



mosman
**Youth
awards**
in literature
2022

Winning Entries

A collection of award winning short stories and poems from the 2022 Mosman Youth Awards in Literature

winners

Primary Prose

First Prize

Ollie's Ruby Tuesday by Violet Bloxsom

Second Prize

Midnight Granny's Club by Lachlan Heezen

Highly Commended

Veronica Jones by Roxalana Burton

Junior Secondary Prose

First Prize

Him by Elizabeth Boydell

Second Prize

Sharks by Lexie McCoy

Highly Commended

Origami Of Life by Georgia Gao

Senior Secondary Prose

First Prize

A Bird's Brain by Tara Seymour

Second Prize

The Disquietude of Darkness by Abigail Mills

Highly Commended

Good Game by Elizabeth Sutherland

Junior Secondary Poetry

First Prize

I Dream of Song by Arianna Rich

Second Prize

To Her Dull Mister by Nour Alkakouni

Highly Commended

The Surface Of The Sea by Bryan To

Senior Secondary Poetry

First Prize

3 by Maia Berry

Second Prize

A step by step guide on getting rid of black mould
by Jessie Varde

Highly Commended

Cassandra by Kit Vanner

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

2022 Judges
Carol Jenkins, Deborah Kalin, Linda Lokhee, Zena Shapter and Michael Sharkey

2022 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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COLLEGE

ORACLE  **BOOKS**

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READER



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Ollie's Ruby Tuesday

Violet Bloxson
Winner – First Prize
Primary Prose

"First, insert a long hook in the nose to pull out the brains. Squelch.

Next, make a cut in the left side of the body near the tummy and remove all internal organs. Ooze.

Then, place the lungs, intestines, stomach and liver inside canopic jars. Plop.

Now, place the heart back inside the body. Squish.

Next, rinse the body with wine and spices and cover the lifeless corpse with salt.

When the body starts to flop, stuff it with linen, straw and sand to give it a more human shape.

When the body is dry, wrap it in linen bandages from head to toe. Be sure to wrap the fingers and toes individually.

Finally, attach sacred amulets and charms and gently place the body in a sarcophagus.

Welcome to Ancient Egypt, one of the greatest civilisations in the history of the world!", announced the eccentric tour guide. He was dressed in an oversized suit and equally oversized glasses. Ollie was captivated.

"And that, boys and girls, is the Egyptian mummification process. Absolutely fascinating stuff!"

"Now!" – he started as he clapped and rubbed his hands together – "who wants to see Hatshepsut's Ruby. Replica of course, the real beauty has been missing for centuries!". He marched ahead, not bothering to check if the kids were following behind.

It was a miserable Tuesday afternoon and the kids trudging through the Museum of Ancient Civilisations looked equally miserable. Except Ollie of course. He was practically skipping along after the tour guide, listening intently and asking many, many questions about the museum's brand-new Ancient Egypt exhibition.

Ollie's passion for all things Ancient Egypt began on his 10th birthday when his Mum, a world-renowned Egyptologist, gave him *The Big Book of Ancient Egypt*. The book was a family heirloom and it certainly looked like it had been around since the days of King Tut. Its spine was cracked and crumbling. The cover was dull and the gold lettering was peeling; the pages were yellowing and falling out. We won't even mention the smell. But, reading it instantly transported Ollie to the wonderful world of Ancient Egypt.

The tour guide beamed as he wrapped up his presentation, "Nearly everything we know about Ancient Egypt is thanks to the work of archaeologists who have been digging in the sand for centuries. I could go on for ever about the pyramids, the Gods and Goddesses, the grave robbers, the curses... but", he shrugged, "that's all for today folks. Don't forget, if you ask your parents to bring you back next month, the real Tutankhamun sarcophagus will be right here on display! It's not to be missed."

Ollie couldn't wait. King Tut had always been his favourite pharaoh.

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Ollie took the stairs two at a time as he raced to his bedroom to read up on Hatshepsut's Ruby. He carefully placed *The Big Book of Ancient Egypt* on his bedspread, which happened to be covered in images of pharaohs, pyramids and hieroglyphics. He switched on his sarcophagus lamp and gently leafed through the pages to the section on the famous pharaoh Hatshepsut. Hatshepsut ruled on behalf of her baby son, wearing a fake beard to make her look manly and wise! The Hatshepsut's Ruby, the world's most precious ruby, was said to have been stolen from the sarcophagus of Queen Hatshepsut.

As he finally reached the right page he paused, confused. The pages containing the images of the ruby were stuck together. Ollie delicately separated the tissue-like paper and a tiny note fluttered to the ground. It read:

My dear reader, treasure you will discover; if you venture inside the back cover.

Inside the back cover? Ollie wiped the thick dust from the back cover and discovered a flap concealing a hidden compartment. Nervously he lifted it to find a deep cherry red jewel nestled inside. The Hatshepsut's Ruby? Surely not.

Just as Ollie plucked the jewel from the compartment, his sarcophagus lamp started to flicker and then went out. The sphinx poster on his wall fell to the ground and his window suddenly flung open. "Just a coincidence", he reassured himself aloud. He was being called for dinner so he quickly stuffed the treasure under his pillow and firmly closed the window.

"Yeouch", he wailed, as Ollie tripped and crashed in a heap at the bottom of the stairs. Then, during dinner, he choked on his baby peas and ended up in a hysterical coughing fit. While he was having a shower, the warm water suddenly turned freezing cold.

What was going on?

As he lay in bed that night nursing a sore knee and staring at the place where his sphinx poster used to be, Ollie wondered whether he was under some kind of strange curse. Ever since he found the jewel that afternoon, mysterious things were happening.

Early the next morning, Ollie stuffed the jewel back inside the secret book compartment, determined to ignore it. He sneezed and as he reached inside his pocket for a tissue, he felt the cold, smooth gemstone instead. "That's odd...!", thought Ollie, "impossible in fact! I'm going to have to tell Mum".

Ollie's Mum's eyes lit up as Ollie described the events. She specialised in Ancient Egyptian curses and so could hardly contain her excitement at the possibility of her son finding the *real* Hatshepsut's Ruby. She studied the dazzling jewel and declared it was indeed the long-lost treasure.

