

**WINNER**

**Claire Chua**

PERTH MODERN SCHOOL  
SUBIACO WA

***the concrete jungle safari***

*WELCOME TO THE CONCRETE JUNGLE,*  
You're sitting within a  
Wooden tram  
Made with purring,  
Metal-bodied engines.  
Your legs shiver with the desert cold.

In the corner of your eye, you think you spot a dingo.  
But then you blink, and then it's gone.

*Your journey begins.*

*WELCOME TO THE CONCRETE JUNGLE,*  
If you look above, you can see the city edifices glistening—  
Like beads and jewels in the neck of this brick-paved outback.

Does it sometimes feel like a dream?  
Do you sometimes feel the hiss of the rainbow serpents,  
Sliding across sandy linoleum corridors  
As the office vents whisper cold air over your collarbones  
In the language of the spirits?

Totems and paperwork mingle under fluorescent lights.

*WELCOME TO THE CONCRETE JUNGLE,*  
If you look above you will be able to see—  
A sacred bird,  
Gliding, soaring,  
Two engines,  
A propulsion system.  
A lingering scent of  
The past, the present—  
The then and the now.

*WELCOME TO THE CONCRETE JUNGLE,*  
*Oh.*  
The dingo is back.  
You lean over the metal bars of the tram to get a closer look.

And in these streets you feel  
The industry-patented air  
Clawing at your cheeks.  
Carbon, nitrogen...sulfur.  
Toxic.

The creature howls,  
Golden fur mirroring the sun's rays.  
But you cannot tell if it's a cry of excitement  
Or pain.  
(*Simply put—you may never know.*)

*WELCOME TO THE CONCRETE JUNGLE,*  
Where sacred Jacaranda trees burst  
Spewing purple confetti  
Over a House of Opera,  
And thundering applause.

Down the street the tram goes.

And you notice that  
Lean totems line the roads like streetlights...

*Or was it that streetlights lined the road like lean totems?*

And a voice: *THIS HEREBY CONCLUDES THE CONCRETE DESERT SAFARI.  
WE HOPE YOU ENJOYED THE RIDE.*

\*\*\*

Until your eyes snap open.  
You gradually float out of the reverie, and then back into reality. You hear voices, trailing passing figures, shadows; they're walking so fast it's a violent blur that presses into your ribs. People hustle by you, their pallid white uniforms a second skin. But when you look at their eyes, you see...black holes. You rub your eyes. That's when you realise you're standing on a platform of marble and brick and concrete.  
Trains hurtle past. There's the clink of metal chewing on metal in a ravenous brawl from the construction site two blocks down. Light refracts on every surface, a chaos of physics and sunbeams. Someone pushes past you, the dusty scent of perfume lingering even as its perpetrator scampers into the crowd, disappearing. You look down. Clutched in your hand is a bag full of papers and projects and words and worries. But where did the dingo go? Is it gone?  
(*Answer: It's not. No one leaves the home that is rightfully theirs.*)

### **Judge's Comment**

I just adore this evocation of ancient Australia within the context of a contemporary urban environment. Fabulous!

## **RUNNER UP**

**Jordan YEE, 15**

ST PETERS LUTHERAN COLLEGE  
INDOOROOPILLY QLD

### ***Anchored***

The queue meanders through the building,  
Takes a sharp right at the artichokes, then  
Swerves to avoid the stack of cans (70% off! Buy Now!), before  
Tiptoeing meekly past the deli and screeching to a halt,  
Just before it collides with the croissants.

Someone carrying a basket of cumquats  
Is arguing wildly on a phone –  
“I don’t see why I should have to demean  
Myself before those monkeys. I can  
Find another job. I’m a star and I’m going to  
Wait until those imbeciles realise it!”

A reply materialises out of the ether,  
Responded to by another flurry of words  
“No, I don’t have to ‘Start somewhere!’ I belong at the top!”  
The line creaks forward, and the deli server glares at him.  
Here she is queen. Silence echoes. The trolleys  
Hold their squeaking and even the crying  
Children know better than to wail.

She’d always wanted to be a hydrographic surveyor.  
When others had decided that they would fly into  
Space, eat ice-cream for tea or fight fires and fiends,  
She’d charted the sand-pit, pretending to be  
Deep beneath the tides, mapping the whorls and  
Peaks of ancient magma, long since coalesced into  
Mountains higher than any above the waves.

But when she had brought home her dreams,  
And prepared to make them real, she was stopped.  
“A hydro-what?! Our family has been slicers of cold meats  
And stuffers of olives for generations! Who cares what’s on

The ocean floor? Look, just try it. It's in the blood."  
The dream drowned and was buried deep.

Now she's waiting. Perhaps one day she'll learn  
To love slicing hams (Thin! But not too thin!) or wrapping  
Two hundred and thirty-seven grams of feta.  
Sometimes she fools herself.  
But then she sees a picture of the deepest part of the world,  
The abyss into which her hopes were hurled,  
And her dream is salvaged.

"Just one more day. One more paycheque."  
Scared to dive into the deep unknown,  
To leave everything behind for marine peaks and troughs.  
Can she dare to leave safe harbours?  
Pull up the anchor of the past?  
And  
Take  
The  
Plunge?

All that was left was an apron and a hairnet.  
All that was taken was a dream  
From its hiding place, unfurled and uncrumpled.  
Stuffed into a rucksack, squeezed in beside Hope,  
Barely leaving room for Regret.  
Her dream must be followed.  
Who knows what's on the ocean floor?

### **Judge's Comment**

There is so much to love about this poem - metaphor, humour, adversity and hope. The pacing is superb, too. (Thin! But not too thin!)

Just love it!

# HIGHLY COMMENDED

**Cherie BAIRD**

MOUNT CARMEL CATHOLIC COLLEGE  
VARROVILLE NSW

## **Filing Cabinets**

People cannot be compartmentalised.

They do not come into your life  
prepackaged and labelled with details  
of the extent  
to which they will impact you.  
And when they are no longer a part of your life,  
it is not possible to pack them up, along with  
all of the ways that they have affected you,  
and move them elsewhere.  
People cannot ever truly be let go of.

That is why only now, years later,  
you realise that you were at least a little  
in love with her.  
That is why you still daydream  
about the boy who will always remain  
a "what if".  
That is why you still think  
of skeletal lights wrapped around trees  
and the smell of rain.  
That is why you still wonder  
about the loveliest girl you have ever met.

Because people become you. People  
fill you up like the oxygen you absentmindedly breathe:  
invigorating your senses,  
covertly setting your very cells alight.  
Each person you come into contact with  
will elicit a unique collection of emotional responses within you,  
leaving you with an impression as individual  
as a fingerprint.

But do not forget –  
you, too, are included in this aggregation referred to as “people”.  
You cannot grasp your lasting impression on others.

Be wary. Be careful. Tread lightly.

### **Judge’s Comment**

This is a very insightful poem, which I found very affecting. I can't recall another poem that speaks so powerfully and interestingly of the deep and long lasting effect human beings have on one another. It reminds me of Kurt Vonnegut's enduring message: "Be kind".

