monster either. Nor did the ambulance or the firefighters. The ignorant say that it's because there never was a monster. I say it's because it escaped.

Once upon a time, in a nice storybook, she was near the top of her class. But her desire to fight, to push herself, died on June 17th. Like the rest of her, it was burnt beyond repair. But how can teachers reprimand her for it? How can they look her in her one good eye and not see the pulpy sooty red mess the other is? They can't. They give her the grades her work demands, but no action has yet been taken to improve them. When she doesn't turn up to one class or another, we all turn a blind eye. You don't prod at the dead.

As for me, I'm content just watching her. Watching as her classmates grow, as friend groups fall apart, as fights break out and new relationships form. Watching while Lyra gnaws at her cheese sandwich, the bread crummy and the cheese cheap. Just the way she likes it.

It was times like this when I hated myself, a deep bone hatred that snakes its way into the core of my being. But I can't help it, can't change the monster I am. She's just a girl. But then again, I'd taken younger before. But it was people like these, the ones with a full life sprawling a head of them that are the hardest to steal. But it's not my story, is it? It's Lyra's.

The town's rapt curiosity in her slowly deteriorated, just like the interest of a bully that gets no response from its victim. They found better things to focus on, more mysteries to create rumours over. Finally, they threw Lyra aside and for a second, she caught her breath. When the clouds moved away, she flourished under the sunlight of every small smile, the jagged pieces of her fractured soul meshing together. It wasn't perfect, it would never be pretty, not again, but maybe with time, it would heal.

I remember the next day at school, staring at her through the window of a classroom. She coughed, wheezing a little, but didn't look at me, never looked at me. A girl on her right stopped, trying to help her. She didn't understand. Of course, she didn't. Lyra hadn't told anyone about me yet.

Slowly, I crept closer to her, along with the other girls who were slowly flocking to her once empty table. I sat a few benches over from her and watched as a conversation I couldn't hear floated to her ears. She smiled and a tear fell from the corner of my eye. I'd never seen her smile before.

It was a month later that I heard her laugh, I was close enough to hear the rough, charred sound. It was obvious what the smoke and fire of June 17th had done to her vocal cords. But none of her new friends gave thought to whether that was where the damage ended.

On a day of grade sport, I'd watched as her friends pulled her up from her usual bench on the side. Teachers had long given up trying to get her to join in with their sport. But today? Today, she let them drag her away into the fun. Dutifully, I stepped behind her, morphing into her shadow as she ran across the grass. Her friends had cheered her on, watched as her naturally athletic body sprinted across the field, trying to outrun a monster behind her. What they didn't see was how she panted when she reached the other side. What they didn't see was how she gulped for air as if she couldn't get enough. Because she couldn't get enough. No one saw that but me.

It was another week before I sat next to her. Her warmth leaked slowly into my cold side. Or rather, my cold leaked slowly into her warm side. She'd turned to me, looked into the bottomless pits of my eyes. *I'm ready* she'd whispered. A tear from either eye had slid down her pale cheeks. One tear washed a smooth track down her face. The other was caught in a maze of scars.

I swept away the tear from the beautiful side of her face, my touch leaving a trail of ash. She didn't flinch, her gaze didn't waver. I looked into her eyes and I saw something I'd never seen in my trials before. A spark. A spark of life and hope and happiness and everything I was about to steal. *No, you're not* I'd whispered back. *No, you're not.*

Slowly I crept away from her, the ash on her cheek soaking into her skin. A reminder of the promise that I would return one day. That I would cover the rest of her in ash, one day. One day, but not today.

All That Glitters

Cate Atkinson
Winner – Highly Commended
Junior Secondary Prose

*All that glitters is not gold,
The Radium Girls, a truth untold.*

March 3, 1920:

I rise from my bed, awakening to a new day. As I stretch my dainty fingers over my head and reach for my glowing dress, I hear the familiar sounds of my colleagues rising before the sun rises. I waltz downstairs, ready for another day of painting and glowing.

I enter The Factory and meet with my fellow Shining Girls. We begin work, setting into the rhythm that has been my life for the past year.

Swish, swish, dip, lick. The routine etched out so clearly is heard echoing around the hollow room. The minuscule numbers on the watches and dials glow effervescently around the room, tiny flickers in the daylight. My luck is far from terrible, I am blessed with such a lucky job. Daily, my life is filled with the best healing element in the world, that I digest daily. I wear my best dresses to work, so that I'll glow when I wear them. What could go wrong? My life is flawless.

November 2, 1925:

I rise from my bed, as dawn stretches her ruby fingers over the quiet land and with a prolonged groan, walk to the bathroom. My body aches and groans, and I am still yet to find why. I collapse to the cold floor and end up dragging myself to the bathroom. "Someone help me" I think. These perpetual pains; a burden, from an unknown source, immobilise me. Where are they from? I eventually reach the bathroom and lift my weak body onto the frigid wooden stool. I investigate myself in the musty mirror, reflecting on my time at The Factory.

I gaze sadly at my reflection in the mirror. The eerie glow around my body, a forgotten source of beauty, that evolved into pain. I remember that first day, the first question I asked of many: "Was it safe? They assured me it was fine. Beneficial even. How they had twisted their words, and how I had listened, succumbing to the patriotic promise of helping the war efforts and being paid a large sum. How I failed to notice the other workers, men wearing clanky suits with special helmets; protected, unlike us. I remember that day, the day when she died. The day when they convinced me it was fine and died a natural death. I never questioned it. My life was perfect. I was working next to a source of beauty and health, my body literally glowed, and I was one of the Shining Girls. One day the truth became clear, much clearer than the tornado of lies encompassing me.

