

Whitsunday Voices Short Story Competition

Grades 9-10

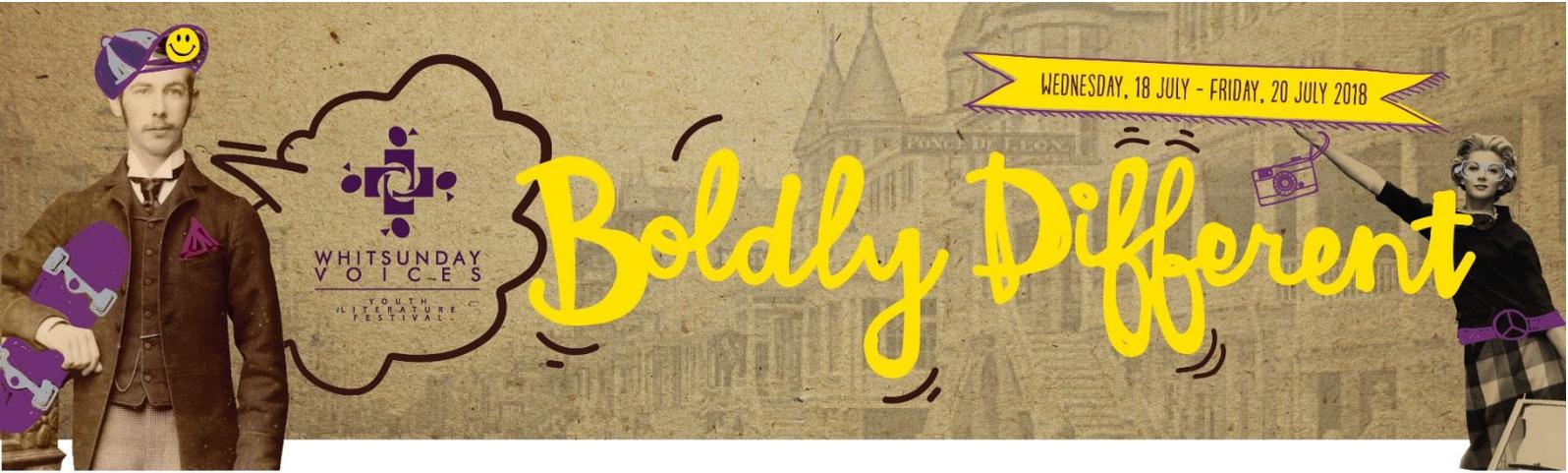
Runner Up

Ella Phillips for

The Wave

The silence in the office was punctured by the clatter of fingers on keyboards. I sat at my desk, ready for another day of boredom after this morning's *excitement*. I sighed at the memory of the many attempts by the kindy teacher to remove Rose's fists from my shirt; I had delivered her to her auntie's apartment who she immediately clung to. I couldn't wait until the day she could drive herself to school.

Leaning back on my chair, I frowned as I noticed my cup of coffee vibrate slightly. I shook my head, blaming a bad night's sleep on this odd hallucination. But my heart sped up as my fingertips brushed my keyboard to find the keys shivering. Another glance at my coffee now found the ceramic clattering against the wooden desk and the brown liquid

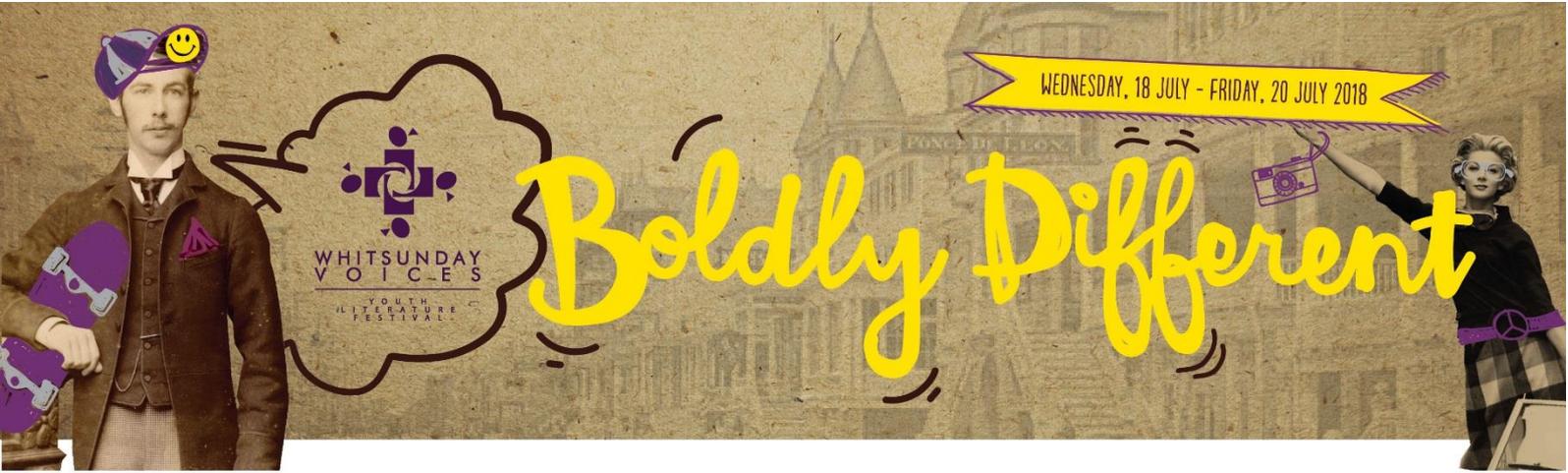


reaching up the sides of the cup. I stood up in alarm, staring wide-eyed as the objects on my desk trembled with increasing intensity.