### **Freya COX**

THE FRIENDS' SCHOOL  
KINGSTON TAS

#### **I do**

I want to buy her flowers  
Hold her hand in the cinema  
And go out for fancy dinners  
That neither of us can really afford

I want to hear her breathing beside me in the night  
Feel her curled up next to me, amongst tangled sheets  
See her tousled hair and sleepy eyes in the morning

I want to travel the world with her  
See the seven wonders  
Look at her  
And see the eighth

I want to build a home  
Paint the walls and get flecks of colour in our hair  
Argue about which couch to buy  
And then let her choose the one she likes

I want to hold  
The soft, heavy bodies of our children in my arms  
Watch them grow up, as we grow older  
Together

I want to drop our children off for their first day of school  
Cry with her at their graduations  
And sit down together to write  
Speeches for their weddings

I want to care for her when she's old  
Flick through a lifetime of photo albums  
And see her face next to mine  
Over the decades

And in amongst that somewhere  
I want to slide a golden band onto her finger  
And say 'I do'  
But in this country  
The government says  
I can't

### **Judge's Comment**

A very powerful plea for the right of the gay community to marry. Like so many great poems, the sting is in the tale.

## **Emma CRISP**

PRESBYTERIAN LADIES COLLEGE  
PEPPERMINT GROVE WA

### **Reaping**

to harvest a child  
they are best picked  
young  
it's easier to spoil  
an identity that way

use crushing words  
and society's moulds  
to smother the useless  
flame of  
imagination

then narrow the mind  
harden the softness  
and stifle their  
voice

there is no room  
for wonder  
so dismantle childish  
beliefs

finally  
eradicate the  
innocence  
and  
you are left  
with an  
adult

### **Judge's Comment**

A bitter but highly eloquent commentary on the journey from childhood to adulthood.

## **Ophilia KONG**

SCEGGS DARLINGHURST  
DARLINGHURST NSW

### **Hymn to Mardi Gras**

we are coming  
to Hyde Park: by daylight  
a single green patch, a rushed assurance of nature  
to its concrete-ravaged wayward child;

but by twilight  
turned into a cathedral, greater tonight  
than its neighbours, the sandstone behemoths  
of tradition; tonight it stands  
a church of infidels,  
an infinite congregation at evensong -

singing for one step, one push  
for justice, for the battle  
against dogma, the pretence of the elements;

or perhaps a party of ephemerals, anticipating their annual spot  
of line-pushing and glitter-throwing,  
a wanton showering of the colours, paintballing  
the bright spilled blood  
of a battle that was never theirs

that's no sin - we're all miscreants,  
all bloody punch-drunk innocents,  
all here to have a good time

but more than that we are a reason  
our shared fragmented hearts  
united against a common enemy: call it injustice, oppression,  
the sheer stagnation of ideals -

through it we have become more  
than a community, we are the fight for and against  
human nature, we are community itself

we are boundless  
yet, on another day perhaps, as tightly bound as ever  
at our wrists, our ankles, our throats  
we cannot act, we cannot move,  
we may speak but it is not heard

as the vast shadows of Government  
like a staggered implosion -  
reason reduced to shrapnel, each fragment  
obstructing the others  
in the search for their own middle truth -  
tumble, though they must think they  
are marching, down upon our heads

we the rich and poor, the young and old -  
a curious collection of opposites, we put the *moron*  
in oxymoron; we dance into the sunset  
and think it is the dawn

but we dance nevertheless

we are the damned – yet still we hope  
we are the godless – yet still we believe  
we are living where stability is inverted, and excess  
is nothing more than nothing

we are coming  
in an army, in a battalion, bearing on our backs  
the skeletal legacies of those  
who fell before us - or rather  
they had hearts so full they burst, their blood-splatters  
the first bold painting of our streets;

we are coming  
with centuries of lost-and-found history  
strewn with our lost minds, our bodies we tore apart  
with our bare hands, our eyes of glass prisms  
shattered over and over again, yet refracting  
all we see into rainbows

and still bright today -

believe me:  
the white light of Government House  
cannot stand a chance against us

### **Judge's Comment**

This plea for gay rights contains rare insight, bitterness, passion and, ultimately, defiance and hope. A real 'no guts, no glory', 'take no prisoners' approach to the subject. Excellent.

## **Genevieve PEADY**

LIGHTNING RIDGE CENTRAL SCHOOL  
LIGHTNING RIDGE NSW

### **The Generation to be Offended**

People often regard the world today as  
"The generation to be offended by everything"  
And that kids these days are too young  
To understand what's going on.  
But,  
Kids these days,  
They're a part of what's going on.  
And it's not that they're offended by everything  
It's that today  
People regard things like  
Racism  
And sexism  
And homophobia  
As something little  
And often they're the ones  
Who don't understand what's going on.  
Someone kills themselves  
Every forty seconds.  
That's three-thousand per day.  
That's over one million per year.  
Nobody looks at that figure,  
And nobody cares.  
Because when you bring up mental illness  
You watch  
Somebody rolls their eyes.  
After all  
This is the generation to be offended  
By everything.

### **Judge's Comment**

Gen Y fights back! All true, too. Great poem.

## **Joumana QUINN**

INDIVIDUAL ENTRY  
MANLY VALE NSW

### **Breaking News!**

*"He's only mean to you because because he likes you."*

They tell us.

*"He'll grow out of it,"*

They tell us.

*"Boys will be boys,"*

They tell us.

Turn on the television:

**Breaking news!**

**Woman is killed**

**In a domestic altercation.**

*"She should have left him sooner,"*

They tell us.

Turns out,

We're still waiting for them to tell us when.

*"Don't dress like such a prude,"*

They tell us.

*"Sex sells,"*

They tell us.

*"Boys will be boys,"*

They tell us.

Turn on the television:

**Breaking news!**

**Woman is raped**

**Out the back of a college party.**

*"She shouldn't have worn that to a party,"*

They tell us.

Turns out,

We're still waiting for them to tell us where.

*"If a boy asks to dance with you, just be nice – say yes,"*

They tell us.

*"If a guy catcalls you, you should take it as a compliment,"*

They tell us.

*"Boys will be boys,"*

They tell us.

Turn on the television:

**Breaking news!**

### **Woman files for divorce**

#### **After claiming to have been pressured into marriage.**

*"She should have just said no in the first place,"*

They tell us.

Turns out,

We're still waiting for them to tell us why.

*"Just say no if you're uncomfortable,"*

They tell us.

*"A nice guy will listen to you,"*

They tell us.

*"Boys will be boys,"*

They tell us.

Turn on the television:

#### **Breaking news!**

#### **Woman is stabbed**

#### **After rejecting a lonely man.**

*"She should have just gone out with him,"*

They tell us.

Turns out,

We're still waiting for them to tell us who.

They tell us,

*"Boys will be boys,"*

Then reprimand us when we spit back at them,

*"Girls will be girls,"*

It's time to turn off the television,

And teach them a lesson.

Because this is no longer breaking news.

Men will be held responsible,

Instead of

Women taking blame for men's actions.

Because,

Men are not boys,

and

Girls are not women.

### **Judge's Comment**

Another great balance of 'head' and heart' - I love the idea of the final words of each verse - when, where, why and who - before the wrap-up. The use of bold print also works very well, and the last verse is an absolute killer. Terrific poem!

## **Eddie SPICER**

THE KILMORE INTERNATIONAL SCHOOL  
KILMORE VIC

### **Mrs. God**

My husband. Such a fool.  
He's taken up a new hobby. He's making people.  
I don't know how he got the idea, but he's completely inept.  
I had to stand over his shoulder to help him make their universe.  
Somehow he still made mistakes. I told him  
Not to put the tree in Eden as they would surely eat its fruit, but he did anyway.

