

# Whitsunday Voices Short Story Competition

Grades 11-12

Highly Commended

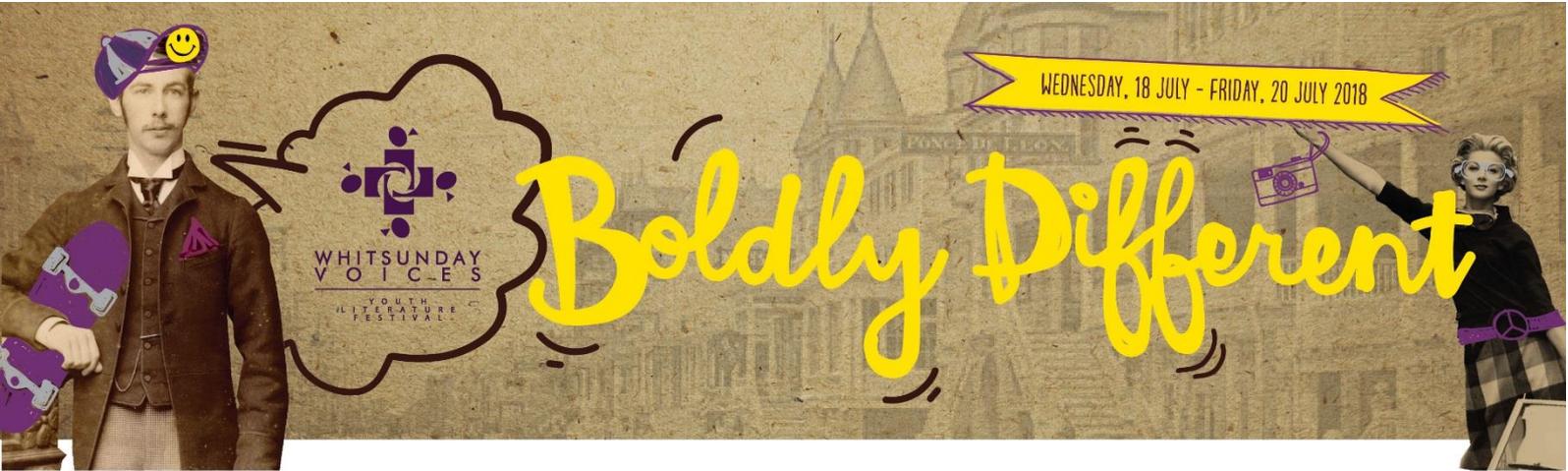
Helene Buttigieg for

Sand

I've always hated sand. No matter how hard you try to stay clean it still finds its way into your clothes and your shoes. Now here I am, in the sand. It's in my eyes and mouth and clothes and socks – not that it really matters. In a few minutes, I won't have the luxury of caring.

It all happened so quickly. One day it was easy strolls on sunlit streets. The next day it was heads down, shoulders hunched, never look them in the eye. Maybe if I was faster, if I weren't so afraid, I wouldn't be here now. I could be at home teaching Maria how to ride a bike or eating the leftover cakes from the bakery. It never ceases to amaze me how such innocence can survive in so cruel and so evil a world. Evil is like having sand in your shoe. The tiniest grain can cause so much discomfort. Then your discomfort makes you angry, and the person you bump into on the street gets angry and in no time at all you have a whole city of angry people and that's how wars start.

The wall started off as a temporary thing but grew into a concrete monster with barbed teeth, stretching as far as the eye can see. The soldier ants crawling over its back, watching for intruders. I have to congratulate the builders on their efficiency, though it's



not surprising. Two weeks and we were trapped. Cut off from our families before the initial shock had worn off. That afternoon the sunset was red as blood.

Step one: steal a uniform.

This was easy. All I had to do was wait behind the laundry cart and take one when no one was looking. People had died trying to get over this wall. I needed to be smart. I needed to blend in. There was an hourglass in a window. A small one with red sand. Maria would have liked it. That's another reason I hate sand, it's always there to remind us how little time we have left.

Step two: pretend to be a guard on patrol.

The wall is uglier up close. The dirty concrete looms high above you, the only thing breaking up the dismal greyness is the odd line of graffiti. Empathy is forbidden here. Kindness is outlawed. Shoot to kill. A gun! I never found a gun! All of a sudden my plan is crumbling around me. I'm in the hourglass and the sand is pouring down, burying me alive. I'll never see them again. A guard is coming over to me. What do I do?

