

Waves of Change

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The salty air is a nice break from the stuffy car. The three-hour journey is long but always worth it. The trees are taller here, greener. They seem happier, like the coast is also their favourite place. The trees here are much better than the ones I see on the way here. The ones I see from the car are burnt, charred. Their scars behind bursts of bright, young green growths. Their attempt to forget the fires. The fires that kissed and licked them; the blazes that raced through the hills. The red and orange waves of scorching elements, chasing animals and remaining hope away. The flames that made people flee. Made people fear for their life. The –

“Hey! Catch!” my brother yells, as he chucks my suitcase at me, snapping me out of my thoughts. I catch it with some struggle and skip to the gate. I swing it open and run to the back door.

The door whines as I kick it open, welcoming me back. My feet lead me to my bedroom but I’m still eager to get out to the beach as soon as I can. My bed has been made and the shelves have been emptied. Grandma does too much for me! I think, remembering that she is upstairs.

I thump up the stairs and fling the glass door open, taking only a second to admire the beautiful coastline, one I’ve seen a thousand times before.

“Hey Grandma!” I say, as I leap over the chair to give her a hug.

“Hello possum. How was the trip down?”

“Boring, as always. But I came up here to ask if you wanted to come to the beach with me.”

“You know, I always want to go to the beach with you!” she says, a grin spreading across her face. “I went down this morning. Perfect weather for a surf! How about you go help get all the bags in and ask your brother and your dad if they’d like to come too.”

“Ok, but I don’t think I need to ask them to know the answer!” I giggle.

As I head back out to the deck, I take a moment to really absorb the scenery: the birds, playing in the air, hiding in the bushes and trees; the great green grass across the road, the perfect place for an outdoor movie and picnic.

And there it is. The beach. The stunning beach that stretches out as far as the eye can see.

Voices are slightly muffled from downstairs, the thin walls barely producing any sound proofing.

“Unpack then get to the beach?” I hear my mum suggest.

“Nah, let’s go to the beach now,” my brother responds.

“I’m with Hudson,” my dad agrees.

“Well let’s go then! Grandma’s getting ready upstairs! And I need to get the surfboard from the garage!” I announce as I charge through the door into the small downstairs living room.

My mum sighs, “Well if it’s what the rest of you want, I suppose we can go now.”

At that, I run to the end of the cramped hallway and swiftly shut the door behind me. I hop over to my suitcase and unzip it. My swimmers are sitting right on top of my other clothes. They’re a blue-and-white striped one-piece with a hole in the back and navy board shorts with palm tree and surfboard prints.

As soon as I have them on, I race back to the kitchen and lather up with some sunscreen. Once I’m fully covered in the sunscreen, I quickly plait my hair and run down to the garage.

The surfboard is propped up against the back wall of the cold garage. It’s pretty heavy but I manage. I run to the gate where the rest of my family are waiting.

“Ready to go?” my grandma asks, with a shiny face.

“Yep!” I exclaim.

The walk down to the beach is short. We only cross the road once and walk about 100 metres until we hit the sand. My mum kicks her thongs off and leaves them at the signpost reading Barlings Beach. But we call it Big Beach, or sometimes Surf Beach.

When I look over to the waves, I get what my Grandma was saying. The surf is perfect. The perfect waves, the perfect wind, the perfect day. I pick out a perfect spot to go in, good waves but not too many people. It’s one of the best things about this beach. It’s nice and private.

The sand squishes beneath my toes, small shells ingraining themselves in my feet. I look over to the picture-perfect beach, no clouds to be seen and the water perfectly coloured.

As I stumble over the sliding sand to my spot, I observe the bush to my left. Small little flowers of all colours are nestled in the big tufts of light green grass. A few big pieces of driftwood. And there it is. A log. Sitting under a bush, pushed away, and forgotten. It’s burnt to a crisp. Bits of burnt wood that have fallen off rest next to it.

I'll never forget the crackling, the whispers, the sounds of the fires that consumed the land. The fires that spun my world out of control. Time has slowed, while the others have already gotten in the water where I stay. I stay standing where the sand meets the grass, staring at this bit of history. The piece of history that is not long enough ago to forget.

A hand on my shoulder sends shockwaves through my body, jolting me out of my daze. Without turning around, I know who it is. It's Grandma. Grandma who is my rock. My constant.

"It's so ugly," I remark. "The fires that tore through here. They're so...ugly. I wish things were back to the way they were before."

"Nothing is ugly, my dear. They are simply beautiful in a different way. Something that has changed is not ugly, just natural. Think of the ocean. The waves are always changing, but they're still beautiful. Just in their own style. Change is part of life's course. The fires might not have been great at the time but now, think of all the plants that have grown underneath, with the sunlight being able to reach them. They never would have been there before. And all the green leaves on the trees now, they're not there to hide the burns. They're there because they're a patchwork. A patchwork of all the changes. Our land is a patchwork quilt of everything that's happened."

And with that she takes the surfboard from me and assures me it will be waiting for me when I'm ready. Then she leaves. I keep looking at the log, and the flowers. These flowers, this log, could they really be just patches for the quilt?

I absentmindedly stroll back to our pile of stuff, dragging my feet as I go. I pick up the surfboard and allow myself to be taken with the currents, and to be pulled out past the breaking point.

The water is cold, but nice. The only other thing I can rely on is the water. The water I know is not going anywhere.

I look back out to shore and see the rows of grass and trees hiding this beach. The years of history that each one of them yields are clear to me now. Everything here is a museum, showcasing the changes and history of this world.

With everything in mind, everything Grandma said, I think I can finally relax. Finally find peace with myself and the fires.

And just let go.