I stare intently at my teeth, painted with that everlasting glow. The glow surrounding all my possessions. Around my hairbrush. My work dresses. My life. The glow I created.

It had been fun at first. The flirting with boys, the glowing teeth that they were so susceptible to. Then the aches began. I thought it was just me, but no. My best friend too. Mollie.

The poignant memories of that day floods over me, as I stare at myself in the mirror. I am transported back to that fateful day.

"Mollie! Wake up!" I call as I scamper to her bed to wake her up. Her disappearance shocks me, and waves of questions wash over me.

"Mollie? Where are you?" As I hurry through the barren house, a memory plays like a record in my mind. I stop in my rushed tracks.

Mollie, yesterday, not feeling well. Her, passing out on the factory floor. Her aching tooth, falling out which led to another, dropping off like flies. Please no. A hurried note, thrown on the bed, informed me she was going to the doctors, and that nothing was wrong. We were working with radium; we should be in peak condition. Shouldn't we?

Then she died. I then realised the lies I had drowned in and began to speak out against this injustice.

Radium had taken the world by storm, an element that had been successful in the treatment of cancer; a miraculous discovery. I remember seeing the words radium infused on everyday things, from toothpaste to water. How we were wrong.

August 22, 1927:

I watch the women waltz to the entrance, ready to begin their profitable job.

"Stop! Radium kills you. It destroys you from the inside out!" I shout helplessly at the naïve girls. It's useless. Their minds are stuck in this twisted false hope of glowing liquid gold.

After my visit back to The Factory, I journey to the city, to speak to yet another lawyer. Will this one accept my case?

I pile my folders onto the desk, and with a sigh, slump into the wooden chair opposite him. My time is running out. I glance across at him. He looks amicable enough. Stretching his hand across the mahogany wood table, I greet him with a grateful smile, and I slowly tell my story.

"My name is Grace Fryer, and I worked in a U.S Radium Corp dial painting factory. Daily, we digested and were exposed to radium, resulting in the many pains that the doctors diagnosed as multiple sclerosis, though they knew the truth. How could they deceive us? Day after day, the labour took an irreversible toll. We were dying by the day. Radium was replacing calcium in us, burning us from the inside out. The company is postponing trial after trial, hoping we would die before the next."

I finish my story, and as I remember, tears sting my weary eyes. This is my last option.

"Will you take my case?" I plead.

Two words. My heart melts, a burden raised from my dying shoulders.

"I will." His comforting smile, the best thing I've seen in years. Hope floods through me. Maybe it isn't too late.

*All that glitters is not gold,
The Radium Girls, the truth unfolds.*

One year, eight months and eleven days

Poppy McKinnon
Winner – Commended
Junior Secondary Prose

The tall rusty fence surrounds my home. My fake home. It's not home to me and it never will be. Lines for hours, I just want my food. They told us we would be comfortable, they told us we would have beds, clean clothes and buckets and buckets of water. I haven't had a shower in months. I miss the cold water running down my spine, the bar of hard soap slipping out of my hands. My clothes are dirty and haven't been washed since I left home. I feel disgusting, the dirt is piling up. The only water we get is to drink. We were meant to have more. They told us we would have MORE.

Lies. So many lies. Lies told by my family to keep me safe. Lies from the soldiers to get me places. Lies from my people to keep me moving so we wouldn't get caught. The lies they have told us...

'There will be water.'

'Water'?!'

'Buckets and buckets of water are waiting for us.'

We shouted with joy, walking up the dry pathway, dust in our lungs. That horrible lie that kept us going.

When we were attacked we were told to pack two small things we wanted to keep, they couldn't be too heavy otherwise they would weigh us down. I chose my small glass elephant and the bracelet I was given for my 8th birthday.

My family was in the middle of the people fleeing, so when someone died in front of us, we would always see them. There were so many people and we didn't have time to stop and pray. I would block my little brother's eyes and make sure he couldn't see the blood. Seeing the flies and other animals ripping open the skin. Each night my brother and I would pray for the people who passed away. I think the only thing that kept me going was to not end up like them. Dead, on the floor, other families gasping in horror as they tried to avoid stepping on me. My family, devastated, then ending up dead as well because they wanted revenge. No, I had to keep going.

My mother's beautiful red dress was all ripped and tattered. I remember that she put her favourite dress on so that my brother and I wouldn't worry. We knew she loved that dress and she would do everything and anything to keep it perfect. It's not perfect anymore. The whole time we were walking I was reminding myself to follow the red dress. My brother and I would repeat it. The red dress, the red dress, the red dress.

Hunger, so much hunger. I didn't know anyone could feel this hungry. Days we went with no food. The empty pit in my stomach kept growing and I just couldn't keep walking. My dad would tell me not to give up. He was working so hard just to keep us alive and I didn't want to disappoint.

My shoes were breaking, the black tacky leather peeling as we walked and walked and walked. Up the hills with no shade for days. I remember my mother carrying our food on her head and I remember seeing the food quickly disappearing as the days went by.

