

**MY BROTHER JACK
AWARDS 2021**

**SHORT STORIES AND
POETRY**

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Junior Secondary Short Story

Judge's Report – Annette Trevitt

Thank you for your stories. It's always a pleasure to see so many entries. I read all the stories and made a shortlist of 21. I re-read the stories and made a shortlist of seven.

This year, the stories included a diversity of characters from a drummer in a quartet being implicated in a murder, a cheeky teenager with a lively imagination, a homesick kid on school camp to a girl facing her fear of heights when her friend is in danger.

The art of story-telling is to maintain tension so the reader will want to read on to see what will happen next to the character.

Stories that grab my attention have:

- a point that matters
- set up a character's dilemma or goal straight away
- a strong structure
- a consistent tone
- short and clear sentences
- scenes I can picture

- a crisis that forces the character to act and to change
- a satisfying resolution linked to the beginning

When you think of a character, think of what the character wants and what obstacles get in the way to make it hard for the character. The character can want anything: a friend, to escape danger, to play in a team, to make sense of a confrontation, to pat an elephant or to be free of others' expectations.

By the end of a story, the character has changed. A crisis, which is pivotal to a story, is when the character hits their lowest point. This breaking point forces the character to act or to realise something new about themselves or their situation.

To write as closely as you can to the way you talk is better than to write how you think a writer should write. The point of story-telling is to connect with an audience rather than to showcase a vocabulary and to let them see another point of view of the world.

Strong nouns and verbs bring life to a story. Adjectives and adverbs can pull attention away from an otherwise good story.

I recommend to all writers to read your sentences out loud. It's a great editing device to pick up typos and repetition. If you say it differently from what you have on the page, change it to what you say. It will be true to your voice.

When writing a story, have fun and trust your thoughts on what goes on around you. It's rewarding to find a way to express them in fiction. All your stories had something worth writing about.

Thank you for letting me read your stories.

Congratulations on writing a short story during a difficult year.

First Place

The Altar by Roshni Walia

The story is very well set up with a slow release of information. A bride is at the altar but things aren't as they seem. I don't want to write more as I don't want to give away the story's plot. The story is told in second person – a point of view that works very well here. The point of view is a disguised first person, however, it is asking, inviting, the reader to understand, to place yourself in the situation of the conflicted main character.

Highly Commended

The Black Salty Hands by Julia White

The character is out at sea in a boat with the character's dad and a fishing crew. Thunder sounds. The details of what happens capture the terror of what can happen when things suddenly turn. The story is well structured and has menace.

Highly Commended

Forgotten by Amelie Sachinidis

An imaginative story of a character walking across the beach to the sea. The character is musical – improvising as she hears the sounds of the sea, the sand and the wooden path and feels the rhythms around her. She walks to the water's edge. I don't want to give away the story. The story shows imagination and originality.

Junior Secondary Short Story – *First Prize*

The Altar

by Roshni Walia

The day has come.

You walk down the aisle in an incandescent white dress; taking note of everyone squeezed into a riot of gaudy colours. After all it is a joyous event. Your gaze drifts to the jet-black eyes that belong to the guy in the back corner. He offers you a half-twisted- nervous-looking smile. You smile back. His suit is almost as black as his eyes. You clutch on to the golden, heart-shaped necklace, which he has given and held to you in faith. At the end of each, seated aisle, jasmine-scented candles hang from naked tree branches. Spread down the aisle were white leaves, far as the eyes can see, slightly moist so they won't crack when you tread on them.

The warmth vanishes from his stare, replaced with anger as you turn to look at the groom. Your parents have told you that after today, you shall not need another thing. Yet, at every step, you take another knife wound to your chest. You haven't realised how tightly you were holding on... until the necklace dropped to the ground. You bend to pick it up, but large, strong hands grip you firmly, yet tenderly, from behind. Your father is holding you upright. Slowly, you feel yourself being turned to face him.

He whispers in your ear, "there's not much longer to go darling, don't disappoint us now...". You draw the tears brimming from your eyes back. The necklace lies forgotten at your pedicured feet. You can't bear to look at him again, knowing that you cannot ever be with him. You search about. He is gone. Panic shoots through your pulse. The seat at the back corner of the room is empty.

A low hiss comes from your father's throat. "Max was... a mistake... which is best left in the past."

Some high, persistent ringing fills your ears, low at first until they are screaming. Blood rushes to your face. The world is tilting on its axis, spinning then teetering.

"Excuse me," you manage to gasp, "I think I'm going to pass out."

"Pass out later. I've paid for this and your mother has been waiting for this day since the moment you were born. Russel is a good man... better than you will ever get again. Now is not the time for your dramatics!"

You step over the white rope, out onto the platform and look leadenly up at the groom. He does not look at you; He doesn't even acknowledge you. He just stands there stiffly, like some stupid, stuffed skunk.

