

2023 My Brother Jack Awards Open Short Story Award

Judging the My Brother Jack open section this year was a privilege and a delight. There was such a range of genres, of dark and light, of memorable characters and scenarios. Entrants this year wrote vivid realist stories that seemed from life and memory, through to those set in fantastical realms, and there were also gritty and gory crime, murder and detective stories. They were set across a range of eras and settings, from the outback to New York City to just down the road. More than in previous years there were bold experiments in genre, form and with language.

Common themes included people partnering up and falling in love, sometimes observed from a third character's lens, for better or worse. There were reunions, but also heartbreak and loss. Families got a look in, as always – parents, children and siblings, with observations on love, hard love, and forgiveness. And chosen families were there too: friends, teachers, the children of others.

In fact, there were quite a few touching stories about teachers, and the difference they make in a child (and person's) life.

There were stories of growing up and changing, facing challenges. Character studies were often of people with rough edges: alcoholics, survivors, aging rockers, and people young and lost. Fire and floods came up, both recent real events and apocalyptic scenarios.

***The Foreign Correspondent* – First Place**

A moody and stunning story about missives sent via pneumatic tube between pen pals in two places lost or on the edge of loss. It's both mysterious and familiar and lingers in the mind. Not a word wasted.

***The Green* – Second Place**

A satire about a status-hungry tech-founder and golf nut. What lengths will this egotist go to for an exclusive invitation he believes is his right? Timely, entertaining and well-paced.

***Braking Grey* – Third Place**

A fun twist on the heist narrative where a group of seniors decide they've had it with technology and get radical. But there's always one in the group who ruins the plan. The structure is satisfying and the themes relatable.

***The Coach* – Highly Commended**

A story with a vivid sense of place about a small town footy game.

***Bird Found* – Highly Commended**

A meticulously crafted story that engages all the senses.

***Of Pearls and Garnets* – Highly Commended**

A genuine piece that recalls an influential art history teacher.