When we got to the camp I still hadn't processed that I had fled my home. All the memories I had made. 13 years of happiness to be wrecked by bombs and cold-hearted people. All my friends out in the world spread apart from their families. Maybe they are happy, maybe they are starving, maybe they have fled to another country and they are trapped in a camp just like me but maybe they are laying on the dusty floor that was blown up by a bomb, dark, red blood smeared all over their bodies maybe their families are crying every night because they just want their daughter back, maybe they are watching me from up above as I cry wanting everything to be reversed.

One year, eight months and eleven days I stayed in that camp. One year, eight months and eleven days I was starved. One year, eight months and eleven days I cried myself to sleep, I gave my brother the food I couldn't eat because I would always throw up, I had to stay strong.

When my family was let out it was so hard to stay focused in school. It's hard to concentrate when all you can think about is the yelling. So much yelling.

I was cleaning out my room when I saw a small bag of things. The bag had my small glass elephant, my bracelet and the things that my family brought from Iran. I put on my bracelet and held the elephant tight in my hands. Tears in my eyes, I yell for my brother. He runs in here because he knows how scared I get even though we are safe. When he came in, he saw me on the floor, he rushed to where I was sitting and held me in his arms. He shouldn't have to do this to me. I'm older and I should be protecting him. He sees that I'm holding my elephant and tries to get me to breathe. He knows what is going to happen next. He holds my hands tight because he is trying to calm me down but once I'm under, I can't come back.

That night, I dreamt of my mother and her red dress. How she told me everything would be okay. I woke up sweating, I ran to my draws, grabbed my small glass elephant and held it tight in my hands. Rocking back and forth I was mumbling the red dress. I said it again and again and again until I was yelling. THE RED DRESS.

Dear friend

Matilda Meikle
Winner – First Prize
Senior Secondary Prose

Dear friend (if that's what I should call you),

You know that comfortable silence? Like, the hush before a movie starts in the cinema. Or, when you run out of conversation, but the quiet says more than words could.

I first felt it lying on my bed that day. I was staring up at the ceiling, tracing the lines of shadows cast across my room, feeling mad at you and *him* for everything you've done. Just this passionate rage that burned inside me, ripping every other emotion to pieces.

Suddenly,

I noticed how still it was.

How completely calm and peaceful everything had become. How the only sound was the wind against the window.

You should have been there.

I guess I'm telling you this because, in that moment, my anger dissolved. And all I felt was the emptiness you've left. Because I miss you.

I remember the day we met. It was the first morning back at school, and our entire year group was shuffling into the hall. I had no idea who to sit with, so I took the chair in the back row which had the least amount of gum on it.

Then you came in. You were wearing that bright red jumper – the one you chew the sleeves of when you get nervous – and you sat down next to me with a goofy smile. You didn't even say anything. You didn't need to.

When the principal finally got to the microphone, hobbling slowly across the stage in his crumpled suit, he spoke slowly. Painfully...

"Welcome to another brilliant year of school!"

which I found funny for two reasons.

1. He had a spitting problem, so the front row were already ducking for cover.
2. He had to take a breath after the first sentence. He'd already exhausted himself.

Of course, you had the exact same thought, and leaned over to tell me, your breath hot against my ear.

"Wow. And I thought you couldn't ruin a speech in the first line."

When I snorted with laughter, the people around us turned to stare, which made you laugh.

That was the first time I'd ever been kicked out of an assembly.

I guess what I'm trying to say is that you may not have been the best influence, but that's what made us so good.

Like, those long drives where you blasted music so loud, and rolled down the windows, and I felt like I could actually be free. Or when I brought over midnight coffees so you could finish the assessment you'd forgotten to start.

They say

Opposites

Attract...

I don't exactly remember where we went wrong.

Maybe it was when you told me you liked *him*, and suddenly everything was about trying to let him know you existed.

Or when you finally started dating, and I didn't get to see you anymore. Because you were always busy. I'd ask to hang out, and you'd tell me you were studying (which was clearly a lie).

Then I'd spot you at our favourite Chinese restaurant with him.

At first I was hurt. It was a quiet sort of hurt that I pretended wasn't there. Especially when you were around. Sometimes, I could almost convince myself I was making it up. But I couldn't stop it getting bigger, turning bitter.

I promise, I tried to suppress it – but it was like a wildfire. Burning out of control.

When you got in the car that day, only one thought was running through my head.

Liar

Liar

Liar

Liar

Liar

Liar. I guess you noticed. I guess I didn't try to hide it.

I guess that's why we fought.

Every word I spat at you made me feel worse – sad, guilty, wrong. I wanted to cut you the way you'd cut me. Truthfully, I don't even remember the whole thing.

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I know they say that “seeing red” is a cliché, that it never actually happens. But it happened to me while we sat in that car, yelling, screaming.

Hurting.

And when it was all over, when you’d stormed off and I’d finally stopped shaking, I ended up on my bed. Staring at the shadows on the ceiling.

When the calm – the comfortable silence – washed over everything.

It’s midnight now, and I don’t even know if you’ve read this far, but I wanted to tell you that I miss you. I know we can fix this.

Maybe we can go to the Chinese restaurant and talk, or we could ditch maths and walk around the city.

Or just drive, and sit in silence, and let it say everything we can’t.

Marigolds

Olivia Layton
Winner – Second Prize
Senior Secondary Prose

Mr James Hindley was by no means the perfect husband, but he loved his wife very much and, to her, that mattered more than anything. Perhaps he could be quick to anger, or forget a birthday here and there, but he always showed her how very sorry he was when he had calmed.