“And finally,” exclaimed the tour guide, “onto *The Bearded Queen* exhibit featuring the exquisite Hatshepsut’s Ruby. The *real* Hatshepsut’s Ruby that is. It was discovered right here by our very own young Egyptologist Ollie”. The tour guide gestured and the crowd turned around. There stood Ollie, proudly wearing his own Tour Guide badge. Following his discovery, Ollie was awarded lifetime membership at the Museum of Ancient Civilisations, where he now spends most of his spare time.

“Well, that’s all for today folks. If you have any questions regarding the ruby, just ask Ollie”.

Midnight Granny's Club

Lachlan Heezen
Winner – Second Prize
Primary Prose

The moonlight shone down the dark, smelly alley illuminating the rough, brick walls. The man did a good job at passing unseen, hiding in the ever-shifting shadows. Although the soft, black balaclava concealed most of his face, one deep, pen-sized scar was still partially visible. His clothes were pitch-black and he had a mud-brown belt attached to his waist. He stood stock still but looked as if he was ready to pounce on his prey like a lion. Then the moment came. The door of a nearby building squeaked open, letting a dull yellow light flood the street. A hunched figure with a sturdy cane came waddling out of the house before closing the door behind them. As they crossed the road the man started to realise, she was an old granny. Or in his eyes, the perfect target.

Loud, jolly laughter shot through the brightly lit room. It was a surprise that nobody could tell that 20 grannies were coming in from all the homes and apartments in the nearby area from 11 pm until 1 am, boxing, playing, chatting and creating a great mess of light and sound in that one large, building. But thanks to the strong, sound proof walls and the fact that it had practically no windows whatsoever, these people could enjoy their daily nights even more. You may be caught asking, how do they get their required sleep every night? The answer is simple, you may have heard that if you eat carrots, you can see better in the dark, not many people know this, and I highly doubt you do, but if you eat enough carrots on a daily basis, you will need almost no sleep to keep your body going. Weird? Yes. Helpful if you're taking part in a midnight granny's organisation nightly? Yes again.

"Goodbye, see you again tomorrow night" Juline half whispered to Rose, someone with a straight, tall back and long hair, such a shade of grey that you would have thought it had been in a photo from the 60s. "Goodbye to you too" Rose replied. With that, Juline quietly shut the door behind her and set off home, only a few blocks away, before sunrise so her family wouldn't suspect anything. She hobbled across the road hoping she would be home in time, as it was her grandson's 5th birthday and crikey does he get up early when he's excited. Her plans to get home in time would have succeeded, if a broadshouldered, heavy-set man who smelled like rotting cheese hadn't jumped in her path, pulling out what looked to be a small sharp knife. "Hand over your wallet, now" he demanded in a rough tone. "Why should I?" Juline replied in a calm tone. There was a clear aura of confidence around this lady. Too confident. If he was worried, he refused to show it. "You know why," he replied in an ominously low voice. "Alright, I'm getting sick and tired of this."

It happened so quickly that anyone watching would have seen a pure blur of actions. Juline's hand clenched in a fist and shot up towards the man's jaw, causing thick, red blood to pour down and his head knocked back. He screamed in rage and lunged with his knife and yelled insults and curses of all kinds. Juline easily dodged his clumsy attacks solely led by fury and anger. She finished it off with a final blow to the head knocking him as unconscious and useless as a stone. She quickly took out what seemed to be a knitting kit and tightly wrapped the yarn across his hand and feet bounding them together rendering him helpless. "That should do him until the police find him," Juline said to herself. But as she looked back at the blood dripping down his broken face, she realised it would be cruel to leave him there and that he needed help. Now.

She slung him across her shoulder and went back to the large building with no windows. She carefully put him down and started typing a code into a keypad. B-4-N-A-N-4. And not long after the door opened to a small but strong looking lady. "Hello Juline, what's going on," a quiet, soft voice said. "I need to get medical help, someone attacked me no more than 10 minutes ago and I gave him what was right but now I recognise that I shouldn't have acted so impulsively." "I know how you feel and even if you didn't make the best choices, you were attacked unexpectedly so don't put all the blame on yourself and please don't lose any sleep over this." Juline stepped in the room and closed the door behind her and dropped off the man at the medical bay. "We'll have him healthy as ever in a few days but I recommend for now you go home; it your grandson's birthday today, isn't it?" "Yes, I guess I must get home, mustn't I?"

Walking home at 2am in the morning had never felt so wrong, maybe it is that she was attacked or that she hadn't made the best decisions or, it was that every time she saw that battered face, she couldn't help but get a feeling that he looked familiar. That he looked like her. Trying to be as stealthy as possible she turned the cold stone door-nob and tip-toed inside her house. As soon as she set foot in the large room, a massive push sent her toppling on to the luxuriously soft couch and she found herself pinned down. She was about to fight back until she heard the words, "grandma, grandma! You're back, where were you?" Shouted in such an unmistakably squeaky voice. "Billy!" She replied with obvious joy in her voice. "Wait, where's Mark?" "Daddy? He said he went out to do something, but he didn't tell me what." She knew he looked familiar. The truth can sometimes be the most unbearable thing.

Veronica Jones

Roxalana Burton
Winner – Highly Commended
Primary Prose

In London we couldn't be women. We are to cook, clean, nurture and love. It was unladylike to take hold of your life. Father ensured I knew this, taking control of any part of my life he could.

May 5th, 1851

It is a warm May morning. I sit on an ottoman while a maid braids my hair. Light flutters in through the coloured glass of my bedroom window, creating a soft purple glow that illuminates my wedding gown in the corner of the room. The maid's fingers are long and soft, she weaves my hair into a crown as if it is a craft. My eyes trace the corners and curves of my room, savouring the last days of my life as a child. The maid's amber eyes meet mine in the gilded mirror on the dressing table, we let our gazes speak.

"The wedding is beginning soon Madame Veronica, are you okay?"

