**Mattie Furphy Short Story Competition 2025**

**Judge’s report**

*Amanda Curtin, June 2025*

Thank you to the Fellowship of Australian Writers WA for inviting me to judge this year’s Mattie Furphy Short Story Competition. It was an honour and a pleasure to read and consider the 111 entries, and I thank the writers of these stories for their work and for reminding me how powerful, immersive and expansive short-form fiction can be. Congratulations to everyone who entered, no matter where you are and where you’re going with your writing.

The reasons for a particular story standing out from others are various:

* memorability—a story that lives on in a reader’s mind after the last word is read
* scope and ambition—one that is innovative in form or treatment, or reaches beyond the particular to the universal
* characters that engage, intrigue, or provoke some other response (likeability not essential!)
* language that startles or charms, seduces or reimagines
* a voice confident enough for subtlety, that trusts its reader
* a pivotal moment of change, of seeing, of disruption
* a paring-back, an economy, that belies weight and force, that is anything but reductive.

And of course that is not an exhaustive list. A story often establishes its own terms, creates its own weather. I once described short fiction as a piece of broken sky: we read the fragment, but in a successful story we catch a glimpse, too, of the whole sky from which it comes.

The standard of entries was high. I read 37 stories more than once, gradually, through successive readings, whittling this group down to a longish longlist of 15, from which I finally selected the winning and highly commended six.

And so to the results.

The three highly commended stories are listed in alphabetical order of the title, which is all I had when I compiled the list.

**Highly commended:**

‘Between’

A young Perth woman working in New York becomes pregnant and returns home. Years later, at a preschool event with her daughter, small moments accumulate and she does something impulsive, shocking. I admire the story’s *in medias res* beginning, the vibe and viscerality of New York compared to Perth’s ‘wide-open spaces’, the use of small details to breathe life into characters. The story offers no easy resolution but beautifully captures a woman’s inability to reconcile real life with might-have-been-if-only life.

Congratulations to **Alison Davis**.

**Highly commended:**

‘Sunrise’

When Damian, an opportunistic thief, steals a car in a misguided attempt to ‘solve’ his partner’s post-natal depression, he also inadvertently steals a story that belongs to someone else. Well paced, layered and full of surprises, ‘Sunrise’ is also a character study centred on a failing relationship between two mismatched, immature new parents, with the spectre of Damian’s father—the father he does not want to be—always haunting his actions.

Congratulations to **Jodie Kewley**.

**Highly commended:**

‘You Turn to Page One’

The ambitious structure of this story forces a reading on more than one level as it carries the reader through key moments in the narrator’s life as a Choose Your Own Adventure, punctuated with fragments of a pivotal slow-motion scene. The writing is strong, sensory, propulsive, and often musical in its piling on of images and emotions. What shines through, for me, is the fears of a young couple, parents too soon, for a boy reaching beyond comfortable boundaries.

Congratulations to **Michael Burrows**.

**Third prize:**

‘Constellations’

This is a quiet story of unquiet times. I love the way it opens, winding, detail by ordinary detail, towards the extraordinary way Desmond conducts his work as a travel agent helping stranded Australians trying to return home during Covid. There is some beautiful imagery, and minimalist dialogue rendered with great effect. The story lives on its characterisation of a gentle, unassuming man doing life-changing work, struggling to remain professional in the midst of heightened emotion and new kinds of danger, and on subtle contrasts between Desmond’s holidaying family in a safe country town and the plight of his desperate clients. It is a convincing, singular portrait of the uncertainty and confusion of those times.

Congratulations to **Amanda Beckett**.

**Second prize:**

‘The Motif’

This sophisticated story foregrounds language and art, ways of seeing and unacknowledged inheritance. Structured around an iconic Caribbean-born figure of the international art world—artist, writer, thinker—visiting Perth to give a talk at an exhibition of her work, it raises ideas of the local, of home, of familiarity in surprising places, and of the provenance of art, its originary debt. ‘We don’t ignore women because they lack force,’ the story tells us. ‘We ignore them because they make us question where we got our patterns from.’ Meditative and elliptical in style, expansive in its use of language, this story invokes others beyond its frame and leaves much to think about in its wake.

Congratulations to **Cee M**.

**First prize:**

‘Mother’

The winning entry is a strong, beautifully told story of loss before loss and the subterranean nature of memory. The narrator, navigating her mother’s erratic decline into dementia, takes her on a holiday by the sea, at a place she thinks might trigger happy memories, calm nostalgia, but does, in fact, the opposite. The story is skilfully constructed, book-ended by a view of the ocean from a hotel balcony, and threaded through with disturbing recurring images. The narrator’s voice, in living out the small rhythms of these days, becomes progressively less controlled, spiralling through patience and forbearance, delight in a flash of wittiness momentarily returned to a fragmenting mind, grief at all that is being lost, a sense of inadequacy helped along, ironically, by a self-help book, and anger provoked by the contrary views of an absent sibling. Perhaps the story’s greatest achievement, among many, is the handling of this difficult, emotionally charged subject matter with restraint and a compassion that resists sentimentality.

Congratulations to **Kerrin O’Sullivan**.