He couldn't control them - they were wild and wicked, like tiny demons.  
So I wrote up ten rules they must follow; he passed them on  
But still they were wicked and in a tantrum, the fool  
Flooded the place, killing almost everything. What an imbecile.

I kept running his little world from over his shoulder.  
His second, more sensible little conscience.  
Telling him what to do, what to create, it was irritating but  
It paid the bills.

Somehow he managed to impregnate a married woman with his child.  
I take my eyes off him for five minutes and look what happens.  
I simply can't understand how he thought that was a good idea.  
If the job had been given to me I would have done it right.  
I felt sorry for them.

He has decided he doesn't need my help anymore.  
He is working on his own and  
It is worse than ever. Disease is running free like flowing water,  
His people are killing each other by the hundreds and so many go hungry.  
It's not that he is neglectful, he just doesn't know what he's doing.  
And to make matters worse, he takes credit for all the good in the world and  
Blames all his stuff ups on Satan from accounting.  
When there's good luck, a breakthrough or times of peace, they all thank God.  
If only they knew how much he is to blame.

### **Judge's Comment**

I love this poem. Very black, but oh boy, is it funny!

## **Samantha SUBAAHARAN**

JOHN PAUL COLLEGE  
DAISY HILL QLD

### **WHAT I'LL BLEED**

there are nights  
when i don't write.  
nights when poetry  
and i do not meet.  
we do not even  
speak on the nights when i  
lay silent in the dark,  
my kaleidoscope heart  
locked in a glass bottle, tucked  
into the sea. there are  
nights when i don't write.  
nights when i keep my  
wounds closed, papercuts and  
blisters left hidden under  
aged bandaids because  
these are the nights  
*when i'm afraid*  
of what i'll bleed.

### **Judge's Comment**

A meditation on pain and courage - sad, but very powerful.

**Lara TIMBRELL**

ST MARY'S ANGLICAN GIRLS' SCHOOL  
KARRINYUP WA

### **The Waste of the World\***

There are many cumbersome ways to kill a planet:  
you could travel her entirety, looking for unknown  
worlds to seize as if you were entitled.

But this, may be awfully hard to coordinate, with need  
for imperialistic monarchs, men with sea legs,  
a large body of water, citrus fruits, a compass  
and some animals to wreak quiet havoc.

Or you could take a length of steel  
sharp. Optimised for harpooning and launch  
it at a great unsuspecting mammal.  
However, for this you need an eggshell ecosystem,  
an enormous rusty vessel, salty spray,  
a bloodstained deck and a high demand  
for controversial cultural delicacies.

Dispensing with nobility, you could terminate pests  
and insects by spraying generously, a compound created  
by a Noble Prize winning capitalist and entrepreneur,  
with a background in chemistry. All you then  
require is a blind government, a nation's scientists,  
an ecosystem to annihilate, a contaminated  
food supply, a pinch of cancer and a Silent Spring.

In an age where painting your houses green is the trend,  
you could suffocate your victim, slowly but surely,  
by everyone pressing small switches over  
and over and over. In preparation, all that you  
require is an abundance of resources to  
deplete, polar bears with little need for ice, a Dodge  
and a planet no one needs for several centuries

These are, as I began, cumbersome ways  
to kill a planet. Effortless, lax and much more idle  
is to place approximately seven billion men in her  
midst, wait, and leave them be.

## **Judge's Comment**

A bristling and brilliant black comedic mix of environmental and gender politics.

## **Cindy UM**

DARWIN HIGH SCHOOL  
DARWIN NT

## **Thy Woeful Northern Territory**

### **I.**

Shall I compare thee to the Northern Territory?  
Tho the air reek of insects and humidity  
Large crocs swarm in the months of the Wet,  
And summer's lease never cease its hold;  
The eye of heaven too hot to withstand,  
Arise the use of utilities  
And bless us with thy air-conditioning  
Thou take caution in the justness of pricing  
For the price is not all that just.  
And perhaps old Turnbull ought to fix up our mess  
Lower'd the taxes, bless'd our sun scorched skin  
But who'd we kid, he ain't from up here  
He's yet to feel the wrath of heat  
He's yet to know defeat.

### **II.**

Mewonders in what a darling mood  
Mother nature hadst've been in when she created such a place.  
A place so hot, so dry, so bitter;  
A place where all but wither.  
Tho 'tis in the dreaded month December  
When thy eternal summer fades; ceased are thy heated waves.  
Arriv'd the blissful chill monsoon  
But alas, rejoice is shortly lived.  
Forgotten. Merry Christmas is.  
For winds of up to lightning speed  
Come hurtling at our Christmas trees

Down the gutter  
Through the house  
O' how we wish'd for Summer.

### **III.**

To drink, or not to drink: that is the question:  
Whether 'tis nobler in the act to reject  
Or live with regret of one night's tumbles.  
Tho thy beverage bear the name of god  
'Tis Satan's deadliest sin: a firing squad.  
For many drink their pockets dry  
Good men forever in deny,  
Who kiss their wives and children bye  
For Evil lies spread deep inside,  
False hope so often beautifies.  
And away from heaven's watchful eye  
All that is good shrivels up and dies,  
For thy drink has claimed another life  
O' holy grail of our Territory.

### **IV.**

'Tis in the months of May and June  
When tourists flock to hellish dooms  
Find themselves in swamps of death; surfers take their final breath.  
At Litchfield Park and Tennant Creek,  
A dozen deaths a year at each  
Cause fool'd are those who think it's cool  
To 'scape the wrath of summer's rule.  
Away from nature, away from pain  
There lives a man in great disdain.  
Who let his friends go out at noon  
Down the creek to seek the beast,  
Oh, what a feast they turned out to be.  
I guess 'tis better just to leave this place  
This place: never our territory.

### **V.**

O' thy beautiful malaria spreading insects  
How could I ever be so foolish to think you innocent?  
Was it 'cause your size so small, your tiny wings so clear of sin  
Was it 'cause your legs so long, your little eyes so cute and thin

To think that nobody ever suspects your bite  
To think that I could ever sleep at night.  
But now I know, now I know the truth;  
To hide away at night, to fear your bite.  
For 'tis deadly, sends an itch down my back  
Makes me scratch, skin raw, as if scarred by the devil's claw.  
But however bad the pain may be  
Be grateful that itch does not turn to rash  
That skin does not fill with yellowish puss  
For malaria kills: Forever unbeautifully.

## **VI.**

Would ye' ever arrive barefoot to a ball,  
In T-shirt and thongs at the Governance Hall  
Well brace ye' hearts to hear such terrible news,  
For the animals of thy Territory do.  
They pride themselves on their backward, no good ways  
Disgrace is the Territory Rig.  
Tho there always is thee good ol' croc skin purse  
Outdated it is- oh how the environmentalists yay'd  
Worst of all: thy students bear no uniform  
No blazers, no scarfs: just T-shirt and jeans  
No seasons to inspire their harrowing fashion senses  
For short shorts and board shorts dominate the woeful fashion scene  
Oh what a tragedy; makes me want to curl up and cry  
Oh how thy Territory is wry.

## **Judge's Comment**

Another great black comedy. I especially loved those lines about the T-shirts and thongs at the Governance Hall!

