

MARJ WILKIE SHORT STORY AWARD RESULTS AND JUDGES COMMENTS

OVERALL COMMENTS

Wow! That was a big job with many difficult decisions to make. I was impressed by the quality of the 101 stories submitted. The writers really made my job tough. Congratulations to all who submitted their stories. It takes courage to submit and courage to write. I commend you all. I'm sorry I couldn't give everyone a prize. If only!

I was moved by many pieces, laughed and cried. I read every story all the way to the end and had to really steel myself to let some go. As a writer who is also submitting to competitions, I know how much time, work and heart goes into every story I read, so it was difficult to cull the stories down to an initial long list of 30, then to a short list of 18. As you can see, I haven't lost many from there. Some stories I read over and over before making a decision. Be assured, your work has been read and appreciated.

So many stories caught my attention and were beautifully written, some needed a little finessing, (formatting is something many entries needed to work on), others were too light or didn't resonate with me fully. As objective as I've tried to be, all reading is subjective, and my own tastes have come into play. Mostly I was looking for stories that shone – and showed themselves to me, bright and shining, as winners. Many stories made me laugh, congratulations to the comedy writers – we all need a laugh right now. Others were deep and moving, exposing the multiple challenges faced by women now and in the past. It was a special honour being asked to judge this collection of women's stories, as empowering women is a huge motivator in all I do.

So, although your story may not have made the final cut, please keep writing and expressing your truth. Women's stories are important and need to be told. Our truths. Our fictions. Our lives now at last have a chance of being seen, as never before. Shine bright women writers. Your stories heal the world.

FIRST PRIZE

'Worlds Apart'

This brilliant and accomplished story interweaves a writer's fantasy story about a woman whose disabled son has been sacrificed to save her community, while she struggles to cope with her own son's disability in the real world. This story, to me, is perfect. Not a word out of place, deeply moving with a satisfying conclusion that pulls no punches. The second last story in my list of 101, as soon as I read the first page, I knew I had my winner. So much is achieved in the space of 1500 words, and the story lingers as every good story should, echoing out in ripples of meaning and emotion. An accomplished and beautiful piece of writing about the challenges of motherhood, by a highly skilled writer who I hope to hear a lot more from.

SECOND PRIZE

'Hauntourism'

This piece of writing is unique, complex, and intriguing. Even after reading it several times, I'm still finding new layers of meaning. I'm not usually a fan of experimental writing, but Hauntourism, set in an otherworldly shape-shifting shopping mall, kept me alert and engaged, wondering and feeling for this "ghost". This story stayed with me and kept me coming back to read again, drawn by the power of the writing. A very clever piece of writing, with a strange, ghostly, and humorous soul.

ENCOURAGEMENT AWARD

'My Feathered Friends'

This story spoke to my heart. Courageous and brave – a telling of a life many endure but most are not brave enough to write about. A young girl and her mother are surviving by the skin of their teeth, a dangerous life for them both, but wrapped in love, until the mother is busted for shoplifting from a charity store and the girl's life changes. No more poverty. But no more motherlove either, only more danger. A story of self-resurrection and resilience. A worthy winner of the encouragement award.

HIGHLY COMMENDED

So many stories on this list were strong contenders for the prizes. I wish I could award you all! Great stories, well written and moving.

'White Bird' – A story that needs to be told and heard. I want to read more of this writer's work.

'Lithe' – special mention – this story has stuck with me.

'Vinegar Lips' – and this – a totally unique voice

COMMENDED

'Losing Molly'

'Slippers'

'Tableau in Sepia'

SHORT LISTED

'Enough'

'His Loss'

'In Cold Blood'

'Survival'

'The Right Fit'

'The Risk'

EDWINA SHAW

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