"Yes, I'm looking forward to this" I reply, realising my response came out in a more sarcastic tone than intended. Truthfully, I am far from looking forward to this. Marriage means that everything in my life will go to my husband, including my will and any personal property. To be tied so closely to someone I do not yet know is a danger, it forms a dense cloud of anxiety that devours me painfully. I study myself in the mirror, following the sun-bleached curls of blonde that frame my heart-shaped face. A parasol of thick eyelashes reside atop the azure rings of my eyes. Freckles veil my nose and a soft blush creeps down my cheeks. I do not know whom my father has assigned me to marry, but I am sure that is something to provide him benefit, not me.

- -

My heart moved a little when I realised just how little I would mean to this man. Stern lines crossed his face, telling stories of frustration and angry disputes. He stood tall, his shoulders tense and face stiff. This is one of the few times I would wish for myself to be of lower class, nobody would have cared of my life enough to choose who I would marry. The ribbons of my dress felt as though they were tightening and there were far too many people watching me. Watching every single part of me.

I keep my gaze on the man at the altar, unsure of what to make of his presence. I assume that I do not get to dispute this, that I'll have to endure whatever story lies ahead of me. I am drawn out of my mind as my father's heavy steps fall in line with mine. Suddenly I feel the warmth of his hand leave mine, this is goodbye. My heart thrums in my head and the ceremony turns to a blur but soon enough I am exiting the chapel, as an aristocratic newlywed.

I learned who my husband is over dinner. He tells me about his mother and father and his job. Which occurred to be a concern to me. He was an aristocrat, as was I, but he aspired to be more. He wanted to work among the governor's personnel. He currently worked in politics among many of the men today. I am a risk to him. If he truly aspired to achieve such a high political rank, the sheer rumour of my plans could ruin him. I really begin to take a liking to him until he begins to discuss my rights.

May 6th, 1851

I spent my night re-planning how I was going to organise my convention. My husband did not know that I was a leader as he was, but I was a leader for something he would never want to see. It was rather naive for me to hope so desperately that my husband would be a man of magic. Someone with power but also on my side, someone who is not anyone else. Throughout the hours of the early morning I find myself writing countless letters to numerous addresses until my hands fell sore. I then ran down the cold moon-kissed front garden, blanketed with sharp grass, to pass my letters to the postal service man. Unlike my desires I was not naive about my plans, I've signed off each letter with the signature of Pearl Barnett, a name surely nobody could know me by.

I was planning something big. Something many women have dreamed of but never dared to do. I laughed at my daring, asking myself who I thought I was. On the 19th of June, 1851, I am to hold a convention. Not one of business or wealth but of rights. I have called upon the women I spent my early youthful years meeting, a mixture of the less wealthy and the ones I walk by each day.

June 19, 1851

The letter I sent over a month ago had detailed to meet outside the Crystal Palace at Hyde Park. My worries wavered as I arrived to see not a single woman waiting there. Instead, there were women scattered among the park. Some holding signs in badly written English, others lecturing citizens about what our movement is about. My heart burst with joy, not even the sickly stench of the River Thames could dull my happiness. They had begun my work without me.

I called the women together, for we were to protest the street leading up to the building. Invites seemed to be extended to many of the ladies friends, I had never once seen this many people advocating together. We walked down the street as one, letting the hems of our dress stain brown from the filthy grounds. We sang, we laughed, we danced, we chanted and soon enough all eyes were on us.

All eyes including those of my husbands.

Him

Elizabeth Boydell
Winner – First Prize
Junior Secondary Prose

Victoria stared out the window. Soooo interesting. The only thing ~~he~~ she could bring ~~himself~~ herself to do right now was watch the birds soar through the sky, completely free. Ironic, ~~he~~ she thought, that male birds tend to be the more flashy, brightly coloured ones to attract female mates, whereas the females were less salient. The opposite seemed to apply to the human race with fashion and makeup. Women are expected to stand out with their flamboyant makeup and revealing dresses to please men.

Now this was ~~not~~ a problem for Victoria, because ~~he~~ she was ~~not~~ a girl. It's just something about wearing dresses, pink and other femininely things that you might see out of a kindergartener's book in association with genders. Something that did ~~not~~ sit right with Victoria. It made ~~him~~ her upset and just... tired. What hurt was how ~~he~~ she was perceived. It wasn't that ~~he~~ she hated being a girl like some internalised misogyny mentality, but rather ~~he~~ she just felt more... masculine. ~~He~~ she looked away. ~~He~~ She stared at the various bobbing heads. None of them understood ~~his~~ her pain, none of them understood.

~~He~~ she dragged ~~himself~~ herself back together and padded towards the door. "Yo! Vicky!" A familiar voice rang out through the hallway, loud footsteps slapping on the floor. Alex spun around in front of ~~him~~ her. "What's going on, dude? I just had Geography with Mr Frolise. Please kill me." Alex groaned. Victoria chuckled. Alex always seemed to be able to take ~~him~~ her out of these moods, but they followed ~~him~~ her around like storm clouds, doom looming behind ~~him~~ her.

Alex looked at ~~him~~ her pointedly. "Y're feelin' shitty again, aren't you." It wasn't a question. 'Vicky' raised ~~his~~ her eyebrows. "No way! How'd you guess?" Alex huffed and folded her arms around her chest. "I dun' like this sarcastic side a' you. I've been rubbin' off on ya too much, haven't I?" Vicky smiled faintly. They didn't speak as they walk down the hallway; a comfortable silence that Victoria wished would continue for the rest of their lives.

Alex groaned, startling Victoria, until the realisation kicked in and ~~he~~ she felt the urge to do the same. Health is a class that is dreaded by all year 9 students, and Victoria was no exception.

There was something so endearing about sitting at the back of the room; the unloved desks that had been scribbled on from many years before, the silence except for the small murmur of chatter, and most importantly, the feeling of invisibility. Like no one is constantly staring over your shoulder.