## COMMENDED

### Cherie BAIRD

MOUNT CARMEL CATHOLIC COLLEGE  
VARROVILLE NSW

### April

It's painfully ironic  
when I think about the fact that  
you wrote that you feel as though  
I am fragile  
(crystal glass)  
next to you  
(as coarse as sandpaper),  
when I can recall writing, months ago,  
that I wished for many things to be different,  
but I did not wish for you  
(not really)  
because I didn't trust myself  
not to destroy you.  
Now here we are,  
and all I can think is that  
appearances can be deceiving,  
and I would do the most wicked things imaginable  
before I would willingly hurt you —  
but I still don't trust myself.

### Judge's Comment

This poem is something of a puzzle to me. I have read it over several times, and still can't quite understand it. I do know, though, that it got under my skin, and seems to be saying something very important.

## **Cherie BAIRD**

MOUNT CARMEL CATHOLIC COLLEGE  
VARROVILLE NSW

### **Caution**

Jackie French  
said she was pleasantly surprised  
when a 14-year-old boy – who could barely write,  
but who took the time to write to her –  
accurately described the essence  
of one of her children's historical novels.  
Jackie herself, numerous critics, a modest fan base,  
and countless others had strived  
arduously and in vain  
to accomplish what this boy had done.  
His mind,  
perceived as simple by those who taught him,  
had allowed him to truly understand and articulate  
the inarticulable.

"Be very wary of anyone who tries to make you angry."

I tore my gaze from the television.  
My mother,  
seated across the room from me –  
but the words had hardly registered at all in her mind,  
let alone as acutely as they had struck me.

Children are taught to obey:  
to walk, but only when instructed to;  
to speak, but only when spoken to;  
to control, but only themselves –  
though they understand much more in the process.

Children understand the meaning of obedience.  
You have the freedom to move  
(within the confines you are afforded).  
You have the freedom to speak  
(in those situations when your opinion is explicitly requested).  
You alone have control over yourself

(or, in the very least, the illusion of it).  
Though regarded as foolish,  
this boy was not fooled.

Oftentimes the phenomenon known as teenage rebellion  
is deemed to be merely the series of selfish and nonsensical outbursts  
of children, yet too immature to handle such responsibility  
as they so naïvely desire.  
I disagree with this widely-accepted definition.

I believe that this occurrence  
takes place following the sharp realisation  
that an adolescent is not a second-class citizen  
and has no business being treated as such.  
A teenaged individual deserves to have their opinion heard –  
in spite of inevitable inaccuracies,  
embryonic ideas,  
and unrealistically optimistic ideologies.  
Age does not determine intelligence, insight,  
or the validity or worth of one's thoughts.

Anger is predominantly a reactive response.  
It is followed within seconds by a flame  
being lit in one's chest,  
every pulse beat  
sending burning adrenaline singeing through the veins.  
Such a blaze is notoriously difficult to extinguish.  
It scorches one's cerebral cortex –  
leaving forethought as the task of the incapable medulla –  
and, too often, scalds the hands into unthinking action.

Be cautious of anyone who tries to make you angry –  
for anger,  
heedless anger,  
is the basis for subservience.

### **Judge's Comment**

This is a dense poem, filled with very sophisticated concepts, and I am not sure I understand it fully in spite of several readings. Perhaps it lost its way a bit. Then again, perhaps the failing is mine.

## **Holly BRAMBLE**

QUAKERS HILL HIGH SCHOOL  
QUAKERS HILL NSW

### **Waiting**

Everyday  
My reflection mocks me  
"It'll never happen to you"  
And I do my best to ignore it,  
but I know it's harsh words  
are a reflection of my own harsh thoughts.

Everyday  
I sit and wait  
and wriggle and wrestle with the problem  
"You'll be stuck with it forever"  
I can't help but think it  
and I feel my marbles let loose.

Everyday  
I see people breeze easily down the street  
"What a freak"  
They never glance my way,  
but I feel their derision  
and I wish my problem were easily lost.

Everyday  
I yearn for a normal, steady life.  
Without unexpected twists  
I wish all the pain would fall out  
Of me and I could  
Smile brightly

Everyday  
I look on the mirror,  
Fixated on everything  
That's wrong with me  
And for the hundredth time today,  
I wish  
That my wiggly tooth would fall out.

## **Judge's Comment**

The poet sets us up beautifully here - a poem that appears destined for hopelessness and sadness is revealed at the end to be a joke. Very well executed, with a tiny hint of what is to come given in the second last verse. (Just for the record: "it's" in verse one, line five, should not have an apostrophe.)

## **Freya COX**

THE FRIENDS' SCHOOL  
KINGSTON TAS

### **forgotten children**

they give us pencils to draw with  
feeling pleased at their generosity  
they do not wait to see the pictures  
that appear  
childish scrawls  
with haunting undertones  
of pain  
and sadness  
tears drip from the pages  
in blue crayon  
blood splatters  
in pink marker

mama said here we could play outside  
run around  
and send our voices spinning up to the clouds  
without being silenced in fear

i tried that once  
only once  
yelling, chasing my brother and shouting out to the clouds  
i got yelled at in return  
now i am silent

they tell us we are illegal  
i do not understand

i am seven  
how can i be illegal?

we used to play with kites  
dancing, swooping, vibrant birds on strings  
squares of colour against the glaring white sun  
anchored to our adoring hands  
flying in the open sky

now we play in the dust  
behind a fence  
that seems to shrink inwards each day  
until it closes in completely  
and crushes us

do they remember when they look at us  
that we are children  
or have they forgotten  
are we now nothing but  
other?

### **Judge's Comment**

This heart-felt plea from a child is very powerful. It offers a great challenge to the reader.

### **Freya COX**

THE FRIENDS' SCHOOL  
KINGSTON TAS

### **Dyeing**

Look around,  
what do you see?  
A pile of fabric,  
a half open packet of dye.

Watch the fabric,  
plunged into the bucket,  
swirled around with a wooden pole,  
soaked in colour,  
a liquid rainbow.

Hung out to dry,  
flapping in the wind  
like a parrot's wing.

Look in the next room,  
stitching flying across the fabric,  
scissors snipping and slicing.  
Shapes appearing.

Look further.  
Past the colours,  
the liquid rainbow,  
the parrot's wing,  
the shapes.

Did you see?

The child?  
Skin stained with dye,  
hands a mottle of colours,  
back strained with the weight of heaving wet kilos of cloth.

In the next room,  
fingers are worn from stitching,  
eyes are weary from peering at the parrot's wing,  
and the rainbow,  
in the gloom and dark.

Did you see?

### **Judge's Comment**

Here is another powerful plea from an exploited and abused child, who produces from his/her own dark and colourless world an object of great brightness and colour.

## **Rezvan CYRUS**

APPLECROSS SENIOR HIGH SCHOOL  
ARDROSS WA

### **Grandma's House**

A six floor, modern apartment looms in front of me,  
Aesthetically pleasing, like a filing cupboard of human lives.  
Iron-grey walls depict a flavourless hive,  
Identical opaque windows deprive,  
Both sunlight and warmth from the owner's lives.  
What was once an exotic garden is now replaced  
With a mundane car park.  
Colourless cars aligned in order, become substitute for trees.  
As a child, I was awestruck by their shifting in the breeze,

As a child I would sit here on a peacock blue Persian rug  
Under the cool shade of the pomegranate tree.  
Grandmother separates ruby seeds for me,  
As I wait eagerly, the earthy aroma of the  
Pomegranate reins in my senses.  
Amethyst tulips, orchids and roses emit bittersweet incense,  
My aunts gathered together, drink cardamom chai,  
And giggling cousins pass by.

