

The Ethel Webb Bundell Literary Awards for Short Stories

Judge's report

I read 118 stories in this year's lineup, with a range of approaches, styles and subject areas. As always, I was attracted to stories that told me of some aspect of how humans operate in their worlds: how they connect with each other and how they resolve problems or dilemmas that aren't necessarily of their own making. When I read a story that has a clear voice, one that contains a *truth* I can recognise or empathise with; one with nuance that may tell me something about a subject I think I know and understand but through a different *slant*, I am forever grateful to the reader for opening up new fields of knowing. When stories are located in familiar places for me, and when they name the particularities of those places, I feel really engaged in my reading. For many of us in places such as Perth and W.A, this is still fairly rare. There were a number of such stories contained in the field I read through, and some are represented in my shortlist.

The winning story does precisely that: it locates itself in place and sentiment and in doing so presents the reader with an added layer of delight. I found 'A Call to Come Home' generous: a young woman's journey through making decisions about her future and what she could contribute within her world. The passion for the natural world, and the ever-present threat to that world is well captured here. The scene with the young tiger shark near the reef: the meeting of two sentient beings is not what we are expecting in the sensationalism that humans have in their narratives about sharks. It is poignant and deeply felt; it is well considered. This is a well written and carefully crafted story that stood out in this field.

The second prize is offered to 'The Love of a Good Woman'. It's an incredibly tense and heartbreaking story circling around women and, particularly, Marta. The high drama of the story is always measured well, avoiding cliché and overstatement.

The third prize goes to 'The Caves', another story of the South-west: of loss and disaster and lifelong dreams gone bad, but also with an uplifting denouement in the discovery of a natural wonder and a new start. It is very local in the best sense of the word.

The highly commended story is 'The Accident.' I enjoyed the idea of a random motor accident and the reading of a book being the catalyst for throwing off habits and defying the world of old age to strike a new beginning with few expectations of where it would take the elderly male protagonist.

Thank you for all of this strenuous work of making stories. Don't give up!

Terri Ann White