

To Sit on Sand

Since their father was having his lawyer over to the house to “discuss his options,” I decided to take the children to the beach for the day. It was sunny outside but not quite hot enough to sweat, and I knew it was early enough in the summer that the water would still be cold, but oh well. I packed a picnic lunch and a blanket and told them we would play in the sand.

They squirmed and squealed when I rubbed them down with sunscreen and pulled hats onto their heads. The boy didn't want me to touch him. He told me he could do it himself. I said okay, and I gave him the bottle, out of which he squeezed a small white blob. He rubbed it in small circles on his knee as I took the bottle back and finished covering his neck. The girl was smiling, excited by the new motions we were going through; she had only just learned to walk and everything in the world was still new to her. I spun her light, thin curls between my fingers as I carried her out to the car.

We parked by a public beach access lined with sand dunes. The boy insisted that he carry the blanket. I asked him to hold his sister's hand as we walked but he scowled and ran ahead of us. The blanket began to drag through the sand behind him. The girl giggled. “This is the beach,” I told her. She tried to run after her brother and landed face first in the sand. “Careful,” I said. “Now you have sand all over you.” She grinned up at me, proud of herself. I remembered when I was a girl and I came to the ocean and stared at the sand, trying to fathom how many grains there were in the world and wondering if they outnumbered the stars in the universe.

The boy had dropped the blanket on the ground and walked down to the water, where he was standing and staring at the waves. The biggest ones were touching his ankles when they crashed. He turned around to look back at us. “Want to go see the ocean?” I said to the girl,

setting the picnic basket next to the blanket. She stared at her brother. I put her on my hip and walked down to him. “The water is cold,” I said. “Want to feel it?” She nodded. I sat down and held her by her waist. “Wait for it to come to you.”

She reached out to grab the sea foam that was rolling towards her. Her brother ventured further towards the ocean. “Be careful,” I said, so he took a few more quick steps and turned around, smiling at me, waiting to see when I would stop him. I looked back down at the girl. She was watching as the sea foam in her hand disappeared. I stood up and walked to the boy. “You’re going to get all your clothes wet.” In response, he yelped and ran further into the surf. A wave crashed at his ankles and knocked him down, and both children shrieked with laughter.

I brought them back to the blanket and asked him if he wanted to keep his clothes on. He didn’t. I stripped the wet fabric from his body. His eyelashes were wet and clumped together. He grinned at me. “Okay,” I said. “You’re gonna get really sandy.” His sister laughed at him and tried to pull her own shirt off with no luck. He ran towards the sand dunes, and she began to chase him.

I straightened out the blanket and pulled our lunch out of the basket. The beach was empty and quiet in the middle of the week, and even the sounds of seagulls in the distance seemed like they were fading. The waves crashed over and over again behind me, and the ocean breeze wrapped my hair around my face. I heard my children’s laughter float through the air and stared at them. The universe itself had become insignificant. They were now the ones that outnumbered all the stars.