

Winner - Furniture by Ms Wes Lee

Confined to a wheelchair Luke lives in a bare room in a city hostel. A larger world is furnished by observations of other marginalised souls on his daily beat through the city.

One man parades the message – ‘I am a soldier in Christ’s army.’ Another wears a hoodie with the image of Hannibal Lecter . A woman on Lambton Quay begs for money – ‘Pale eyes moving from the deep gloom, as fierce, and as naked as a moray’s.’

These disparate lives are brought into association with a variety of startling and original framing images and echoes. From the ‘skewed lines...and heart shock of contrasting colours’ in Van Gogh’s painting of his bedroom at Arles to this observation of the hens on his brother’s farm: ‘Most people don’t realise what complex lives they have, we’d spy on their habitual circuits through the day watching the small but important changes in their routines : their quarrels and collusions, something as simple as someone walking through the garden at an unfamiliar time would send out ripples, causing them to roost in a different place at dusk.’

Sophisticated in its construction, persuasive in its telling, this story is in a class of its own. *Furniture* by Wes Lee is the winner of the 2010 BNZ Katherine Mansfield Award..

Runners- Up

My Yale and My Harvard by Craig Cliff

A charming and well-told story in which the narrator recounts the education received as a boy riding around in his father’s cab. Story itself is a currency, and the boy delights his father and charms the passengers by reading aloud from picture books. ‘The old ladies would often give me a fifty cent piece...The old man, well, they would muss my hair and give a solemn cough while slipping the change back into the deep pockets of their baggy slacks.’ This is a very original story told with verve and skill.

Not Saying Goodbye by Margot Schwass

Told with perfect pitch this story is about two sisters and their marriages to two brothers. ‘(Joan) married Bob Wysocki...So I stayed up in the valley waiting for Archie, Bob’s moon-faced big brother to come trailing down the road to see me. Which pretty soon he did. I guess he didn’t want to be the one left behind either.’ So much commonsense and practical business about conducting a life is packed into this story. The writer displays a masterly control over the material.

The Letterbox by Stephanie Attwood

Marley has tagged Mr Walsh’s letter box and stolen his tools from a shed. Mr Walsh, a retired army man, seems aware of who is responsible but never raises an accusing finger. Together they rebuild the letter box. Mr Walsh tells the culprit assisting him, ‘We’re going to break the cycle of damage. We’ll wait a month or so. Let the rascal move on to something else.’ Marley: ‘I loved that he knew I was one of the rascals...’ The writer has successfully inhabited a voice that seduces the reader from the first page.

The Flasher by Vicki Walker

This coming of age story is set in Melbourne, in 1973, a year of drought, when cracks begin to appear in the narrator’s world. The flasher of the title is a constant menacing presence but is never revealed. Exposed instead is a world of uncertainty and of sudden unforeseen shifts. A large cast of characters is expertly handled. Perhaps the most compelling character is the place itself. ‘After the crayon set of colours of Sydney, Melbourne in full drought was like landing on the moon.’

The Happiest Music on Earth by Sue Wootton

The constraints of space often make it challenging for a short story to accommodate a story-within-a-story. But this one is more than competently achieved. A dying father tells his adult son about a childhood incident designed to shed light on their own relationship. Earle is nine years old when a stranger tries to get him in the car with an offer of tickets to the A & P Show. Earle runs home and tells his violent cop father. Merv doesn’t waste another minute. He puts on his steel-cap boots, packs a truncheon in

a sports bag, and announces he is 'going fishing.' Earle loves to sing but it has had the urge beaten out of him. His mother's presence in the house is limited to a photo. In the photo she is riding a horse on a merry go round 'listening to the happiest music on earth.' While Merv is away on his violent errand Earle takes himself off to the A & P Show in attempt to locate himself in the happy moment in the photo.