I look at grandmother's saffron brick house,  
Simple and old, its filled with our memories.  
"Grandma why did you rebuild your house?"

I preferred the old one much more than this.

"Because we have to move on."

### **Judge's Comment**

A beautiful meditation on conventional notions of 'progress'. How often do we sacrifice emotional health in the quest for material wealth and comfort?

## **Uyen DIEN**

THE KNOX SCHOOL  
WANTIRNA SOUTH VIC

### **Waiting 101**

1. Pretend to be happy, greet the customers;  
Maybe not like you're looking for your next bff,  
But at least like you pretend to care
2. Offer drinks and menus;  
This is when you also offer the, god forbid,  
Specials.  
It's all about managing their expectations,  
Write down the specials so that you can actually remember,  
If it was a chilli,  
Or chive hollandaise — big difference
3. Ready to order?  
This is where you write down,  
Or memorise for the show offs,  
What each customer will be having.  
Be prepared for the (painfully) specific food considerations,  
In their mind:  
You're a waiter,  
It's your job,  
Deal with it
4. Bring food to the table;  
This is where you allow the customer enough time to taste their food,  
Only coming back if it seems that they are not happy  
Or need something else,  
This is a crucial moment, pay attention.  
Signs of discontent may include:  
Head shaking left to right, desperate looking around,  
Finger snapping (rude, but possible), waving arms,  
Getting up and getting the salt shaker, milk and sauces
5. Payment and thanks;  
This is where you act like you're grateful,  
For the fact that they have supported the restaurant,

Where you are lucky enough to have a job and get paid peanuts,  
Hopefully making at least minimum wage in tips to clothe yourself,  
Feed yourself, keep a roof over your head and pursue your dreams.

And here it is,  
A step by step guide to becoming a pro-waiter,  
Why wait for a new job,  
When you can wait for new customers?

### **Judge's Comment**

A clever play on the theme of 'waiting', and another black comedy. Very good poem.

### **Rebecca EATON**

ST MARY'S COLLEGE  
HOBART TAS

### **Forest**

The towers nature itself created.  
An oxygen factory.  
Towers losing themselves on the ground.  
Streets of green below.  
Bugs going every which way in a chaotic but orderly fashion.  
Nature's ultimate light globe reaches its fingers between the towers.  
The towers sway in the wind. The parts if themselves blown away.  
People make the towers fall.  
People divide the towers and take them away,  
But they don't put new towers where the old ones were.  
They don't put in new towers at all.

### **Judge's Comment**

Here is a very simple but elegant exposition of the perils of deforestation.

## **Piper EDMONDS**

BYRON BAY HIGH SCHOOL  
BYRON BAY NSW

### **His Eyes Were Brown**

Yellow were the afternoon adventures, the wasps under the veranda, the smile he gave his mum when he lied, and the bouquet his father bought for the neighbour.

Blue was the schoolcap, his first ballpoint pen and the handball he bounced on the roof. Blue were the ribbons in Jenny's hair.

White was the dress at his aunts third wedding and the soft skin of his baby sister. White was the sky the day his father left.

Red were the painted soldiers and the blood he could taste on his tongue. Red was the strawberry by Mary's lips and what his hand felt when they brushed hers. Red was the life ahead of him.

Green was high-noon, the weeds in Nana's garden, the sour smell of hard candy. Green was a kiss from his mother, the ships hull and the shade of scared boys riding sea salt horses.

Purple was the echo of his sister's giggles, the sharp sweet cruelty of limericks and lullabies. Purple was the lavender he pressed in letters home, his snowdrop descriptions and an exhaustion he kept hidden beneath his eyes.

Grey was the mire, the tin hat, the shells. Grey were the screams of mutilated youth with seeping holes in their smoked uniforms and cloudy skin. Grey was the Great War that swallowed him with its great grey jaw.

But most of all,

Grey was the hair of his little sister,

When she finally stopped searching for him in the stars.

### **Judge's Comment**

I think it is difficult to write effective poems about the First World War one hundred years after the event, but this colour-based approach to the theme is very imaginative. The ending really kicks you in the guts.

## **Natalie EVERETT**

PRESBYTERIAN LADIES COLLEGE  
PEPPERMINT GROVE WA

### **The Perfect Illusion**

The perfect system, the best around,  
Australia's democracy, the epitome of excellence.  
Idyllic with our white sands, white birds, and white people,  
With our fair system for fair citizens.

The strong society that fears the issues that matter,  
The perfect community that removes the outliers.  
Individuality, uniqueness, all devoured  
To Advance Australia Fair.

For the ones that came across the sea  
To share our boundless plains,  
We have an island for you, the ones that "don't fit the mould".  
An island where Christmas never comes.

With courage let us all combine to Advance  
Australia, the melting pot of the world,  
Where the hot desert sun bleaches away all colour  
Until everyone is smooth and sandblasted.

Australia, the everlasting circle of mistakes.  
The suspicion, the action, the Apology.  
Sometimes Sorry, never remorseful,  
Though always a friendly mask.

Australia, the land of lawful separation,  
Where everything is for your own good.  
Father and Mother know best, of course,  
But Father most of all.

Australia, where love knows many boundaries,  
And there's plenty of discrimination to go around.  
Closed doors show our accepting nature,  
Representative of our shores.

The road to the future is shadowed,  
Forked along the way.  
Which path to follow?  
Choice is only an illusion if you let it be.

### **Judge's Comment**

Another very black, very funny poem that no doubt contains much truth.

### **Zane FORSYTH**

BYRON BAY HIGH SCHOOL  
BYRON BAY NSW

### **It's Normal To Me, It's My Family**

Two families I have  
They do not get along  
Their cease fire stands  
But no one knows for how long  
It's normal to me  
It's my family

When I change house  
I must change my life  
At dads I am always on my toes  
Not sure of what may happen next  
At mums I relax and get my work done  
It's normal to me  
It's my family

At my dad's house I have four young brothers  
Three step, one real  
We fight and we argue  
Like cats and dogs  
But when all is said and done

We have each other's back  
We are like a team  
Us vs the world  
And although we do not share the same blood  
We share what we have  
And we all have some fun  
It's normal to me  
It's my family

My mum's house is easy I have only one brother there  
This house is relaxed  
My homes are contrasted  
Like day and night  
My family's different  
In ways indescribable  
But it's normal to me  
Because It's my family

### **Judge's Comment**

Another poem with a duality - it teeters on the edge of sadness, but the poet appears to have come to terms with her domestic situation.

### **Michelle GREENWELL**

APPLECROSS SENIOR HIGH SCHOOL  
ARDROSS WA

### **Wedding**

We are dressed in our Sunday best,  
sweat in afternoon sun masked by dianthus.  
Heels sink in the quagmire of dirt and grass  
while men squirm in ill-advised jackets.  
Drinks and conversation are passed around  
as we wait for the bride to arrive,  
late to her own party.

A car is heard, people scramble into place.  
The band begins to play while groom stands proudly.  
A hushed silence falls as bride marches, vows are said,  
soon the affair is over, and now begin  
the murmur of congratulations; what else to say?