As the roll was called, Victoria and Alex froze momentarily. Victoria used to be an organised student, striving to do her best, to do the best, but a strange wave of ill motivation had seemed to wash over ~~him~~ her recently. This phenomenon for Victoria was nothing out of character for Alex, who banged their head on the table. The start of a headache rung in the back of ~~his~~ her head. A silent argument commenced, and defeated, Alex raised their hand. Their teacher asked what was wrong, and Alex explained their predicament in precise detail, adding in some events here and there that didn't occur. If it was for comedic effect, Alex had succeeded, because the class was chuckling and snickering under their breath. They elect to open an online copy of the booklet instead, an inconvenient substitute.

The teacher cleared their throat, and everyone went quiet. The teacher's raspy voice rung out through the classroom. "TODAY'S CLASS IS ABOUT MENTAL HEALTH!" The voice boomed. Alex leaned over to Victoria. "My mental health would be *exponentially* improved if ya used a goddamn inside voice." Alex muttered, earning a snicker from Victoria.

Victoria spent most of the lesson zoning in and out. "LADIES," The teacher borderline yelled. Ladies. Ladies. Victoria knows the word well, having been referred to as one her entire life. So why does a part inside him feel so broken when that word is used? Victoria opts to ignore the revelation.

"-EVERYONE IS GOING THROUGH SIMILAR TROUBLES TO YOU. IT'S IMPORTANT FOR YOU TO BE THERE FOR A GIRLIEFRIEND AND VICE VERSA." Victoria scoffed. No one could understand what he, no, she was going through. No one understood the pain that grabbed at his- her heart whenever she was referred to as a girl. Girl. Lady. Woman. Miss. Sister. Her. Her a lot. Why does it hurt? Why does it hurt? Why does it hurt so much? The phrase stuck in **her** head; "Sticks and stones may break my bones, but words will never hurt me." Flaming lies. In fact, Victoria wasn't sure whether or not he would prefer to be beaten repeatedly or experience the constant hurt that induced by being referred to as female. No one understood. And no one would ever understand.

The world starts to spiral. Victoria thinks back to HER favourite TV show, *Neon Genesis Evangelion*, and a prominent quote from it; "Everything is simply a shape, a form, an identifier to let others recognise me as me. But then, what am I?" SHHE related to it more than SHHE would admit. HER breathing becomes laboured and everything spins. *I'm not myself*. SHHE saw HIER reflection in the window, and snapped HIR glance away from it, turning to Alex, who's glasses reflected HES face.

No. No. **No. No. Please.** Why is this happening? HHE got up and barged out the door, pushing anything in his way away. *I'm not myself*. He felt like a John Deere harvester had run him over. The yells of confusion from the classroom faded away. *I'm not myself*. He ran. His body was overwhelmed, He was overwhelmed, he didn't know what to do. He wanted to be like the free female bird; modest and liberated. In the final moment prior to short-circuiting, finally accepting his fate, he told himself three words, and accepted them.

I'm not myself.

Sharks

Lexie McCoy
Winner – Second Prize
Junior Secondary Prose

I'm drowning.

My limbs are lead, lifeless as they float.

The bitter cold of the water envelopes me, strangles me, pushes me

down

beneath the endless layers of current.

Darkness slides its freezing, shadowy hands over my eyes.

My future is weighing me down.

Sandpaper skin

dragsssss

against mine, sharp fins ripping my skin.

Hungry, malicious sounds hiss over the crackle of the water.

I am blind, but I know what's there.

It

Takes

A

Bite.

They all do. Sharks sink their teeth into me, writhing as they wrestle my flesh away. A current of blood, my blood, swirls up around my face. I am knocked around as the sharks pile on vicious attack after attack, until I am no longer me.

Just chum in the deep blue -

Someone grabs my wrist.

They drag me upwards, and I reform. My limbs, my heart, my sight, all come back to me.

The icy water turns warm.

My head breaks the surface- I breathe.

Ugly breaths, but I am alive.

My rescuer pulls me close into a toasty embrace.

The welcoming beams of the sun shower us in golden light.

"How do you feel?" They ask.

"Better now."

The next day, I go to school.

The worries of my future, my adulthood, my path- all lure the sharks back.

What is the compound interest on \$45 000 000 at 0.08% for 12 years?

~~\$45 000 000 × 53389~~

~~\$45 000 000 × (1.8) × 12~~

~~\$450~~

I can't focus.

The question is easy, but I feel the sharks circling, desperate, manic for a drop of blood.

I can't do this, not with them watching.

I can't do this.

I am thrust back beneath the deep blue.

The water swaddles me, restrains me, pushes me

down

beneath the endless layers of current.

My attackers are stronger now.

Nourished by their last meal.

Me.

Over and over, the sharks rip me apart.

The dark, the cold, the blood, the thrashing sharks are my deadly friends.

However, the faces in the water are not.

I see my teachers, my friends, my family, staring and shaking their heads. They watch as the brutes tear me to ribbons.

People grab my wrist. They pull me away from the sharks.

The water is warm, my head breaks the surface and- I breathe.

I see my teachers, my friends, my family.

They embrace me, wrap me in soft blankets, give me a hot drink.

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"How do you feel?" they ask.

"Better now."

The sharks raid my favourite places.

My dance studio is in ruins.

My horse stable is demolished.

My happy tree, the one with the swing, is destroyed.

I sink to my knees, my shaking hands stroking the soft wood, avoiding the teeth marks.

Rage scorches through my blood, my ears roaring and my heart pounding.

I want to kill the sharks.

But I am powerless.

In my despair, I fall into the deep blue once again.

Day after day, the sharks surround me, attacking at every possible minute.

They find me in English.

They find me at lunch.

They find me in Science.

They find me walking home.

The sharks are so strong now, so riled up, that it only takes one swift chomp and I'm in pieces.

So I sink.

Right there on the street.

The chilling gravel feels just like the frosty bite of the ocean.

I bury my head in my hands, and I stay like that for a long time.

When I look up again, it is sunset.

Dusty orange blurs with rose pink and burnt yellow, a picture-perfect array of colour. I fixate on it.

How can it be so... fine? So pretty? So organised? So carefree?

"Are you okay?" A voice from behind says softly.

"I've just been attacked by sharks, and now the sunset is mocking me," I reply, deadpan, to the mystery person.

