



2022 REFUGEES & HUMAN RIGHTS CHILD & YOUTH POETRY CONTEST DIVISION 2 – GRADES 7 TO 8

LYLA BIRRELL, GRADE 7 FERN AVENUE PUBLIC SCHOOL FIRST PRIZE

IN THE KITCHEN



John found his smile in our kitchen
It was always about to explode into his even bigger laugh
John knew seven languages
Collected like little souvenirs from all the countries he'd seen
Fleeing Myanmar, through Bangladesh, China, Thailand, India,
On a boat. In the middle of the ocean. Waiting.
Rejected by Australia, Indonesia was like the sky between branches
Negative space, so close to growth.

In his country the mangos were free.
If his mom ever found out he ate pork she would be furious
The first time I ate his food the spices spoke,
Every meal the conversation with my taste buds got deeper

It wasn't the same with me and John
Do you need help with the dishes, I asked, he said thank you
So do you want help? Thank you, he said.

Why did you make the cake batter pink? I asked,
It's your favourite colour; you're a girl
My favourite colour is green,

He recalled girls being trafficked, he was jittery, his voice compressed

What are you watching? I asked
Mr. Bean. His chin flicked to the computer, his signature move.
I sit and watch and our smiles explode.

John was so eager to leave the house, get out in the world, he was so often
riding his bike.
Then he left our kitchen.