

## **The Young Adas Short Story Prize 2021: Judges' Report**

The 35 entries for this seventh year of the Young Adas competition included many different 'takes' on the form and content of the short story. Some young writers opted for first-person reflections on identity, their place in the world, and the forces that threatened them – whether these be coming to terms with sex and gender, presumptions about race and ethnicity, or environmental catastrophe. Others took us on fantastic journeys towards surprising conclusions. Meticulous realism had its place in the stories, as did love, romance and yearning. We were impressed by the maturity with which the writers addressed the complexities of family life and the relationship between generations; often they charted a hopeful movement towards increased empathy and understanding. It was also fun to read stories suffused with humour, irony and a sense of the value of friendships and of fleeting moments of togetherness and fulfilment.

The ten short-listed narratives are published on the Williamstown Literary Festival website. There are several others we wish could have included. It is no exaggeration to say that all of them address profound social and personal issues and find diverse and intense ways of doing so. Within the space of 1,000 words, they paint vivid pictures of the lives of young adults, or enter into the lives of others, depicting situations that demand strength of character and resilience. The overall effect is inspiring.

It is only possible here to make detailed reference to five stories. Two of these were 'Commended'. Agrima Ghosh's 'Crashing Thunder' embarks on a compressed but vivid evocation of the vicissitudes of the Australian Indigenous experience, tracking a life of someone who is forced to deal with dispossession. However, the story also makes space for the nourishing aspects of family, friendship, and love. The encounter between two frightened but resilient women in Rydham Oza's 'A Foreign Touch' (set in the USA of today) manages to suggest the possibility of cross-cultural connection without being facile or sentimental. The Highly Commended story, 'The Foreign Land' by Cathy Le, is a touching and detailed account of the immigrant experience of a woman from an older generation. We were impressed by the sensitivity of the treatment, and the ability to conjure up a world seen from 'the inside'. The Young Adas 2021 Runner-up, Crislin Rosete's 'A Roll of Film', traces a relationship that ended (almost before it began), but manages to do so in a spirit of generosity and acceptance. Wistfulness and a sense of the fragility and intensity of past moments are captured in a series of surprising, sensuous images. Elena Turner's 'A Kumquat Enterprise' was awarded the 2021

First Prize. The judges were won over by the freshness of the style, the quirkiness of the characters, the movement from its starting point on the morning of a summer's day when "the air was heavy and still and not much was happening" to two young girls' brilliant idea for making money from fruit, and the trip back home after the scheme's inevitable failure. The story includes a satisfying beginning, middle and end within its brief compass, and the trick of the ending is that youthful optimism redeems what could have been a disappointment. Everything about the story seems fresh.

We hope readers will enjoy these stories in the 2021 Adas web posting, and be charmed, disturbed, and rewarded by them. No two of them are the same. Congratulations to those short-listed, and a big thank you to all the young writers who took the time to write so well and submit work to us.

Judges: Margaret Campbell and Chris Ringrose