Rosemary Dobson Prize
Short-list: Jillian Pattinson (VIC) — ‘Octoberman’.

Octoberman

Hatless, coatless, I walk autumn home. Since childhood,
I’ve drawn the storm behind me on a kite string.
Now rheumatism and hard use have hinged these weather-telling
Bones into a clotheshorse for a worn and weathered skin.

Bearing constellations of telltale scars and sunspots,
My hands are grown fluent in the knuckles’ curt dialect.
Long ago, the right let fall a flag too dark to carry,
The left set down a sword to wield this whittled stick.

Gap-toothed, I hum in tune with such birds as remember
The wayfaring Saint Benedict—a seasonal chorus of light
Flooding his treed cathedral. And with such as these do I
Break bread, all the while whistling counterpoint to nightfall.

Though I know the snow by many names and several aliases,
In order to remember, I have forgotten my own name.
Each autumn, leaves whisper it as they fall from trees.
Away sou’-sou’-east, I answer also to the call of wild geese.

I make my way via fallow fields and byways,
Sometimes coming to an unfamiliar crossroad.
Arms outstretched, I turn like a weathervane,
Laughing aloud, whirling into a mazurka with the wind.