Murmurs from the other cubicles circled the floor like smoke. The room shuddered, cries of alarm joining the jittery chatter. Heart hammering, I peered out the window which provided a view of the distant beach. A huge wave was rising, clawing at the air as it advanced towards land. In a trance, I watched as it rose taller causing people to run from the beaches and swarm into the buildings that lined the sand. Screams from my floor pulled me back into reality. I glanced out into the hallway to be hit with a scene of panic, mirroring the terror that was building up in my chest.

“GET TO HIGH GROUND IMMEDIATELY!” yelled a voice through the speakers. I was on the 15th floor. I had to get to the 20th. My adrenaline-filled body joined the sea of people tearing up the stairs. My pulse spiked as a distance rumble whispered through the noise. A blanket of silence covered the spiralling stairwell.. They had heard it too. We ran. We reached the top floor. We were barely up there for more than a few minutes when we felt the building shake, screams drowning in the roar of the water that lapped hungrily at the passing buildings. *A tsunami*, I thought, the words sharp in my sluggish brain.

Rose.



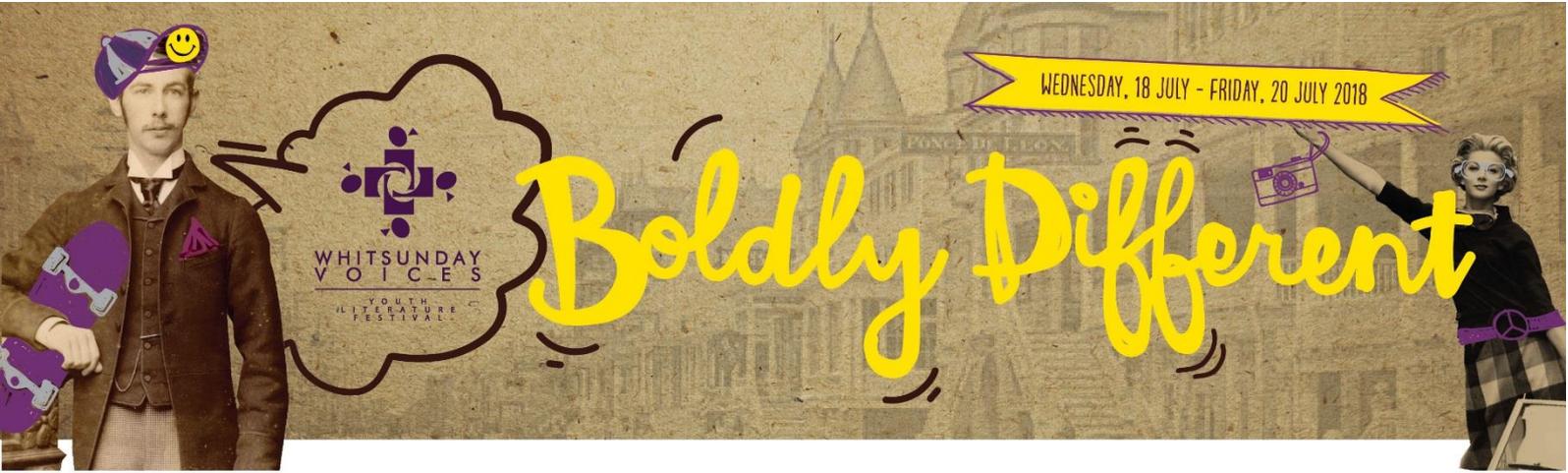
I waded through the sea of bodies, eyes set on the staircase. Someone gripped my arm.

“Michelle, what’re you doing?”

I ignored the voice and pulled out of their grasp, leaving their cries behind me. Her auntie was hopeless. She often left Rose at home by herself. She wouldn’t have gotten any warning as she didn’t have a TV or radio, even living near the middle of the city. I couldn’t risk it. I was vaguely aware of the swaying of the building and the sprays of water coming in from cracks in windows as I sped down the stairs. I stopped at the 5th floor. Running to the window, I scanned Auntie’s drowning apartment desperately. I was taken aback at the sight of the city. The murky water rushed between every building, leaving no structure untouched by its devastation. All I could hear was its undying growl.

A familiar cry sent my heart into overdrive. “Rose!” I screamed, heaving open the window. All I could see was the expanse of brown. Dread pierced my heart. “Rose! Baby, where are you?” the words scraped my hoarse throat.

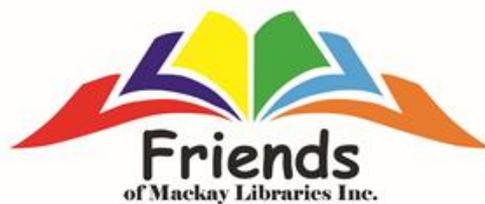
My eyes locked on a small figure, a smudge of fuzzy brown hair amongst leave -less branches. Right below me, a sparse tree waved under the weight of the water and on its thin trunk perched Rose. Tears streamed down her face, screams and cries heaving her tiny body. “I’m coming baby! Stay right where you are!”



I raced down the stairs. I ran to the window of the 4th floor, Rose just a metre above it. My heart ached as I saw her form clinging to the wood, eyes wide and cheeks wet. I opened the window, violently aware of the racing stream of death churning below. I slowly perched myself on the ledge, reaching up to the tree. Rose sobbed, reaching for me with one chubby arm.

“I know, honey, I’m here,” I yelled. I reached up to the tree and grabbed her, pulling her close to me. She clung to my shirt, crying, screaming, body trembling uncontrollably. I buried my face into her hair, sobbing with relief.

Whispering empty promises to her, I went to climb inside when a surge of dirty water caught my eye. I turned to see a fresh wave of screaming water slinking right toward us. I held Rose close to me. “Look at me, darling,” I whispered. Her innocent face looked up at me, brown eyes reflecting the terrors she’d witnessed. “It’s going to be okay.”



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