One such occasion, he brought her flowers – a bunch of golden marigolds after missing an important dinner or some such thing. She gasped when she saw them, the petals precisely positioned in place by some tender loving hand. She insisted he was too kind, that there was no need for such a gesture when she had already forgiven him, knowing he had not meant to hurt her. But he merely laughed and kissed her gently, proclaiming a man should never leave his wife angry.

The children gazed in wonder at the blossoms, Ivy insisting on carrying them, the water sloshing in the vase as she half-ran to the dining table. Leo's chubby fingers reached towards the stems, sneezing when he drew too close and the pollen tickled his nose. All marriages had highs and lows, and this was most certainly a high – the children were laughing and James was glowing as he beamed serenely at his family. The best of times always managed to outweigh the worst.

The first thing that reached her was the sound, the mumble of curses and the fumbling of the doorknob – he finally shoved the door open, flicking the bedroom light on. She opened her eyes reluctantly; any hope of pretending to be asleep lost as he slumped into bed.

The smell of whiskey rolled off him in waves, almost enough to cover the sticky sweet scent of roses that whispered of deviation and betrayal. There was a lavender smudge just above his collar, the remnants off a kiss from far younger lips. After all, no woman her age would wear purple lipstick.

A braver woman may have argued, demanded to know where he'd been and why he stunk of sex. A stronger woman may have screamed, accused him of all the things she had ignored until the whole street could hear of his crimes. But she was neither of those things – and she would not want to wake the children anyhow. So instead, she watched as his chest rose and fell, blinking away the tears that pricked at her eyes. In the harsh fluorescent light, his radiance was lost, a middle-aged man who was wearing shoes in bed lying in his place. What a fool she was!

To allow the baby to distract her from her matrimonial duties, allow him to cast his light on another. She swore to herself that she would not lose his glow again. It had been a stroke of genius, this plan of hers – hosting a family dinner, seeing all their parents and siblings gathered. He was always more affectionate once the family were around. It reminded him of why he had settled down in the first place. There would be no visits to his woman tonight.

His voice cut through her contentment, calling out to ask where the beers were. The blood drained from her face. In her haste, she had forgotten to replenish the beers; the one thing required at every dinner, and the one thing that would keep his tempests at bay.

He strode over to her now, his face hardening as she remained silent. He towered over her, looking down as he repeated his question. She murmured an apology, but the mistake had been made, his nostrils flaring as he opened his mouth and began – but his mother cut him off. The woman organised this all in a day, she said, and you can hardly blame her for forgetting one thing.

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His jaw clenched – her muscles coiled – and after a moment his face softened. He grunted out an agreement and strode back across the lawn. She was saved. For now. It was very wise, this plan. He would not visit his woman – and she would not suffer his wrath tonight.

His anger had not softened overnight, simmering in the air of their quiet kitchen as she busied herself with making his breakfast. His gaze was white-hot, drilling into her spine as he moved closer to where she was rifling through a drawer. Without warning he slammed it shut – there was a sickening crack and pain blossomed in her finger. No sound passed through her lips. She would not wake the children with her cries.

He began shouting, screaming about how she had embarrassed him, humiliated them in front of his family. There was a blow to the stomach, a slap to the cheek. It was all absorbed in trepid silence as she waited for the storm to pass.

She was looking sideways at the vase of marigolds now, his fingers wrapped around her throat as he pushed her harder against the table. The soft petals were dried and brown as they drifted through the air, falling slowly to the ground. He had given them to her barely five days earlier, when he was smiling and she was caught in his glow. She was deep in the dark now, left blind once more as the destruction overtook him.

Far away, she could hear the children laughing and the roar of waves against the shore. She could smell the sea salt, feel the warm sun against her skin. With one final lurch, she wrapped her fingers around the cold glass vase and swung.

Ghost Girl

Sarah Cassidy
Winner – Highly Commended
Senior Secondary Prose

She woke up cold as death between sheets to a wintry spell cast over the morning. Through eyes half-closed she noted a fresh lacquer of frost glazed on her window, its crust altered shards of light which passed through turning them strange and cold. Kaleidoscopic- they patterned the walls making it seem as if the room could be the inside of a snow globe. The girl wriggled her toes from a tangle of covers and found they had vanished almost entirely, then checked glassy palms to see the roses of her floral duvet right through them. In that way she had monitored the disappearing of her body every morning since it started; not so horrified as she should've been at her slow fading into a ghost but instead acknowledging the fact of it with a dull sadness. Now the girl lay there on her mattress with silvery locks splayed across the pillow and haloing her face.

Yet another day of school stretched ahead so in reluctance she rolled from bed and floated towards her bathroom, the soles of frigid feet hovering two inches above floorboards that used to creak under her weight. She noticed the faint outline of a familiar face in the mottled mirror hanging over the basin, its faucet gurgled a stream of water and she cupped her hand underneath to splash some over pale cheeks. The coolness did nothing to wake her from the somnambulistic-like trance she was in. From the checked tiled icebox of the bathroom, the girl drifted towards a kitchen that was slightly warmer in its marinade of morning sun, then boiled the kettle and poured a cup of tea. She took a sip but was surprised to see it trickle in a single streamlet straight through her and slop into a steaming puddle on the floor. That was something new.