Confusion spreads across the families  
as photos with the stars are being taken.  
The sun is waning, time is wasting.  
Distant relatives panic as their opportunity fades  
while photographer wishes he were somewhere else

We are sat at spotless tables with precise position,  
our names so elegantly written.  
Emotional father of bride stands to speak;  
bawdy jokes are shared with a wink.  
An articulate afternoon descends  
into a riot of voices drinking and dancing,  
the lady who sits across the soiled table  
laughs with booming thunder,  
slurred voice screeching for more wine.

Soon the party is over, as newlywed leave.  
As they depart, more congratulations are noisily declared  
their counterparts seized by taxis and swiftly discharged.  
Guests are gone, and staff promptly prepare for tomorrow -  
another wedding perhaps?

### **Judge's Comment**

This is a very black poem, but also very funny, and it contains much truth, I am sure.

## **Angela HEWITT**

ST MARY'S ANGLICAN GIRLS' SCHOOL  
KARRINYUP WA

### **Gone by May-Day**

*A response to "Icarus Allsorts" by Roger McGough*

Once upon a time, before mayday,  
There lived a jolly, lovely fat-lady.  
Who loved nothing more than an old fashioned pub,  
And having a drink with her friends from yacht club.  
Paying for a round of drinks for her friends,  
That's what she was doing when her world ends.

Gone.

Once upon a time, in yesterdays future,  
There lived a rather grumpy old butcher.  
Who did so despise the smell of new paint  
For whenever he smelt it he felt quite faint.  
Avoiding the paint on his new shop walls,  
That's what he was doing when his world falls.

Gone.

Once upon a time, before the first air raid,  
There lived a timid and pretty young maid.  
Who's what you would call a cleaning fanatic,  
So her awfully messy boyfriend is often quite problematic.  
Wading through the dirty clothes in his room,  
That's what she was doing when her world met its doom.

Gone.

Gone now.

Gone then.

Gone Forever.

### **Judge's Comment**

It is hard to make much sense of a poem like this without a knowledge of the poem to which it is responding. Fortunately, I am a great fan of Roger McGough, and it was a pleasure to do the research!

## **Fiona JONES**

ST PAUL'S COLLEGE  
WALLA WALLA NSW

### **Waiting**

Waiting...

All the nurses scurry around,  
Similar to squirrels preparing for a severe winter.  
Tucking in beds and preparing  
What little equipment we have left.

My once white apron is now stained  
With a copious amount of men's excretions.  
We haven't been able to wash our uniform in months,  
We haven't even been able to wash ourselves in months!!!

Matron received news from the Commanding Officer,  
"A great number of frontline casualties are arriving".  
Will there be 100 men? Will there be 400?  
Have I got any tears left to shed for more brothers?  
Fathers? Sweethearts?

And how much can we do without fresh water?  
Many of the sisters have fallen sick themselves,  
We were already short of hands to begin with.  
The sun is beginning to set already.

How much longer will they be?  
Time is off the essence, how many lives can we still save?  
The temperature drops as the darkness takes over.  
As silence creeps in the sound of explosions falls dead.

All that can be heard is light footsteps of the nurses.  
Suddenly the flaps of the tent are thrown open with a smack!  
A chilling breeze rushes in and prickles down my spine,  
All the nurses turn with their hearts in their throats.  
"Sisters, they're here..."

### **Judge's Comment**

Another unusually effective war poem. We like to think of the medical staff as always being in control, no matter how difficult the circumstances. Here the poet draws the curtain on an all-too-frequent truth. (A clever use of the theme of 'waiting', too.)

## **Tyson KEATING**

INDIVIDUAL ENTRY  
NANANGO QLD

### **Resignation**

I regret to inform you  
That I will be resigning;  
Immediately –  
Today will be my last day.

I have grown tired of;  
Being forced to work endless hours  
For no reward tangible, slavery,  
An unconscious state the only escape.

I have grown tired of;  
A workplace bursting with negativity,  
Prejudices, stereotypes and social norms,  
Restricting me from my dreams.

I have grown tired of;  
The unbelievably high expectations  
Which I must live up to, impossibly,  
Or face the rest of my existence as a failure

I have grown tired of;  
Going to 'work' every day, knowing,  
That the end result will always be the same;  
Fired, after a lifetime of diligent work.

I am looking forward to;  
Taking my fate into my own hands  
In the only way one truly can –  
By resigning, and seeking bliss in eternal retirement.

### **Judge's Comment**

As the saying goes, "Most men (and presumably women also) lead lives of quiet desperation". This narrator would appear to be have been one of them. I'm just glad he has such a healthy balance in his superannuation fund! The refrain "I have grown tired of..." works well, as does the break from the pattern for the final verse.

## **Amy LAYTON**

INDIVIDUAL ENTRY  
CROMER NSW

### **What I've Been Told**

When I was born,  
They told me I was safe.  
Safe to be free,  
Safe to be happy,  
Safe to be me.

When I was 5,  
They told me I was meant to be quiet.  
Quiet when they were talking,  
Quiet when they teased,  
Quiet when something was wrong.

When I was 7,  
They told me I was his.  
His to poke,  
His to make jokes about,  
His to be submit to.

When I was 10,  
They told me I was going to Hell.  
Going because I was mean,  
Going because I didn't listen,  
Going because that where bad little girls go.

When I was 12,  
They told me I was going to hurt.  
Hurt because of boys,  
Hurt because of friends,  
Hurt because of the lessons they taught.

When I was 15,  
They told me I was invalid.  
Invalid in my looks,  
Invalid in my life,  
Invalid in my decisions.

When I was 17,  
They told me I was pretty.

Pretty enough to catch their eye,  
Pretty enough to make them want,  
Pretty enough to be worthy of their time.

When I was 19,  
They told me I was wrong.  
Wrong about the way I felt,  
Wrong about who I loved,  
Wrong about who I was.

When I was young,  
They lied.  
Lied about the future I had,  
Lied about the choices I had,  
Lied about who they would let me be.

### **Judge's Comment**

This is a very bitter - but powerful - poem on the perils of being female, intelligent and (possibly?) homosexual in our society.

### **Amy LAYTON**

INDIVIDUAL ENTRY  
CROMER NSW

### **Bottom of the Garden**

At the bottom of my grandmother's garden,  
There is a clump of toadstools.  
I've seen fairies living in them,  
And I always leave them little presents.  
When I go down to visit them they make the sun shine for me,  
So I can stay with them for hours,  
As they move in and out of their little houses.  
I love that clump very much.

At the bottom of my grandmother's garden,  
There's a big old tree.  
It's very good for climbing,  
And sometimes we have picnics underneath.  
When I climb the tree I can see the neighbour's roofs,  
Stretching all the way out the the ocean,

And the horizon after that.  
I love that tree very much.

At the bottom of my grandmother's garden,  
There's a bush of flowers.  
They're so pretty to pick in summer,  
And I like to weave them through my hair.  
When I go through the flowers there is never one without a blemish,  
Yet they're all perfect in their own way,  
The most beautiful flowers I've ever seen.  
I love that bush very much.

At the bottom of my grandmother's garden,  
There's an old marble birdbath.  
The water in it is always fresh and clean,  
And birds come year round to bathe in peace.  
When I watch the birds trying to fight for a place by the water I laugh,  
And as they scatter into the sky,  
I find myself wishing to be just like them.  
I love that birdbath very much.

At the bottom of my grandmother's garden,  
There's a wooden bench in the shade.  
My grandmother sits down there with me,  
And tells me stories from when she was young.  
When I listen to her talk I can see the glister in her eyes,  
So I know she wishes a little she was back there,  
Young and strong and not without my grandfather.  
I love that bench very much.

