

The Young One

'Please can we go to the beach?' the young one asked. 'No' was her immediate response. She thought of the tasks, the cleaning, the washing, the tidying and sorting.

'No'. The beach meant organising snacks and towels, sunscreen and toys, sand and mess. 'No'.

Then suddenly 'Yes'.

An unexpected response, one that came from a place where life was simpler, where sudden outings and unplanned activities happened without thinking. The 'yes' came, full of possibilities, dreams and yearning. There it was, hanging in the air between them, quivering, lingering.

So they grabbed a bag; sunscreen and hats were already at the door waiting for something to happen, the car keys were found and out they went. Out into a sparkling day. Anywhere; elsewhere.

They drove aimlessly away from the house, until the smell of the air changed and they knew they had arrived. They tumbled out of the car, laughter floating away behind them as they shed their shoes and ran down to the sand. The glistening of the water beckoned them down the slopes and the steps and called a welcome.

Down they went, rushing and giddy with the unexpectedness of her 'yes'. There were no towels, no swimmers, no toys, just them and that wonderful glorious 'yes'.

'Let's explore' the young one called, galloping off. The shallow water sung a siren song, and the young one was caught within it. Clothes got wet as shells and stones, driftwood and sand were collected, examined, rejected or kept. A large stick became a tool to draw images in the wet sand; the beach becoming a canvas. 'Guess' called the young one and gradually she was captured by the stories and tales told as the pictures emerged and changed. The rocky outcrop was a castle, now a shipwreck, now a plane. She was made to be a dragon, a pirate, a pilot. Her 'yes' hung between them, giddy with possibilities, the young one grasping at it with greedy hands, turning to it with joy.

The clothes, now wet, sandy and beyond redemption were cast off, hung on the dry parts of the beach rocks, underwear left on as makeshift swimmers. Skin to skin they braved the deeper water. The water pushed and tugged at her, unbalancing her, entreating her, driving her closer to the young one, then pulling her away.

Wavelets chased the young one back to the beach. Calling and retreating, playing, inviting. She stood still, not quite knee-deep, watching the game, absorbing the demands being made of her.

As the impulsiveness of the 'yes' wore off the play and they gradually returned to

themselves, they started walking along the beach. Clothes, partly dry, stiff with salt, grimy with sand were shaken out and pulled on. The walk was slow, halting as the young one explored rock pools, sought out shells and examined each new treasure.

She was left to quietly ruminate on where the 'yes' had come from. The shockwaves of it still careening around her.

The years since the young one arrived had changed her markedly. Joy was harder to reach, the necessary routines had worn grooves in her responses. She was still able to find moments where music left her skin tingling, where a painted sky could detonate awe in her soul and where the caress of a small sleep-filled hand could elicit a yearning more powerful than anything previously; but mostly she had forgotten the gladness present in a simple 'yes'. Her life was full now with little things. The big things pushed aside, to be returned to at a later date. The young one required her constancy. This was not a thing to mourn, to resent, to rail against. It just was.

Rarely did she ponder it, but today the 'yes' had opened a sliver into the maybe, and so she allowed herself to consider it all.

Hunger and tiredness drove the young one back to her side, dragging at her clothes, demands and complaints tripping over themselves. She sighed as she bent down and retrieved the day's treasures from where they had been released, offerings strewn at her feet. The young one used the opportunity to beg a ride, all energy exhumed, relinquished to that startling 'yes'.

With the 'yes' now scattered with the gulls cries and the young one's grumbles, her life dropped back into the known grooves. Picking up the young one, she gathered the accoutrements of the day and felt the necessary cloak of responsibility settle around her again.

And yet, the fault lines of that simple word had displaced something. The possibility of the future, tinted by the memory, seemed to be there - a delicate promise, like the taste of salt on the gentle sea breeze.

'Yes' she whispered. 'Yes' her footprints called back to her. 'Yes'.

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