The girl was bumped around on the school bus as she stood with her hand looped through a plastic straphanger, though its support didn't help as no matter how hard she held on her fingers would sift right through. Each twisty turn or bump in the road jostled her about when she used to have a stance so strong, but those were the days prior to her fading into breath and fog. Now the girl was hollow. The vehicle soon rolled into the school stop with a sigh of exhaust before shuddering its doors open. Other students rushed through the girl and she noticed them shiver as they did so, for just a moment they must've felt the chill of her sadness. Only the bus driver seemed to acknowledge her presence with a smile when she hopped off the footstep. Gratefully the girl offered one in return as the small gesture left her feeling just a little more solid; but that rare upturn of her lips slid downwards as she was lost in a stream of students and ushered through the wrought-iron school gates.

The hallways whistled with a graveyard chill and lockers lined against the wall rattled as students gathered armfuls of books from their shelves. Those steel compartments were grey and boxy just like headstones jutting from soil, and processions filed along besides as the death knell echoed. Its ring was followed by a sombre silence stilling the air when everyone had found their classes. Only the girl was left to wander the lonely halls as she grieved the figurative death of herself. Nobody had really noticed her gradual fading, or that now she barely spoke, they didn't see the phantasmic shimmer of her skin or the way that a pencil would slip through her fingers when she tried to take notes. All of them looked past her because she was nothing but an apparition. Pacing the length of those halls with long hair and skirt flowing evanesce, she faded further away as her skin evaporated into mist like the sort rising off mountains. She was levitating three inches above the carpet. Would today be the day that she ebbed away into nothing? The thought crossed her mind vaguely but dissipated before she had a chance to mull it over, there was nothing that could be done to save her now regardless.

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The girl finally wafted into class and realised herself to be late as classmates were already seated, but no recognition was given of her impunctuality. The teacher didn't even notice. She slid into a chair and twisted her feet around its legs to anchor herself in case a sudden breeze took her away, it would wash her swiftly out the open window and she would float up, up, up into the clouds to conjoin with their hazy gases. Perhaps the white breadth of them was made up of other sad people who had already evaporated, now puffing against blue and making rain as they wept. Voices swirled around the room but sounded very far away, and there was a slight rippling effect to her surroundings like she was dreaming. That was how it felt to experience the world through the senses of a ghost, like the one she was becoming.

With eyes following the tedious ticking of a lazy clock on the wall the girl felt emptier and emptier after each minute's revolution. Even sunlight dappling the desk seemed drained of warmth as rays of it slanted across blank pages of her notebook, she dipped fingertips in the honey gold to watch their ghostliness swirl in its lustre. Bells sounded once again so the girl pulled herself from slipping through the plastic seat that was now unable to contain her weightlessness. She realised upon standing that her feet were now four inches above ground. Whilst everyone else made for the door, she moved straight through the brick wall and re-joined them on its other side. She drifted apace as they headed en route for their next classes; to which the girl never arrived because on her way she disappeared completely. . .

Her scones

Aileen Bak
Winner – Commended
Senior Secondary Prose

Just four seconds after Ruthanne's eyes opened, her phone alarm went off. She quietly got up, conscious of the resting silhouette beside her, and headed downstairs. Her hands navigated the topography of the house in the darkness with the map they had internalised, leading her to the kitchen. She reached into the oven and pulled out the scones she had baked yesterday. A buttery smell wafted through the kitchen. They were browned and shaped to perfection with their crisp, hard exterior, risen to a confident height.

One by one, they were broken in half. A wallop of clotted cream. Topped with strawberry jam. These were for the orphans that her husband would visit every morning.

This was her daily ritual: the act of breaking the bread so she, through her husband, could feed them. As she broke open the hard exterior of the scones to expose their soft, crumbling insides, a warmth washed over her. She imagined small hands holding those very scones, jam and cream smeared over their beaming grins. She smiled to herself.

"The children call you the Scone Lady," her husband had once told her.

Suddenly, the sound of her husband's footsteps startled her. His strong arms slid around her waist as he lightly kissed her cheek. It was this touch, this display of affection that still possessed a foreignness, something she was slowly growing accustomed to even after two years of marriage.

A quick chat and before she knew it, he was off once again with the scones. Ruthanne was left staring at the door her husband had just closed.

Around her, solitary scone crumbs littered the tile floor. She sighed and grabbed a dustpan and broom. As she began to sweep, she was flung back to her childhood, watching her mother wipe spilled milk off a tiled kitchen floor. Ruthanne shuddered at the thought.

With the crumbs gathered and disposed of, she sat down and mindlessly flicked through television channels before one caught her eye. Bold letters read 'MODERN WOMEN CAN ACHIEVE ANYTHING', and a bony woman in a business-suit yelled at her through bright painted lips: "Female entrepreneurs are smashing traditional gender roles, shattering the glass ceiling..."

Those words pierced her. Modern women. She looked around. There was a kitchen, an apron, a vacuum, cleaning products, and in the middle of it all, there was her.

Was this what it meant to be a modern woman? In many ways, these objects, her life, seemed to resemble her mother's more than the 'modern', liberated women on screen.

Even before her death, her mother had seemed to haunt her childhood home like a ghost. A hollow shell of a woman, she would float around the house, drifting from chore to chore, room to room. The television box had always been left on, a desperate attempt to fill the empty void that was their home with its grey pixelated images. An anonymous, beautiful woman doing chores. A high-pitched voice advertising yet another vacuum, another detergent, another kitchen sponge. That poised and perfect picture was seared into her mind. The picture of the ideal woman.