Above, across the inky blackness, there are no stars, only the moon, an island of pale yellow against the nighted universe. A rush of words is said, but you do not listen - cannot. Someone nudges you. It's your turn to speak. You glance back one more time at your necklace; the heart is broken in two, splicing the middle.

No one notices.

Junior Secondary Short Story – *Highly Commended*

The Black Salty Hands

by Julia White

The swell towered over my head, reaching down towards me with salty hands. A vision flashed behind my eyes, the dark water swirling around me as I grasped the lifejacket on the soaked woodendeck. Shoving it over my head, my realization was delayed, that in moments of time, I was about to be dumped into the depths of a black nightmare.

Clear nights always turn on you, we were packing dinner and getting ready for some night fishing. The fish come out more at night. The soft call of the sea whispered in my ear; the crew got the boat ready while the water washed up on my feet, sending a cold wave through me. We were out at sea in no time, the fish swimming away as fast as they came. I could hear a crack of thunder in the distance.

“Dad?” I said urgently.

“Huh?”

“Is there going to be a thunderstorm?” Another crack in the distance sent shivers through me, making the hairs on my arms stand up. Dad looked up and focused his attention on the dark cloud that was starting to brew.

“We might have to head back earlier than planned,” he said to the crew, they all nodded in response. To take my mind off the thunder, I swirled my hand in the water, making little ripples through the sea. The water brought peace to my mind and relaxed my tensed body, making me feel safe in its clutches. Little did I know that it would soon turn on me, and become the monster I once feared.

The boat rocked delicately at first, not very noticeable. Dad and the crew were laughing at jokes I was making while tossing their lines into the sea. We already had quite the stash of fish and squid stacking up. The sky was darkening by the minute, and before we knew it, the black salty waves were trying to flip us over.

The sea was much colder than I realized. It hit me like a hundred pins all over, only one of my lifejacket buttons was done up and the brutally cold, ice numbing water wasn't helping me think straight. The swell sucked me down, down, down, salt stinging my eyes as I miserably tried

finding the surface. When the cool night air hit me, I gulped in a deep and strangling breath. Trying to stay afloat, I then realized that my lifejacket had left me. The black salty hands pulled me down again, I couldn't see or hear anything apart from a low buzz in my ear. Finally, a pair of human hands grabbed me, to take me back to safety. However, the world blacked out before we broke through the surface.

Junior Secondary Short Story– *Highly Commended*

Forgotten

by Amelie Sachinidis

Skipping down the dilapidated, wooden stairs, she observed the waves reaching over the sand and retreating into the water. On the wooden planks, she noticed a dotted rhythm was being played by her feet. One foot landed heavily - it would be the only one majorly affected by the coarse nature of the rotted and splintered wood. She stopped at the third step, as she had always thought major thirds sounded nice, and jumped off into the silky-smooth sand. The step creaked.

“*C sharp*,” she thought. She had a realisation, that the rhythm played off her feet would be a superb basis of a new song.

She began to improvise something in her head, then expelled a hefty sigh. Would she ever remember it anyway? No, of course not. She was still looking for one, one of the first ever that she could remember. Again, as she thought of it, the 3 seconds of a rhythm, pitch and a few mismatched words came into her head. She kept trotting along in time, one foot going deeper into the sand than the other; her left foot as the stronger upbeat, and her right foot as the weaker downbeat.

“Skreek!” the sand called out. It was an *F sharp* this time. Would the beach stay on *D Major*, or would it change its mind? She set out her towel, and it landed softly on the sand.

She reclined on her towel and tapped out a rhythm with her fingers according to the tempo of the waves. She noticed the waves were incrementally swelling up, and at the tipping point, they came crashing down. It reminded her of the slow and steady *crescendo* in the orchestra, starting at *pianissimo* and ending with *fortissimo*, and then a breath-taking silence. She wanted to be closer to the feeling.

She walked into the water, but the unanticipated deepness made her knees buckle. She kept her balance though, and waded in. A small breeze tickled her back, and she glanced back at her towel to make sure it didn't dance away in the wind. She spun around, and in that moment, she saw a wave. Not a normal wave, in fact, one that was charging at her. She had nowhere to go. It punched her in the stomach and nonchalantly annihilated her presence above the water.

Underneath, she wasn't fazed by it. For about 5 seconds that was. Now, her hands were desperately grasping for some stability.

“The upbeats are the strongest,” she reassured herself. “I can get up!”

The pressure on her chest started to feel like the pressure of the bow on the strings. But if you press too hard, the strings snap. She heard a whining in her ears. G sharp. It was A major; she knew it now. The unfinished song started in her head. But this time, it kept going. She had the rhythm, the melody. The only problem was... her words were slowly slipping away.