

Women Writers Qld Inc
Marj Wilke Short Story Award
13 December 2022

Report from Judge Fiona Robertson

It was such a joy to be part of this short story award and to read the submitted pieces. Each story had something to admire, something that moved me or amused me or surprised me. I found the task of choosing placegetters overwhelming, because I wanted to acknowledge many more of the writers.

I'd like to highlight a few lines from stories that *weren't* selected – to show how much beauty there was in each submission.

'Pia pats my arm now, steady like a pulse, just like I used to pat the kids off to sleep.'

'Sometimes she felt as though she stood at a cliff edge, her toes protruding, just air beneath them.'

'We hover on a breath, anticipate and appease his fractured mood.'

'Positive affirmations are hellishly depressing.'

'In bed that night I heard the call of the mopoke and imagined its dark shape in the moonlight.'

There were many themes explored in these pieces. Illness, growing older, mental health issues. Romantic love, friendship, parent-child relationships. Motherhood. Domestic violence. Grief and loss. Solitude.

A few stories, while charming and fascinating, were more like a collection of memories, or 'slice of life' pieces – not quite cohesive narratives. A number of the pieces started well and were strong in many aspects, but didn't nail the ending. Others started in a slightly confusing or meandering way, so that although the story became clear and vivid in time, it was let down by the beginning.

However, there was not a single story that didn't thrill me for the writer's fresh perspective, and there wasn't one story that wasn't the work of a talented writer. I congratulate everyone who submitted, and thank you for having the courage to submit your work.

To those who weren't selected, please continue writing. You really can write. You may well have been a whisker away from being selected. And since perseverance is one of the biggest factors as to a writer's success, persisting despite all the knockbacks that come with writing is vital.

To the placegetters, highly commended and commended writers – you were selected in the top eight from a field of ninety-two stories. I hope you're proud of this achievement, but most importantly, I hope you continue to dream up and create amazing stories.

Here is the list of selected work:

1st place: Killjoy.

This story has an unusual plot, a striking setting, true-to-life dialogue and a subtly-developed sense of mystery that is revealed by the end. The writing is spare yet evocative.

2nd place: Recidivism

Another story with a quirky narrative and beautiful, clear writing. The voice is very strong in this piece, with the main character a sharp and cynical presence throughout.

Highly commended: Death in the Funeral Parlour

A captivating, lyrical piece that is reminiscent of a fairy tale.

Highly commended: Black Swan Moment

An offbeat story with a fresh and original protagonist.

Highly commended: Last Light

A well-written story with a vivid sense of place and cinematic style.

Commended: The Kiss

A tender piece about loss and love.

Commended: Pigeon Day

A short, crisp tale of two sisters that is wickedly surprising.

Commended: The Visit

A gentle, charming story of regret, longing and love.

Huge congratulations to each and every one of you!