

First Taste of Salt

Yung Wing Chit (Vinci)

The opening of a door. The clatter of spades and buckets. I woke from a dream, one of those recurring ones about falling, saved by the lift out of my seat into an alien place. I groggily followed my parents down to a scene of turquoise and golden yellow, infinitely vast. ‘There we are! Mei Mei’s first trip to the beach!’ Father said, already laying down towels and lathering himself with sunscreen. Mother removed my shoes, letting my feet touch the sand. I squealed, unaccustomed to the coarseness, instantly jumping up and down and running towards the waters. Chasing after me, she suggested that we build a castle, like one of those in the fairy tales. Thus began the laborious construction of Cinderella’s castle with sand for concrete and seashells for decor.

‘She sells seashells by the seashore.’ She said while picking up seashells. I became mesmerised by my mother’s quick-moving lips, not understanding at that age what the words meant. I copied her actions, looking for patterns in the shells; cones, fans, swirls half-hidden in the sand. To a child, the beach is a treasure trove, full of beauty waiting to be discovered.

We returned to our little spot by the shoreline, hands overflowing with these gems. Yet our spot was not to be seen. I grew confused. *What is this? Are we in the right spot? How could something that was here a few moments ago be gone so swiftly?* It only dawned on me, as the saltwater washed aggressively over my ankles, that our sandcastle, *my* sandcastle, had been destroyed by the relentless waves. Even something as exquisite as a castle could crumble, I realized. In an instant I sensed the impermanence of things, the transient nature of being. My creation could collapse; nothing remained but total devastation.



Mother hugged me tightly while my tears fell, creating ripples upon the waves. I watched the waves silently, each one bringing grains of sand along with them on an unknown adventure. ‘See? The sand is just enjoying a ride!’ Mother said. Maybe the disintegration of the sandcastle was not so tragic after all. The sand did not disappear but merely travelled across the land. A smile appeared on my face again, once I understood that the castle has simply shifted into another form.

Decades later, I still reminisce about this lazy summer day every so often. It was not some grand event, but this seemingly unremarkable day has become imprinted on a child’s memory for a lifetime. It was my first experience of loss and feeling lost. It was the first time I became acutely aware of how fleeting and short-lived things can be. From that moment onwards, my outlook of being changed. A life was transformed.