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The only time Ruthanne ever saw her parents together was on Sundays. Her mother would put on her mask to look her Sunday Best for church. She would paint on a different face with make-up and perform her well-rehearsed act of The Happy Wife. Her smile was too wide. Her clothes were too bright. So bold that they seemed to scream a forced cheerfulness as she stood by her stranger of a husband. But Ruthanne knew that none of this was real – that behind the seemingly impenetrable mask was a woman who was trapped, crumbling and falling apart like her scones.

Maybe it was that memory that made Ruthanne flinch every time her husband kissed her cheek. The possibility that her marriage would become like her mother's. An empty act of deprivation and facade. But deep down, she knew that her husband's gestures were full of love, not indifference. They should be a source of comfort, not pain.

Her eyes glossed over the framed photo that sat on the coffee table. In it, her husband's arms wrapped around her in a warm and natural embrace. Ruthanne's eyes become hot as the furniture surrounding her became a blur. Never in her childhood was there a photograph of her parents like this on display. Her mother's marriage was a prison with a stranger who never loved her. Hers was one of genuine love. There was no performance involved.

Just as her tears began to hit the cold, tiled floor, she heard the front door open.

"The children loved your scones!" Her husband beamed. "Are there any more?"

Ruthanne quickly wiped her eyes and hurried to the kitchen, shielding her face from view. She placed the few leftover scones in a basket and walked towards her husband. Just as she was about to pass them over, she paused.

"Could I come with you and deliver them myself? I'd love to meet the children."

Her husband looked astonished for a moment before smiling. "Of course! The children would be thrilled to finally meet you."

Taking his arm with one hand, she glanced at the scones that were in the other. With each one she baked, she parcelled out warmth and happiness and hope. She'd work the dough just enough to let it rise again; every batch sweeter than the last. It was her choice to love her husband, to stay home or to walk out the door. Was she not as free as any other woman?

Ruthanne stepped over the threshold, detangling her arm from her husband's to pull the front door softly shut.



Winning Entries

A collection of award winning
poems from the 2021 Mosman
Youth Awards in Literature

Athazagoraphobia

Jade Cummins
Winner – First Prize
Junior Secondary Poetry

I have lost my memory.
I cannot remember losing it,
I cannot remember having it,
I cannot remember.
I can only close my eyes, and picture hazy shapes,
Outlines,
Silhouettes.
I can only try to pull one from thin air,
Like a rabbit from a hat,
I can only try to hold on to the wind that blows,
Teasing the gaps between my fingers.
I can only try to cover up the hole that sits,
Ever growing,
Between my ears and behind my eyes.
I can only try.
I can only fail.
And when your memory fails,
Who do you become?
When your memory fails,
Who can you trust?
When your memory fails...
What will succeed?
...
I don't know.
I don't know.

Frost

Imogen Robertson
Winner – Second Prize
Junior Secondary Poetry

The lake lay, a lost pearl amongst the trees,
Mirroring the white from all around,
The milky water, all anyone sees,
The rush of water, the only sound.

The boy sat, distraught, by the ancient lake,
All he had left was his inward, covert flame,
The only thing numbing his ache,
He had to go back the way he came.

The sky was the top of a crystal ball,
Letting yet more unwanted frosty flakes down,
All he had over him was his late mother's shawl,
As much as recalling made him frown.

He came to a memorable bridge, softened with snow,
Slumping against the wooden rails, kidnapping sleep,
He dreamt of her betrayal, her surrender to the blow,
Her allowance of her tears to seep.

As he was plunged into the frigid water his mind awoke,
He was wrapped in a cloak of the cold,
He felt water surge through him, felt the choke,
Felt darkness cover his eyes, a malicious blindfold.

No, he could never give up, would not be like her,
He pushed to the surface, only to go under once more,
Suddenly there was a hand there, cloaked in fur,
Helping him push to the shore.

Looking into those cinnamon eyes he saw a future,
He saw his safety and he saw more than he left behind.

Two Trees

Ivy Hatherall
Winner – Highly Commended
Junior Secondary Poetry

Doze.

Noon's drugged light
touches your face,
sun-dappling your furrowed bark in
lingering shadows.

Bathed with the impermeable coat of dust and drought
where flames once licked your jaded arms anchored
now, sinching muddy earth.

And your roots- drooping with age, digging lazily downward,
intertwining with those of *she*;
who weeps
into the sun's veil.

You *obligate*
to protect her a
pledge, to insurmountable guilt.

Bleed.

The soil provides no respite
against the drier days:
wind beating at your leaves, like pinpointed needles
the ethereal cloak of warmth
and sap

seeping from a wound in your side.
Parched, and foreboding interminable
apprehension,
humankind's gentle hand unwantedly tending to you and
her tears watering your stump.

And *she* leans away from you now,
frail body too weary to stand upright.

You've seen to it that
time
still passes
while *her* head falls further and further from your shoulder
deeming you lonely.
Tangled roots and
thwarted promises;
you with your homelands,
a sprawled verdant mass behind you.

Schlepp.

The absence of humankind's tending...

a rot.

Channelled through *her* bark and over your shoulder

slipping tentatively down through your leaves.

Vow of dependence, and your deploring gaze

Distortion of realism -

of man's hand against oakheart

of careful days spent nursing *her*, rather than yourself

and of stark acceptance

bequeathing tangibility.

You- and *she*- depend.

The territorial harbouring of sorrow

your contradictions

and the allowance of

liberty

once again.