"Yeah, it does that sometimes, doesn't it? I feel the same. I was attacked by ninjas just this morning."

I whirl around. The girl I'm talking to is about my age and has bubblegum pink hair, but that's not the most surprising thing about her.

I am shocked that her face doesn't betray any hint of amusement. Her almond eyes display a sort of understanding.

"I hope we are talking about the same thing here. You're not meaning it literally, right? I mean, I'm talking about panic attacks but-"

"No, I meant literally," I interrupt.

The girl blinks furiously. She opens and closes her mouth, unsure of what to say.

"I'm kidding," I say as a rusty smile cracks my lips.

"Oh, well in that case then-" The girl leans in and gives me a big bear hug. I'm stiff to begin with, but I melt into her. A lump bubbles up in my throat, and I feel like I'm drowning again.

But this time, it feels good.

It's not scary.

"I know panic attacks can be hard. So hard. I don't know anything about you or your triggers, but if I can learn to manage mine, you can learn to manage yours," she says kindly.

"Thank you-" I begin to say, searching for her name.

"Lilah."

"Thank you, Lilah."

It's been a while since I last saw the sharks, and met Lilah, who helped immensely. She taught me to conquer my thoughts, stay on top of the sharks, even ride them like a cowboy.

I still trudge through the school day, but it's easier without the sharks.

When I feel them circle, I breathe. I remind myself of everyone who loves me. I tell myself I won't fail, because failing doesn't exist.

I even rebuild the dance studio, the horse stables, and plant a new happy tree.

I know that sometimes I'll still see the sharks, but I know they won't be as strong, because I don't feed them anymore.

Maybe eventually, they'll lose their taste for blood and become vegetarian.

How do I feel?

I'm better now.

Origami Of Life

Georgia Gao
Winner – Highly Commended
Junior Secondary Prose

“Gather round children, it’s time to set the origami free!” A loud voice echoed throughout the house. The time had come to the 10 yearly tradition of folding origami figurines and setting them out to sea. The elders believed that Origami was a metaphor to life, bringing folded people to life.

A young girl hopped excitedly as she shielded her delicate creation from the harsh Winter breeze. She skipped down to the ocean shore and tugged on a tall man’s sleeve.

“Here Grandfather! Look at my origami, I’m going to name this boy Mark.” She squealed as she pushed it up to his face, a widened grin on her face.

“There, there, calm down. Now let Mark begin his journey,” he bellows with a smile before giving her a shove forward to the water.

The little girl bent down and softly put the boy into his boat before pushing him to drift slowly more and more out to sea. The girl and her grandfather stood hugging each other tightly watching the paper boat as it drifted further and further towards the horizon. It slowly became fainter to the point you couldn’t see it anymore, its journey had finally begun. Most paper boats don’t survive.. But what is different about this one?

...

A small paper boat lay folded in between waves, as they pulse rhythmically against the shore. Reflections of splatters of blue, pink and purple lit up the sky, it was as if it was a choreographed contemporary dance. The sight was quite magical, for a small paper boy, well rather Mark, to see, he sat in his small paper boat, rocking side to side due to the waves. A paper boy in a paper world, set out to see the wondrous universe, something he could only have imagined. He sat at the bow of the boat, a small paper map in one hand and an origami paper sword in the other, and drifted off into the horizon. With that, he fell in and out of consciousness until he went away to dreamland.

Splash! Splash!

With that, he woke up. The boat was pressing up against an island shore, 2 to 3 metres away. The day had awakened. He rubbed his eyes with his paper hands and stood up, stretching himself. Forgetting he was on a boat, he toppled off into shallow water. His body was welcomed with a cold hug. Something rhythmic engulfs him in its grasp, enveloping him, cradling him, embracing him. A slight feeling of fear arose in the space, yet again, a slight sense of safety. A salty breeze accompanied by a sudden splash of coldness.. This was all new for a paper boy like him, strange but appreciated. He opened his eyes again – a blinding sight, yet in its own way.. Magical. The folds of the sky, twist and turn, front and back. Tortoise-slow clouds creep by. A sight to see only once. The whoosh sound of the impact of waves and footsteps as he walked closer and closer to the island shore. The sun beats on his back, engraving its imprint whilst the reflective wave surface slides up and down the shore.

Upon the shore, wet clothes.. Well, should I call it wet paper? Wet paper, sticking like slime against his skin. The boy stood in silence, quietly in awe of the island in front of him. Little did he know, it wasn't any normal island. Small footprints lay in the sand, indicating others had once

been there too. The boy's curiosity grew by each footstep as he picked up his pace and broke out into a sprint.

You see, this world was new for him. He had never seen nature the way any human would have seen in day to day life. The crunch of paper was the only noise he heard before, in comparison to the chattering of the birds, the whisper of the wind and the crumbling of sand beneath his feet that nature gifted him. Earth was far beyond what the boy imagined and today was his first official day alive.

A Bird's Brain

Tara Seymour
Winner – First Prize
Senior Secondary Prose

I killed a bird today. Wiped it's brains off my windscreen. Plucked the bloody black feathers from the grooves of the P-Plate. Technically, the bird killed itself. Kamikazed into the 2010 Mitsubishi Lancer, just as Morrissey was really getting into it. You know, the part about the double-decker bus. '*Cause if a double-decker bus, crashes into us*'- that bit. Yeah, yeah- I appreciate the irony, don't have a panic. I was parked, which is the funny thing. The real kicker. Can't tell you the number of times I've run a red- don't think I've ever stopped at a Zebra crossing in my life- and somehow, just as I'm trying to enjoy a bit of a smoke, a bit of a Big Mac meal, a bit of Diet Coke, a bit of The Smiths- when I'm *parked*, for crying out loud- is when some magpie decides to end it all, to welcome the Great Beyond via the peeling cobalt hood.

But don't get sentimental. Don't get deep. Don't think, not for a minute, that this is soon to become a metaphor for life's ups and downs or some other rubbish. I'm only telling *you* because, well, it's not like I can tell anyone else. I wasn't even supposed to be there. I was supposed to be shedding tears alongside every other idiot, supposed to be wallowing and screaming and crying and healing and letting it all out inside the four walls of the auditorium, so after 90 minutes we could all get on with our days and go back to pretending nothing happened. I was supposed to '*Say a few words. From the heart. No funny business, Kayla. Make them nice*'. I was on the programme. Guest speaker. Stuff that. I'm sorry, but stuff that.

