

## **YOUTH CATEGORY**

### **Shortlisted - Vivienne Pole - The Birds Didn't Sing**

A simple title, but a seriously unsettling visual. Sitting at around 300 words, this was one of the shorter entries for the youth category, but it packed a wicked punch. Sometimes the creepiest things happen in the most mundane of ways. Thunder doesn't strike. Darkness doesn't fall. And sometimes, it's only the birds that know. A well crafted and precise piece. Congratulations Vivienne.

### **Shortlisted - Rishika Narula - Instinct**

Instinct is a beautifully written story, establishing an eerie, almost dream like setting for the forest that calls to you. The words lure you in, much like the woods themselves, they intrigue you with their beauty, then in a spooky twist, grab hold of you, and never let you go. This tale was a pleasure to read, leaving me somehow cosy and disturbed, all at the same time. Well done, Rishika.

### **Shortlisted - Xinya Tang - The Call from the Dead Grandpa**

The title of this story does not hold back. And you get exactly what you think you will, with a surprise side of wholesome ghostliness. This tale starts off with pain and grief, then evolves into despair and desperation, but, like all good stories, it takes a turn right at the end, where it morphs into something more beautiful, more hopeful, more eternal. Thank you Xinya for a beautifully told, eerie tale.

### **Commended - Gemma Carpenter - If I Die Alone**

This story opens with a devastating blow and unfortunately, or fortunately, if you like your tales murderous and creepy (which, if you're reading this, I'm guessing you do), things only get darker. Beautifully descriptive and evocative, the grief and subsequent panic are tangible elements of this tale. Congratulations Gemma on a moving piece that had me looking over my shoulder on my forest walks.

### **Commended - Devanshi Mandowara - The New School**

Everyone's worst nightmare: the first day at a new school. Throw in some uber creepy, unique descriptors, like 'everyone walking in synchrony, like a pendulum clock'... and you have one

eerie tale that will have you second guessing changing schools. A very tasty short story not to be read before the first day of term. Congratulations Devanshi.

**Highly Commended - Anabel Mathew - Whisper in the Trees**

A lingering call from the forest and a village with a dark secret. Whisper in the Trees is a beautifully written piece that felt like a poetic, yet dark history lesson that would be retold around many a campfire. Elegantly written with restraint yet enough gritty details to have me squirming a little in my seat, this was one history lesson that held my attention. Well done, Anabel.

**MNYWEA - Rory Harfouche - Don't Answer**

One creepy line delivered in the middle of this story had a shiver trickle down my spine; "Check on the twins". There's nothing like an unknown caller giving you morbid instructions to trigger that internal panic button. A seriously creepy tale that will have you double checking the locks on your doors, great work Rory.

**1st Place Interstate - Carina Guo - Fight or Flight**

This story moves at breakneck speed thanks to the cleverly written breathless prose. Stranded in the darkness with a phone on its last legs is everyone's worst nightmare, but throw in a monster taunting you from the woods, and you've moved firmly into horror territory. A great, spooky story, well done Carina.

**2nd WA Place - Hannah Koay - Brownhill Manor**

A ghostly story that tugs on the heart strings. It can be difficult to weave emotion into a spooky story, but Brownhill Manor does it with ease. Deceit and grief are all wrapped up in this complicated tale of familial woes that is only made eerier by the lingering presence of something otherworldly. A wonderfully unique entry, congratulations Hannah.

**1st WA Place – Caitlyn Woon - The Dollhouse**

The Dollhouse hits a few of my very favourite horror tropes all in the one tale; mirrors, dolls and attics. This story is well written with excellent pacing, building quickly from the introduction to the house, to the irresistible call, then moving swiftly into the horrors awaiting in the attic. A very clearly creepy entry that whisks you into the horrors of the unknown. Excellent work Caitlyn, and congratulations.