Hymns of self/hymns of other

Amber Li

Winner – Commended

Junior Secondary Poetry

1.

Mind. Silence. Translucent from fatigue, sandpaper, the denseness of eyes that sweep through, unimpeded. When rock cannot split, it can only wait. Wind brushes, thick-haired; air fills with you-particles, no longer bound to solidity. When you learn to sit beside yourself, pulling laces, scraping rot from cracks in the wall-paint. When you realise there are parts where you can't feel the weight anymore – kinaesthetic cataract in swarms, blooming grey over the buzzing of your chest cavity. First, first, first, the mind.

2.

Let's say you wake up with a body wrapped thick cotton around the bones. Let's say the cells in the body listen, mouths wide open, trembling, red-lipped. There's a butterfly, there's a chaos theory spreading its wire-moth wings into typhoon hyperbolas. There's fluttering from paper all around you. There's a blur scattered with trickles, breathy on the hot mirrors encircling.

3.

Here's something: melt into the musty river, green or maybe blue-brown of the not-nows: hold it, sweep an arm through, scattering drops of yellow dense through the currents, I wish, I wish; there's no more to this past than a dance of words, coded in thick meshes inside the electric skull. Paper is a dimension, don't forget, curled tight with nine others, letting light refract like a portal's liquid membrane. Look at the corners and the endless curves, crumpled, undocumentable. Look at the waves of grey and white, the palimpsests upon palimpsests erased until there's no emptiness left.

4.

Feel the cracks down my flesh. They ripple into obsidian waves, they rip cleanly, they do not bleed. I can hear the sound of shedding – the pieces tearing themselves off, blackened, to the ground and thump into brown piles. I throw in boxes of lighters, watch them envelop themselves in gusts of yellow. The cold is a cold without temperature. Stretching out my hand to warm from the electric thrill, burning's pain; I forget the ash, fingernails, the eyeless pools of shining ten-cent coins. I forget the clothly solidity, already oozing out of a million ravenous pores.

5.

Under the moon ripples a river the texture of ink or blood – warm, bottomless, banks ghostly as slivers of light. There's a steady throb, low as the sun's redder-than-red pulsing. Sometimes a boat, a wooden bed, rocking. Sometimes just the surface drifting away, webbed starlight chanting softer, softer, softer through the colourless ether. No one hauls me up. No one sinks with me, sleep-turning, but the silence curled where my breath had been.

6.

Since when did speech become synonymous with this distance? The dust is a story of where veins are golden, electrons buzzing ichor, hearts loops of lyre-string stirrings. Now there's a world where the ground is glass forever down, inside the galaxy's spherical black heart. Snapped wires hang caustic by strands of white. Broken strings, broken light in threads. Which one's you. If we touch, surely there will be something. Oh, they're the only thing hovering around me behind the glass, those somethings. They hum, click; all I want sometimes – stretch out in waves, ghost-tentacles cracking, sharp recoil of second-hand smoke; black hair. Straggles, twist-roots, carved hurricane paths in the toneless key of ebony – to wrap until nothing.

7.

To be I? To be river mouth, spilling tendonless, open, a stream for each colour of the truth. Different eyes, body-cases spun hard like dyed salt crystal. The taste in liquid-solid limbo, the way they surge with the intent of filling until there's no more air to let it swish round. How you gulp it, grinning with glinting scales, yellow dribbling down your cheeks, throat shaken loose with hungers esophageal, visceral, primordial.

8.

The sun didn't emerge for our ones with horned ribs, callous-clusters of gravelly throat-box. Not us with pits blotching black down our stumbling torsos. The orange and pink that twists through the hedges this morning; petal-sheaths, scabbards of razor light. You watch me drive with all the sun in my eyes, back of eyelids blazing of the yellowest red. Here's the dye just crushed, tracing my skin in new marker; scars, not-scars, lines of a pain that can be learned into love that trickles down, down, down, through.

9.

Fractal-frost: rusted fire-blade of ice, ice on skin, ice on veins – rock-mantles, ancient like the moss-moist soil. No skin's chafed, no black appendages swaying bloodless and sooty. It's the dark pine branches who love me by not loving me, rugged blurs shadowy against any stray thawing spring. Volcanic-rock caves, bruiseless feet, bare; darkness-cool streams taper curled strands of hair. Suddenly, my hand on my face. Opaque, like flesh should be. Marble-cheek but unseen, sculptorless. There. That's a touch that births a different form of life: see the eyes open, all iris, down to the tiniest corner.

Motorcar

Isaac Elms
Winner – First Prize
Senior Secondary Poetry

When I am in heaven,
And cannot see your face
I will buy a little motorcar,
And search the other place.

The Ship

Sunday Meikle
Winner – Second Prize
Senior Secondary Poetry

The sky was dark and the moon was bright,
And the dashboard clicked quietly.
They didn't speak, they didn't ask,
As the drive went on for eternity.
The cold crept in through the cracks in the windows,
And nipped at the young cheeks
Of the children in the passenger's seat,
And the mother at the helm.
And although the cold was sharp and fierce,
The pain inside was fiercer,
And the bruise that flowered upon her cheek
Was as fresh as a burning fire.

This mother of two plastered on a broken smile
And stowed away her tears.
The police were called, the call ignored,
And the beast prowled in his den.
She knew the sun would rise with him,
To an empty home and a silent bed,
But his anger wasn't theirs now.
Sadness was their friend.
The bags she packed lay strewn in the trunk,
The food lay in her lap,
The children lay in a thick woollen blanket,
And the white noise
was deafening.