So yeah, I couldn't exactly tell my mates. They'd get pissy I skipped. '*Fine. Wag fourth period. It's your Funeral*', Becca would mutter, under normal circumstances. Ironically, it *was* my funeral. Well yeah, it was technically Phoebe they buried, but it was me they put it on for. That much is common sense. Why else did they want me to *say a few words*? They needed someone to feel sorry for. Something to distract them from the twisting of their stomachs. *Here, look. Somebody gave a toss. She had a friend. She didn't mind what you did. Don't worry. Don't think too hard. Feel sorry for this poor bugger instead.*

Honestly, though. What are they gonna do? I'm allowed to skip my best mate's wake for a Big Mac and a smoke if I want to. These things don't happen every day, after all.

When it first hit, it took me a moment to react. I was mid-verse, really belting it out (I love a bit of Morrissey, what can I say). But then I opened my eyes, and it was a little hard to miss, internal organs sliding down the glass and all. I thought I was dreaming (talk about an omen)- I couldn't move, the fries getting soggy in the back of my mouth. But then there was no more Morrissey- just the deafening tones of *Dancing Queen*, so I chewed and swallowed and wiped a carcass off my car instead. Damn you SmoothFM.

It might seem a bit dramatic, but I hate that song. Hate it. Can't stand it. Yeah, it's catchy. Yeah, it's tempting to have a little groove to the angelic, upbeat voices of Agnetha and Anni-Frid. But then it gets to that line- *Young and Sweet, only Seventeen*. And it gets me every time- Benny and Bjorn you cheeky bastards- because I *am* Seventeen, that idolised age. Stevie Nicks knew it, Meat Loaf knew it, ABBA knew it- but I must be missing something because this is bloody horrible. I'm not coming of age, exploring my identity, or deciding who I want to be. I'm not getting pretty, not finding some older boyfriend, not sneaking off in the middle of the night to go to punk-rock concerts. There will be no memoirs made of my youth, no poetic lessons to be gleaned. I'm just living, just waking up and eating and breathing and sleeping again. Is this seriously as good as it gets? Jesus.

Phoebe loved it, though- Dancing Queen. It'd come on and she'd be off, spinning round and round, hair loose, eyes bright. She was what Stevie Nicks was talking about, I reckon. She was sunshine, honestly- never knew her to be anything else. She felt and lived and experienced everything in full force- every moment had meaning, had beauty- she wore her heart on her sleeve and made it look good.

I always thought sleeves were a dangerous place for hearts, in truth.

I was working the night it happened. Bunnings is pretty dead at 9 pm- couldn't say why they needed me working. There was something at Nicks' place, everyone was going. Everyone was pissed. She always went overboard; they'd tell me later. Nobody forced her to. Wasn't their fault she walked off with *him*. Course not. Yeah, everyone saw. She was all over the place. Tragic. No. Nobody heard her yelling. Nobody heard her plead. But he came back looking pretty chuffed, so we assumed it went well. No, didn't see her after that. Yeah, we heard him brag. No, we didn't ask about her. We laughed along. Half-yearlies were coming up, ok? Wasn't exactly Number One priority. She was struggling? Oh. Had no idea. That's so random. Offed herself? Bit dramatic.

There's brain under the hood still. I gave up cleaning after five minutes. These things happen. I finished my smoke and drove back to school in silence.

That's it. You're up to speed, pretty much. Geography Exam tomorrow, Maths next week. Grad in a couple of months. After that, well, I'm not sure- no one sings about being Eighteen. I'll let you know if I figure it out. For now, I guess, I'll just keep driving down this road- bird brains and all.

The Disquietude of Darkness

Abigail Mills

Winner – Second Prize

Senior Secondary Prose

I gaze at the lucent red script advertising Romano's Pizzeria. Even from outside the restaurant, the distinctive aroma of Italian cooking is salient. I've just walked out after finishing dinner there with my friends, but I inhale deeply to savour it. Romano's has been a constant in my neighbourhood for decades and was established long before my parents moved here. That was almost seventeen years ago, and a few short months before I was born, yet the familiar staff and buzzing atmosphere hold an enduring place in our hearts.

"Bye, Lyssa!"

"See you tomorrow!"

"Text us when you get home!"

My friends' voices blend into an ebullient chorus of farewells. I raise my arm and wave back at them, smiling. I keep waving until their silhouettes disappear into the distance. It's only nine-thirty, but the streets are soaked in darkness. Turning back around, I begin my walk home. My white sneakers appear inordinately bright against the begrimed concrete footpath and their subdued scuffing echoes down the empty suburban streets. The outline of my shadow follows me, conspicuous in the lambent pools cast off by the streetlamps standing guard at the sides of the road.

I pause in my stride as I reach a crossing, my hand instinctively pushing the silver button at the traffic lights. I take the time look up at the map of scintillating stars illuminated against the velvet curtain of night. The silver-sweet outline of the alluring crescent moon, the delicately intricate pathways of speckled constellations... it's breathtaking.

I am jolted from my musings by the sound of music blasting at full volume. I look in the direction of the noise and see a group of men, perhaps in their twenties, driving towards the lights. I quickly look away. My heartbeat accelerates as their car slows to a stop at the red light, right beside the footpath where I'm standing. A prickling sensation tiptoes down my spine. My palms moisten with perspiration as I hear the volume of the music being lowered. I take a shuddering breath in. I know it's inevitable, what's going to happen. It's happened before, it's happening now, and it will happen again. Still, it disconcerts me every time.

"Hey there, gorgeous," calls an arrogant male voice.

"Why don't you come for a ride with us?"

"Come and sit on my lap."

It's disgusting, the things men think they can say. I don't dare to speak back, though. I keep my eyes firmly resting ahead at the road, refusing to gratify them with my gaze.