At the bottom of my grandmother's garden,  
There's some words carved into a rock.  
The rock reads "Here lies Betsy Wilson,  
Who lived a long and beautiful life, full of love."  
When I sit down there and cry over my grandmother next to her grave,  
I think about how brilliant she was and how much I miss her,  
And about how much time we spent at the bottom of the garden.  
I love that garden very much.

### **Judge's Comment**

A simple and straightforward, but very beautiful, love poem for a departed grandmother.

## **Tabitha MALET**

PRESBYTERIAN LADIES COLLEGE  
PEPPERMINT GROVE WA

### **Backbones**

Backbones make her uncomfortable.  
The pictures of bent-over models,  
Straight wispy hair pulled to the sides of their necks  
To reveal a line of knobs like vital organs  
Barely trapped under the skin  
Make her own ache.

She imagines running her fingers over the buttons  
Remembering how hard, how breakable they are  
How the skin on top tightens with cold  
And leaves them so exposed.

There is a livid purple scar on her back  
From a high-friction slide at an unnamed adventure park  
She slid down in nothing but overly-loose school bathers  
And the plastic scored a line where the bones dug through

Like the silver-sharp cold ends of cutlery.  
Oh, she was always cold  
Swamped in massive jumpers or pretending  
To be warm in an attempt to prove  
That eating less hadn't changed her.

Of course it had. Old photos, digitally preserved  
To look the same as today's  
Show the angry fuzz at the nape of her neck  
Where the hair stopped growing.

Her fingertips are purple in every photograph  
And the gaunt lines of her jaw have horrible stories  
To tell to the unwary listener.

The worst curse is seeing her story repeat itself,  
Spotting the warning signs early but  
Powerless to stop the wheel turning,  
Slowly eroding lives.

### **Judge's Comment**

A very powerful and disturbing meditation on eating disorders. The focus on minute details - such as the injury from the slide - is, to my way of thinking, at the heart of much great poetry.

### **Katherine PHILLIP**

PERTH MODERN SCHOOL  
SUBIACO WA

### **in which you have more in common with cinderella than you think**

In the land of never after the girls wince when the invitations arrive. The stepsisters are plump with botox; pouted lips stifling their speech. *"It doesn't matter."* Stepmother says. *"Nobody cares what you have to say – they'll be looking at your ass not your face."* They smile sweetly, saccharine lips and sad eyes. In the land of never after the dress sizes wane with the moon. Bruises bloom on their ribs where whalebones hold their bodies together. They feast on diet pills and hard liquor. In the land of never after Cinderella's fairy godmother spits in her face. You cannot get anything for nothing. The mice and rats gnaw at her toes. The birds screech outside her window. When the clock chimes midnight her dress falls off her in tatters and her shoes splinter and break. *"If the shoe fits..."* It never does.

### **Judge's Comment**

This is a very black but extremely funny take on the old fairy tale.

## **Eva PRIESTLEY**

BYRON BAY HIGH SCHOOL  
BYRON BAY NSW

### **Hush, Little Girl**

Little girl, go to sleep,  
It will be all right,  
Little Girl, play those strings,  
And everything will be fine.

Little girl, if that's what you love,  
Go for it and listen to your heart,  
You are strong, you'll persevere,  
The pieces will fall in place, you just have to work hard.

Little girl, you don't want that stress,  
Of having to choose between two parents,  
We'll get through this, we always do,  
Things just take time and so can you.

I know you're scared,  
I know you don't believe,  
But you can be,  
Whoever you choose to be baby,  
Take a breath,  
A deep breath in and out,  
It's only a moment in time,  
Hush, little girl.

### **Judge's Comment**

Here we see a girl demonstrating enormous poise, courage and faith during a time of great adversity.

## **Sophia RICHARDS**

HERITAGE COLLEGE LAKE MACQUARIE  
MORISSET NSW

### **Cycles and Seasons**

You go  
I will be right here  
Go and breathe  
Love, laugh and dream  
The clock hands and calendar  
The moon cycle and seasons  
Will become my sweet and loved friends  
I will miss you and mourn your loss  
But it's a decision only you can make  
She may be perfect  
The culmination of everything you want and need  
Logistics and logic in her favour  
But  
What we have is undeniable  
It shimmers in the starlight  
Dancing under the silvery moon

So  
I will soothe my fretful mind  
Calm my boiling blood  
And watch  
Maybe  
One day  
Those little sparks of a dream  
I once blew from a dandelion  
Will find you  
And bring your heart to mine

### **Judge's Comment**

Many poems are written about unrequited love. What I love about this poem is the enduring sense of dignity, and the lack of self-pity. It also contains many beautiful images.

**Bella RICHARDSON**

OGILVIE HIGH SCHOOL  
NEW TOWN TAS

**The Sting of Friendship**

A blackberry bush  
Holds the sweetest fruit  
Up where you cannot reach.  
If you miss,  
A spike to your hand.  
A stinging that lasts a long while.  
You could settle for a lower fruit  
One that is soft  
And covered in bugs  
Or you could reach  
Up high  
For the best  
Because sometimes the sting  
Is worth it.

**Judge's Comment**

No pain, no gain. Simple, but very beautiful. A great life lesson.

## **Shi HAN SU**

PERTH MODERN SCHOOL  
SUBIACO WA

### **Waiting**

Time passes in short bursts, and endless stretches,  
Or perhaps it hasn't passed at all?  
Denim jeans meet the peeling leather,  
I think I'll be here a while...  
And the sound of the slamming door still echoes,  
Endless ripples in a broken home.  
The fridge is still stocked with his favourite beer,  
A flannel shirt still wafts faint cologne,  
There's still a spare toothbrush in a blue ceramic cup,  
But in the dead of night, an empty room reminds me he's gone.  
Though my mother swears he's coming back,  
Whispers her wedding vows to bottles of jack.  
Denim jeans hug the peeling leather,  
Old friends.  
The clock the only thing that moves,  
A red second hand that ticks,  
And ticks,  
                  and ticks,  
                          and ticks...

### **Judge's Comment**

Lots of powerful images here speak indirectly of a wife's grief for a departed husband, and a daughter's grief for a departed father and an abandoned mother.

## **Samantha SUBAAHARAN**

JOHN PAUL COLLEGE  
DAISY HILL QLD

### **ATOMS**

And with a mist  
of mystery about her,  
she parted her lips  
and let words fall out like gold coins:

*"It is the scientists  
that I feel most sorry for,"*

she said.

*"How awful it would be  
to truly believe  
that we were made of atoms.  
To believe that we were made  
of broken pieces  
to begin with.*

*(Like we never  
had a chance  
at all.)"*

### **Judge's Comment**

The science underpinning this poem is deeply flawed - atoms are not 'broken pieces'. Nevertheless, the idea behind the poem is beautiful and touching, the poem itself elegant and simple. I love the idea, too, of a poem capturing only a tiny fragment of a conversation. (I'd better stop now, or my comments on the poem will be longer than the poem itself, which would not feel right!)