First light wafts over the distant horizon
As the clock hits half past six,
And the children turn to their mother for love,
Who holds her fragile smile up wearily.
And while the youngest reaches to his mother's tender wound,
They wish for a time when the silence had healed -
But now was not that time.
Now is the time to disembark their battered ship
And make their way to the warmth of the house
Where the mother's mother and her father were waiting
With a hug and a kiss and a smile.

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And as the boys fill their stomachs full to the brim,
Their weak bones are strengthened with newfound hope,
And Grandma and Pa sit wearily by the fire
Whispering calmly with a sympathetic shrug.

And the mother watches in muted peace
As breakfast passes, then lunch, then dinner,
And as darkness embraces them with droopy eyes,
They crawl into bed and begin their soft descent.
But the mother is awake.
She slips to the bathroom, keeling over in pain,
As she feels deep within -
the soft kick
of a child.

Uniformity

Maeve Cox
Winner – Highly Commended
Senior Secondary Poetry

Winding through the busy halls,
I am but a droplet in a churning sea of grey, red and black.
We glide and dart around the ocean landscape on our own journeys,
to English, History and Maths. On our own, and yet as one.
Identical grey tunics flapping like sails in a boat race.
The drum of identical black shoes.
The swish of identical glossy ponytails.

Each morning at 8:20am, we shed our human skins.
We leave them on the sand, wet and heavy with our identities,
differences, privileges and problems.
Our dry-land rankings dissolve when we don our matching fins and scales.
Humans are the only creatures that create a food chain within a single species.
As fish, we are equal but equally blank.

It's well discussed - which way does the balance tip?
Does conformity create a level playing field,
or does it smother essential self-expression?
Do we really care about combatting classes,
or is it all a guise to establish control and breed obedience?

I am a happy fish.
My 7 hours underwater Monday to Friday can be productive when
who I am does not matter.
But I long to experiment. As a teenager, I am a ticking time bomb.
My fins and scales are claustrophobic.
The zip on my fish suit is sealed shut for two more years.
My true self is trapped inside.
I am going to explode, and when I do,
the whole ocean will be covered in my remains.

The Place This Once Was

Ashley Hanna
Winner – Commended
Senior Secondary Poetry

My Dad grew up in this place,
It's far away from here.
It was Disneyland to a free-minded child and
He used to take me there every year.

'You need to get out of the city, kid' he'd say
It's time to go to Urunga.
And we'd count the cows till Freddo's pies,
And indulge till we'd cured our hunger.

No banquet or high tea has since compared,
To that greasy-floored country shack,
A meat pie and wave to the locals,
Who actually smiled back.

At the smell of impending dusk, we'd hit the road again,
And we knew we were getting close,
When Dad sighed and went all silent,
Sinking into a nostalgia about the place he loved the most.

He talked about surfing in the river mouth
Back in Nineteen-Eighty-Four,
He was lanky and lousy and somehow school captain,
And his Dad, Lenny, was still drinking away the war.

We'd get a bit restless and try to stay awake,
And listen to *Video Killed the Radio Star*,
Which for Dad sparked some recollection that I never understood,
By now I just wanted to get out of the car.

When we finally arrived, we'd have dinner at the pub
With old Val and Betty and Rene,
Who Dad remembers when they were young,
Not scrawny-figured and pungent with nicotine.

A chorus of insects would wake us from our sleep,
And we'd clamber out to the beach,
The sting of sun-soaked gravel on our naked city feet,
And an empty stretch of coastline, as far as the eyes could reach.

I'd pump yabbies from the dunes,
And never catch a nibble when I used them as bait,
So, Dad took me to the fish shop and said:
'This is where I fish, kid, it'll put dinner on ya plate.'

The blue of the sky faded into darkness,
With a soft yellow crescendo in between,
Mosquito bites declared themselves,
And we churned through Stingos and antihistamine.

I'd curl up in my swag to the lullaby of the cicadas,
Then a sudden stream of torchlight:
'The clouds are gone; the stars are out'
And we'd hurl on our jackets and wade into the night.

The dewy grass soaked our backs,
As we lay on the headland gazing into the sky,
We counted passing satellites to the swoosh of the ocean,
And the depths of the universe suddenly felt so nearby.

I never wanted to be anywhere else and I said:
'I'll get married here one day'
Dad choked on his words a little and replied:
'That's exactly what I used to say.'

Year after year and not much has changed,
But I walk in grown up shoes.
Life's lost a certain sugar coating,
And the gravestones at the cemetery ring a familiar muse.

There's not much to Urunga,
A town that can't escape the stench of beer,
And all the prospective home buyers say:
'They want one mil for a joint around here?!'

A waiting room for the retirement home,
That's just as tired as its inhabitants,
Has now been bypassed by the highway,
So usual visitors neglect its extravagance.

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Tides still come and go,
And the stars still gleam,
The sun has the same bitter sting and
Sometimes dolphins visit from upstream.

But there is no longer this fascination,
That made everything seem so big.
What used to be the pinnacle of places,
Is now just a lazy shore, battered by the tides if a big, wide, world.

I'm swaying in and out of reminiscence,
The past cannot be resuscitated, but did it ever really die?
Did the reality of this place change?
Or just the illusion in my mind?



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