"You stupid whore, don't you know it's rude to ignore people who are giving you compliments?"

"Fuck you!"

"Ungrateful little bitch."

The lights finally turn green, and I release a shaky breath as they drive off, their harsh voices still echoing faintly in the wind.

Head down, I cross the street and keep walking. Summer's incessant chorus of cicadas is long gone, and the nights are now enveloped in winter's clandestine silence. The wind breathes cool, sharp air onto my skin, and I shiver in my thin cardigan. I'm about halfway home now, I notice. It's only a few kilometres from Romano's to my house, and I know the area well, but the walk is not a pleasant one in this weather. I turn left off the main road, heading into the suburban branches of the town. There are no streetlamps in this area. Both sides of the street are lined with looming trees, which spill sinister shadows onto the moonlit road, their spindly fingertips reaching to brush the dark sky. I hear a faint susurrations behind me and my heartbeat thumps in loud, rhythmic echoes. I know I'm being irrational; rustling leaves are not something to panic about. Still, I am all too aware of these noises in the usually silent hours. I stop, and glance back over my shoulder. There's a figure there, a man, walking several houses behind me. Nausea overwhelms me as my gut twists into knots of trepidation. I keep walking, hearing loose fragments of gravel crunching with his every step. My breath hitches in the back of my throat. I walk faster. I wipe my palms on my jeans. Are his strides quickening or is my imagination conjuring up scenarios? I clutch at my keys and place them between my trembling fingers, a makeshift weapon. I cross the road, panic threatening to choke me. I look back just in time to see the man crossing after me.

I run.

The wind whips my hair in frantic motions and the cool night air stings my skin. My feet pound on the bitumen with every step I take. My breath comes out in ragged gasps and my legs threaten to give way beneath me, but I don't pause to think. All I can do is run. Faster. Further. A wave of wild panic surges within my mind, crashing, and threatening to drown me in tumultuous fear. I keep running.

The sight of the lamppost at the end of my street is a beacon of assuagement. I grit my teeth and keep sprinting towards my house. I have never been so grateful for the familiar brick driveway and white-painted front door. Desperately, I insert the key into the lock, burst inside, chest heaving, and slam the door shut behind me. I collapse onto the floor. Saltwater streams down my cheeks, adrenaline keeping my heart racing.

Tentatively, I peer through the window. The man isn't outside. I feel pathetic. Perhaps he was just walking home. That's all. Nothing sinister. It's hard to reconcile this normalcy with the inherent trepidation of being a young girl walking home alone at night. I hate feeling so vulnerable, but anything else would be anomalous. This fear is a commonality between all women. It's a painful truth, but this underlying, unspoken rule lies at the fractured core of society. The truth is this:

I am a woman. And that, in itself, is enough reason to be afraid.

Good Game

Elizabeth Sutherland
Winner – Highly Commended
Senior Secondary Prose

Chess is a test of wills, a test of foresight. I have neither of those.

“Check,” he says. My little white pieces stand querulously on the board, almost fully surrounded but just out of danger. Tiny ducks in a barrel, hemmed in from all sides. There is a threat to the throne.

Only my mouth moves, and it’s a grimace. When have I ever won? When has the fragile regency under my command ever executed a successful campaign? Our meetings were always under the cover of darkness: doing it in the car, in the garage, in a public toilet. Call me when you’re home alone, he’d say. A kingdom championed by an idiot sealing her own ruin one blunder at a time.

I glance at him. A shock of blonde hair, wide blue eyes more pupil than iris. Smooth hair like wicked sunrays, hanging in liquid locks over his face. He doesn’t really love me, I think to myself. Then I remember how he’d trimmed his beard and cut his hair for me. I remember how he’d signed up at my gym. I remember the movie tickets he’d shouted me. I look at my pieces lying dead in the cardboard lid and he smiles at me like it’s mate in two.

I move, then he moves.

“Check.”

Last night I slept for a whole thirteen hours. Apparently that’s not humanly possible. Apparently, I could’ve snuck out in the early morning. One hundred scenarios, he’d say. So I’m sharing my location with him indefinitely. I’m sending him photos of what I’m doing, who I’m with. White can’t move anywhere Black can’t reach.

I can’t imagine how anyone could like me, he’d say, then he’d flash that winning smile. He’d swerve this way and that and laugh as I reach for the handbrake. Knights move in unexpected ways. Send me a photo of you in it. Again, this time with more leg. Again, but lean forward and undo that top button. God, you’re sexy. His bishops and rooks carve out sweeping sections of the board. Crossing those boundaries is one way. He had made that very clear.

But it’s just chess, and chess is just a game. There are two ways the game can end. He wins, or we draw. You might be cuter than me but that’s all you have, he’d say. He’s bigger. He’s stronger. He’s smarter. My friends have begged me to leave him.

But I can’t.

I move, then he moves.

He waits for me to realise, then he knocks over my king with the tip of his finger. His blue eyes pierce my defences. His pieces circle mine with all the airs of a predator hunting its prey. My kingdom has been toppled.

He smiles again, and I forget all of it. “Checkmate,” he says. Good game.



Winning Entries

A collection of award winning
poems from the 2022 Mosman
Youth Awards in Literature

I Dream of Song

Arianna Rich
Winner – First Prize
Junior Secondary Poetry

When you dream,
It goes on and on,
Of different people and places,
Sometimes fierce, sometimes fun.

But when I dream,
I dream of song.

I dream of opera singers,
In their billowing ball gowns,
And of the whimsical tunes,
Of renowned party clowns.

When you dream,
It goes on and on,
But when I dream,

I dream of song.
I dream of song,
I dream of song,
I dream of the beautiful, delicate song,
Of country larks,
And nightingales,
Of elephants,
And big blue whales.

Because,
When I dream,
I dream of song.

