

My Brother Jack Awards 2016
Open Short Story Award
Judge's Report: Toni Jordan

In blind-judging this year's Open Short Story category, I read 89 stories – a substantial increase over last year's total. The stories this year were, in general, more polished and satisfying than last year's. They represented many different styles, including historical fiction, fantasy, literary fiction, science fiction and epistolary stories. They were all a delight to read. I thank and congratulate all the writers who submitted their work.

One of the challenges in short fiction is keeping away from clichés to create a story that feels fresh and original. Many stories began with the main character waking up in the morning. In general, it isn't necessary to start a story here, especially when the story itself begins later in the day. There were also many stories about the relationship of a character to their pet. These were touching and charming – I'm a sucker for a good dog story – but it's a very common idea these days. Also, there were lots of stories about childhood or from a child's perspective. Many wonderful stories have been written featuring young protagonists, but again: to distinguish a story among such a large field, there needs to be something special about it.

There were also many extracts from longer manuscripts submitted as short stories. In general, this is a great idea. I admire thriftiness in writers; nothing should go to waste. But you can't just take a chunk from a full-length manuscript and send it in. Extracts need to be adjusted to fit into the form of short fiction. These adjustments might be big or they might be small, but almost certainly, some changes will need to be made.

Finally, I'd like to encourage all the entrants to continue to polish their stories and improve their writing craft. Not every story could be a winner, but every story had something wonderful about it: a unique and fascinating point of view; an interesting plot; unusual characters; or even (most pleasing for me), one or more gorgeous lines. You are all real writers, because there is something you do very well.

I'm delighted to announce the winning and shortlisted stories as follows:

Winner: Entry #4 Canary Fields

I was captured from the very first line: *We drive past oceans of canola, coloured like the canaries at the home I have just left behind.* This is a gorgeous story that is deceptively simple: on the surface, it's just a child and her parents, driving somewhere. As it progresses, though, it reveals a dense undercurrent just under the surface. I loved it.

2nd Place: Entry #13 Vat 69

3rd Place: Entry #41 Circumnavigate

Highly Commended

Entry #81 Untitled (for jiminy cricket)
Entry #47 The Year Buddy Holly died

Toni Jordan's Bio:

Toni Jordan is the author of four novels. The international best-seller *Addition* (2008), was a Richard and Judy Bookclub pick and was longlisted for the Miles Franklin award. *Fall Girl* (2010) was published internationally and has been optioned for film, and *Nine Days* was awarded Best Fiction at the 2012 Indie Awards, was shortlisted for the ABIA Best General Fiction award and was named in Kirkus Review's top 10 Historical Novels of 2013. Her latest novel is *Our Tiny, Useless Hearts* (2016). Toni has been widely published in newspapers and magazines and teaches creative writing at Faber Academy at Allen & Unwin.
