

### Senior Secondary

#### WINNER

**Amelia Neylon, 16**

Individual Entry  
West Hobart, TAS

***When Penelope went sailing, instead of waiting for Odysseus to come home***

Dear Odysseus,

Tell me of Aphrodite  
lipstick war stripes on her cheeks,  
trying to finish the war she started.  
Tell me of Athena  
eyes blazing,  
trying to justify being the God of War.  
Tell me about Arachne  
and sewing that shames Gods.  
Tell me something I can believe –  
I'm sick of hearing about Trojan horses and Nobody.

Gather me onions  
so I have an excuse for all of these tears.  
Gather me smiles  
so I have one for every occasion.  
Gather me pens  
so I can finally write you love letters.  
Gather me stars  
and I'll tangle my hair in the sky, so it'll stay out of my eyes.  
Gather me fabric scraps  
because I  
want an ocean...

I'll go sailing in an eggshell like the witches of old  
and drown sailors, in charm.  
I'll teach lonely sirens sign language

I'll thread the sun through a needle,

stitch stories to the constellations  
and teach the Kraken embroidery.

I'll learn how to cuss and how to use thimbles as knuckle dusters

I'll trade an eye for tall tales,

give away my protest songs

to mermaids bored with their hairbrushes,

give away my hair

so a selkie can sew a new skin.

I'll give away my buttons

to hold down starfishes in storms,

and give away my shoelaces

to seabirds

a long way from home.

And then I'll sink my eggshell

to make a reef:

use all my tapestry thread

to weave coral.

Anchor it with my pins

and I'll come home

and you will kiss where my eye used to be

and bandage my bloody knuckles,

sew buttons back onto my jacket, and dye what hair is left.

And I will tell you about the sailor, the siren and the selkie's happily ever after.

I'll embroider constellations and krakens on your clothing,

I'll give you all the tall tales I collected

and the pamphlets of the Mermaids' Liberation Army.

I'll tell you about buckling down in storms and seabird's nests tied to clouds:

So, gather me wind

and I'll make us a sail

Gather up new bones and old boots

and I'll make a boat

And gather up your things

and come with me

But, please...

Please don't take too long gathering your thoughts.

***Judge Comment:***

Gutsy and strong like its subject Penelope, and brimming with carefully-crafted imagery, this poem takes no prisoners as it whirls the reader on a journey through ancient mythology, triumphantly turning accepted truths about power on their head. A well-deserved winner!

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