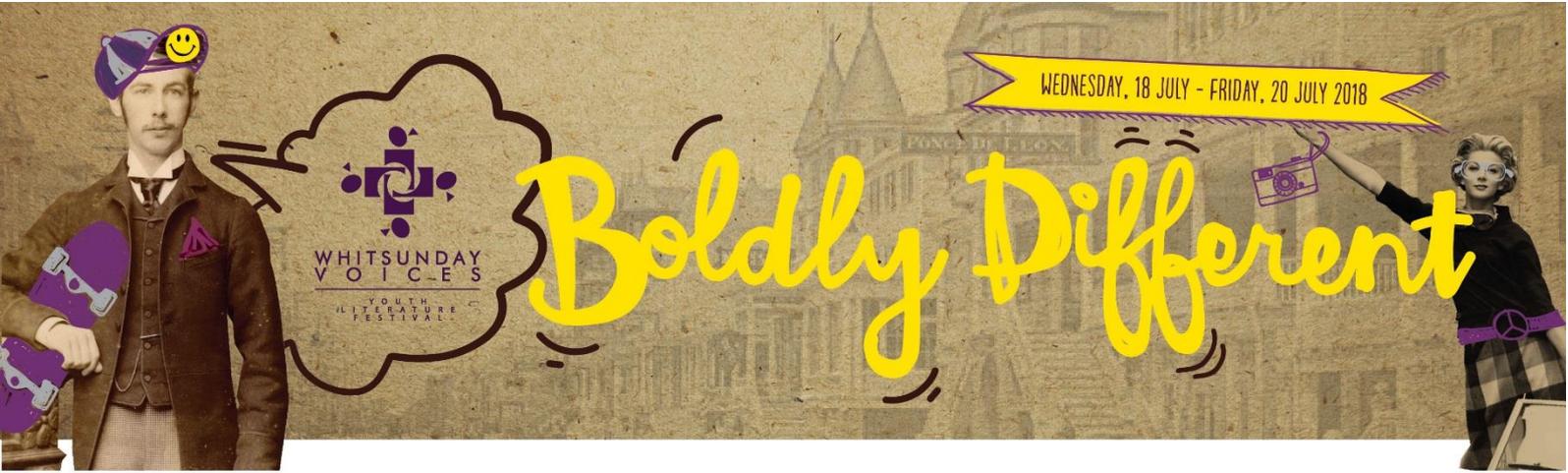
He looks at me, "You must be one of the new ones." New what? He's getting impatient, what do I say to him?

"Yes... Sir." Is he a sir? What if he knows I'm lying?

"Get over to the checkpoint. Don't let anyone through." He's walking away. I'm safe. The sand has stopped raining down. The crushing pressure is off my chest and I'm lighter than air. I'm going home. Back to the bakery and the streets and Maria and Mother.

Wait, It's not over yet.

Step three: when nobody's looking get to the other side.



The watch lights are points of brilliance in a sea of pitch. Some sections are in complete darkness while others are in a blinding light. The moths circle the beams like vultures over a corpse. I'm almost there. Only a few more steps and I'm free. I disappear into the darkness.

Step four: run. Run as fast as you can and don't look back.

I'm gone. Running faster than I ever have. The sand kicks up into my eyes but for once the sand doesn't matter. Nothing matters except my escape. Almost there, oh to see their smiling faces again. Almost home, back to warmth of the fireplace and the comfort only family can bring. Then I'm falling.

The end was right in front of me, then all I could see was sand. There was a bang, then there was pain. Searing agony flaring up my spine. Lights and yelling. More shots. More pain. Then nothing. All feeling gone like somebody flipped a switch. Back home when I was little, there was an old man in a wheelchair. He said he got shot in the back and lost all feeling in his legs. Is this my future? A broken body for little kids to point and stare at, only to run away when I catch their eye? Judging from the ever-growing bloodstain in the sand, I'd say I don't have much longer.

Maybe I was wrong. The sand is soft. Comforting. It's almost like I'm melting into it. I love you Maria. I love you Mother. I'm sorry. I love you. I love you.

I am...

Sand.



[WWW.WHITSUNDAYVOICES.COM.AU](http://WWW.WHITSUNDAYVOICES.COM.AU)