To Her Dull Mister

Nour Alkakouni
Winner – Second Prize
Junior Secondary Poetry

This world is not enough, we have no time
Your love for me is a crime
You speak as if our love flows the same way
But, oh lad my heart says 'no way
If you try stay by my side
I will send you with the tide
I shine like summers day
You are like snow and melt away
I shall wed and have jewels to shine
But you would take me to play and dine
He who I shall wed will cherish every part
While you stay and re- think your heart
Your love is what you want me to hear
But how can I when I'm no longer here

You want my honour into dust
So you share all your lust
Your want infects my eyes
I think it's time to say goodbyes
Keep your eyes down
You make yourself a clown
Thy stinking roach
I have to go catch my coach
You keep coming and I want you to avaunt
I wonder why you can't daunt
Lad you're such a slag I must take my leave and gag

Non like min beauty can be found
Thyself keep searching around
You bring the darkness of the moon
I glisten in this twilit June
Let in the bright sun
Leave now, we are done

The Surface Of The Sea

Bryan To
Winner – Highly Commended
Junior Secondary Poetry

On the surface of the sea,
Where light from the dying sun,
Reflects on the rippling waters,
Announcing the day is done.

On the surface of the sea,
Where inky blackness reigns,
The cold breeze whispers past,
Across the flat terrain.

On the surface of the sea,
Where unseen creatures swim,
Quietly splashing in the darkness of night,
Diving on a whim.

On the surface of the sea,
When warm light brightens the sky,
Melting the frozen waters,
The heat of daylight passing by.

As the shining sun rises,
Over the surface of the sea,
New life brought to the waters,
A new world bright and free.

3

Maia Berry
Winner – First Prize
Senior Secondary Poetry

To remind me of the little things T sat next to me
That observant mind of her own
That detailed the greens beneath my feet
A swelling sound of tiled fondness that dripped between the thumpest part of me

Her attentiveness not shun
But welcomed by the soles
She turned her attention to thee
Brown eyes, fair skin, and hair that knew no in

Carless not the mind
Love that spreads no width beyond belief
Sharp edges of her bluntness
Not lying in the snow
But dear T, you remind so much of what I don't know

And what you do, with the knowledge behind those eyes?
Is remind me of the blindness that digs deep
Through wells of silent minds

Dear T you remind me of a light that only too dark could see

A is first
She knows no means

She is the flowers fallen from skylines that drop
To delve beneath the derails that detest us
She is the flowers of all flowers
Birthed in September enchantment
She stands star tall
Blooming though the edges and combing through the sands

"Take care of yourself" with faith she tells me

A is the lilac, lavender carnation fascination
She leaves no destine unleft
Written I love you in the crevices of her ruffles

She paints in purple and blooms yellow roses
Through dark skies and splanted spots of youth

She cares

Depthed shades of arrays that align
She stands her ground above the tide
She stands it tall with all honesty combined

In spring she flourishes and forgiveness may lay
You are a wonderful friend
My dear A

Tangled beneath the tie of our souls
Could she be a twin of thee?
No
How could J be tied to me?

It is not the seeing that beholds an likeness
Her deep brathed blue does not melt with the earth's dirt
But rather the chatter that brims

We sail together through waves of trouble
Nostalgic yellow boils the minimal aspects of endless nothings and squeezes my eyes
tight
Blue, yellow?
There is no way to say J
So, I'll settle with green

She weaves the branches of new life's laughter
Mixed together every aspect that teaches me worth
Blue and yellow they say makes her may

The irises that darken in the night
And pale through the light
That beams from beam to beam
The yellow ends of brick road form
A mixture of blue and yellow is green
She is not one but two

And two my dear J
Should always be enough for you

A step by step guide on getting rid of black mould

Jessie Varde
Winner – Second Prize
Senior Secondary Poetry

Never been a place of sentiment, further
three years back earned my zebra cuffs
on the very same floor
like a smoker's wall
quilted with black mould grout

Scooped an earful of skinned elements
raw as the contusion on my knee
from clipping the contoured edge
your black tails follow me
to sit with patch-wet hair
on a Tuesday evening
the bug taps my leg softer than the water rolling
Doctor's eyes rolling
so bored of waiting, your toes dangle metres from here
you mumble, dear, where's morning gone?
I answer inside my head

"It only gets closer away"

To borrow another hour, for
card to decline
overboard, you watched me stop swimming
so long ago, sym-pathetic siren
you know what I'm doing here
you will teach me

This is how furniture feels.

Where little moonlight pirouettes
and scans barcode ankles
Mr 99.3, you tell me
of Armenian dances and emergencies
wrinkled preservatives like thimbles
know it's dragging longer, your numbers cycle
in a fibreglass jar
fibreglass martyr
been here a while
be a while longer

Just til morning returns

Til I'm above the floor
and you watch the linen drape from the tap
and you watch the water climb my calf
my ribcage on a circular platter, shrinks in time
deal me ignorance, AM
shuffle closer, FM
you will dip your toes soon, soon
move closer
I'll be here to react your fall

The aftermath knocks
you tell me the switch has been on
this waltzing apology, spotted
signals not laying as flat as
cross stitching in a handmade gutter
the switch has been on, this
whole-damn-time
tell me I'm over oh-so ready
and drive off the edge

Never been a place of tragedy, except
what goes on past the clock
because your black tails reach
and bruise my other knee
when you crossed the circus sideline
what perfect e(lectri)(xe)cution
I can't give an encore

This is how furniture feels.

When I'm drifting off
bugs fleeing an atomic waste ground, while
words just bubbles now
wish this fibreglass was cleaner
is it morning or night?
I'll think back to when the grout was a
pearly-white

Cassandra

Kit Vanner
Winner – Highly Commended
Senior Secondary Poetry

we are the modern Cassandras
liars, prophets
calling out monsters and men

/but I know he wouldn't do that/
please.
he knew just what he was doing

/but think about his future! so much potential! /
We are branded- easy, dirty
but he is the golden boy
apollo on the football team

/but you're just accusing him for clout/
we were cursed at birth with two X chromosomes
fated to never be believed

/but look at her skirt- she was asking for it/
no matter how many times she said no
her body and clothes must speak for her

poor Cassandra
gifted a voice but no value
we have no credibility
favoured by gods but believed not by men

poor Cassandra
Showered with gifts,
strangled by the strings attached

poor Cassandra
when she said no
she was cursed

Poor Cassandra.
At least people remember she cried out



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