## **Sophie VISSER**

HOBART COLLEGE  
MOUNT NELSON TAS

### **If I Were a Tinker**

If I were a tinker  
I would carve the soft dimples in your cheeks  
and mend the chisel of your jawbone

If I were a tailor  
I would stitch the tethers of your broken heart  
and I would embroider the silver lining of your psyche

If I were a soldier  
I would raise an army of terracotta warriors  
and I would guard your dreams from the phantoms of the night

If I were a sailor  
I would commandeer a tall ship with sails billowing in the wind of your  
breath  
and circumnavigate the waterway of your tears

If I were rich man  
I would dress the contour of your collarbone in diamonds  
and the circumference of your wrist in a twist of white gold

If I were a poor man  
I would tiptoe along the tips of your fingers  
and sleep in the palm of your hand

If I were a beggar man  
I would kiss at the curve of your Achilles heel  
and I would beg for the mercy of your weakness

If I were a thief  
I would steal away the worry from the furrows of your brow  
and the sadness from the iris of your eyes

And if I were an Indian Chief  
I would paint my face in the fierce courage of your desire  
and then

I would dance in the shadows of  
your passions inner fire

### **Judge's Comment**

This poem is well structured, and is positively bursting with rich imagery and metaphor.

### **Pandanus WEST**

BYRON BAY HIGH SCHOOL  
BYRON BAY NSW

### **Two Fathers**

I have two fathers  
My father that takes me walking  
And my father that sits down  
I have two fathers  
My father who hears me talking  
And my father, he's out of town  
I have two fathers  
My father that carries me high  
And my father, Preoccupied  
I have two fathers  
My father who can look me in the eye  
And my father, too often he's lied  
I have two Fathers,  
The one I imagine myself to be  
And the one who disappoints me in reality

### **Judge's Comment**

This is a sad poem, but also very clever. I assumed the two fathers would be the biological father and the stepfather - not the real vs the idealised father in the imagination.

## **Rosalie WICKS**

MOUNT CARMEL CATHOLIC COLLEGE  
VARROVILLE NSW

### **The Carrot and the Axolotl**

There once was a carrot who fell off a wall,  
He had long hair and a colourful shawl,  
This carrot decided he wanted to embark  
On a journey to Sweden National Park,

He rang his very old and faithful friend Ben,  
So they could meet in Sweden at half past 10,  
But Ben had a condition for the lovely carrot,  
Ben would only come if he didn't bring his parrot,

And so to the airport the carrot did run,  
The flight was quite tedious and not at all fun,  
He waited in baggage claim for hours on end,  
Before he was approached by a man with no left hand,

Who told him his bags had been left in Qatar,  
So he gathered his shawl and travelled by car,  
In search of somewhere to crash before night,  
Before bats and mosquitoes came out to bite,

The carrot stayed in a 3 star hostel,  
Before morning arrived with Ben the Axolotl,  
They had tea and crumpets and chatted away,  
About how best to go about their day,

Back to the airport in a fast-paced gait,  
This time carrot was accompanied by his mate.  
They decided they'd rescue the missing baggage,  
From abandonment issues and life without cabbage.

In Qatar they got off the plane, sore and stiff,  
The carrot "Tripped on his shawl" and fell off a cliff,  
So Ben collected the baggage alone,  
And the carrot was remembered as accident prone.

Now what you didn't know was that Ben was poor,  
And entirely impartial to a little gore.  
He'd called the airport to arrange a mistake,  
Because in Qatar he knew it would be easier to escape,

From the forceful wrath of the intelligent police,  
Who would know that carrots death was performed with malice.  
But poor Ben had made a mistake,  
Which could shatter his world just like an earthquake,

For the carrot had in secret brought his parrot,  
Who'd witnessed his murder and was happy to share it,  
Ben was sentenced to a decade in jail,  
Which made him depressed and awfully pale.

### **Judge's Comment**

This is a wild romp that deserves an award for its title alone!

### **Ashley WILLIAMS**

INDIVIDUAL ENTRY  
DONNYBROOK WA

### **Existential Crisis**

Existential crisis is highly underrated  
When I explain it to people I am quickly hated  
I guess talking about death is pretty deep stuff  
But anyone with any self-awareness will have one soon enough  
You think about such topics as the crashing loneliness of realizing all  
humans inherently are and will die alone and it kinda ruins your day  
Everything else seems to be meaningless and you don't really want to say  
Anything to anyone you just want to be alone

And sit in silence as the messages pile up on your phone  
Suddenly homework seems stupid when you are questioning your  
existence  
And all your friends first world problems make you want to keep your  
distance  
You suddenly have moments when you ask yourself the question  
About what would happen if your parents died and did I mention  
If you're like this for too long people will start to get concerned  
But honestly you'd rather leave that stone unturned  
From personal experience therapy is suggested  
And seriously you will still have these crises even after you're tested (you  
don't want to know...)  
The crisis could last for day's even weeks  
And the constant talking about death WILL make your friends think you're  
a freak  
Everything feels monotone and nothing really matters  
People wonder why I don't do math's homework when my brain's in  
tatters  
You think that does anything you do have an impact on the world  
And then get even more questions that need to be unfurled  
You don't really know when this happened but you know there was a  
point in your life when you were content  
And don't know how you put up with this constant torment  
It's kind of scary but motivational to know your place  
To know that there are so many unknown things in space  
To see yourself lying there, pale and dead  
To think about things your friends and family would've said  
About you and your personality, your flaws and all  
And then again you begin to fall  
Re-assessing your life choices  
Trying to block out all the voices  
Thinking about all of your biggest mistakes in life

How you always got into so much strife  
You think about all those times you procrastinated  
And never did anything that made you feel validated  
Basically all of your life regrets are forced upon you in heaps  
All of the memories haunt you in your sleep  
You have that curiosity to want to know why  
What's the reason for us being here and what happens after we die?  
But of course no one knows these answers so you are stuck in a loop  
And you kind of feel like you've been cheated, almost duped  
But at some point you realize that even though self-awareness is a curse  
Honestly this all could be a whole lot worse  
You could always be completely oblivious  
And act like an idiot, totally frivolous  
To know you are intelligent enough to think like this  
Although once it's gone it's not something you will miss  
I take pride in knowing that I'm so fixated on death  
That I actually think about what happens after our last breath  
It motivates me to try new things and make the most of our very short  
amount of time  
Like how for this project I decided to do it in rhyme  
(see what I did there now my poem is self-aware)  
I feel like existential crises are great for self-reflection  
To think about how to improve all your imperfections  
Like New Year resolutions that are still broken  
Although I find existential crises much more potent  
All I can really say to someone to get through a crisis is this  
Only you can make yourself have the courage to exist

### **Judge's Comment**

This is a long ramble, where the 'heart' might be said to have got the better of the 'head'. It is entertaining though, and mockingly self-aware, which is very endearing.

## **Eliza WOODS**

BRISBANE GIRLS GRAMMAR SCHOOL  
BRISBANE QLD

### **McLovin'**

I'm a barista now  
Like the beans through the grinder,  
the lonely hours of my shift  
Pulverize my heart.  
Sometimes I look over  
and see you there  
with the new chick at my register  
and think of all the things I could have said.

Cha ching  
you opened up your register  
Why did I not open mine up to you?  
I was robbed  
But you didn't know you were the thief:  
They couldn't catch your crime on the security cameras  
Only I know.  
You weren't trusted with the keys to the shop  
But it didn't matter,  
You had the key to my heart.

I don't laugh at the café like I did with you,  
It's quiet over here.  
I wish I could put down my coffee cloth  
and go back to the way it used to be  
Because when I'm with you  
I'm lovin' it.

### **Judge's Comment**

This is a very clever, fun poem - packed with puns, many of which escaped me on the first couple of readings.