

Perspectives



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A Plain Canvas

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The waves crashed on to the sand and ran up the beach before receding back into the thundering sea. The beach was empty and silent; the only sound was that of the sea. The wind whipped up the sands, slowly filling up the old footprints on the beach, which told of the good days. Days where the weather was hot and the beach was full of people, holiday makers, playing beach cricket, swimming, relaxing, and small children making castles built from sand.

But one set of footprints was different from all the others. It led away from the main beach where the past activity had been. These footprints were smaller than most. They trailed around the rocks only to disappear into the sea. The waves from high tides had swallowed up most of these prints and the sands had covered others, leaving only odd-shaped marks in the white sand. But although the prints entered the sea, they never came out.

It was a Sunday, the first week of school holidays, and the first day of the Johnsons' family holiday. Mr Johnson had convinced his boss to let him have a week off. Mrs Johnson had been planning the trip for weeks. For the twins, Mike and Matilda Johnson, this was the holiday of the year. The event they had been looking forward to all term. Mike and Matilda were in grade prep and went to Oxbury Primary School.

That morning had been a rush to get the car packed and get on the road. Mrs Johnson was stressed; she couldn't remember if they'd packed everything and Mr Johnson and the twins were just impatient to get going.

The car trip was long and the twins were bored and fighting, just generally annoying Mr and Mrs Johnson. Matilda was singing and Mike was continually asking 'How much longer?' and 'Are we there yet?' It was a typical start to a family holiday. By the time the Johnsons reached their destination they were anything from relaxed, and there was still the task of unloading the car and settling into their beach house.

The next morning, Matilda and Mike were up bright and early, which meant that Mr and Mrs Johnson were too. They shovelled down a quick breakfast and then were ready to hit the beach.

It was a long and enduring trip up the steep sand dunes in the baking sun. The scrub on either side of the path was dense and rustled in the hot wind. The Johnsons reached the top of the dune, taking in the view before them; blue surf meeting white sands. They didn't stop for long before Matilda and Mike passed them and charged on down the slope towards the beach.

'Careful kids!' Mrs Johnson called as they followed the children on to the sand.

The twins stopped in a clear patch of sand on the crowded beach, their parents caught up, spread out their towels and sat back to watch the kids, who were already heading towards the surf. Mrs Johnson made to get up, 'Don't go too deep,' she warned. 'Don't worry, they'll be fine,' said Mr Johnson. Mrs Johnson sat back down.

Matilda and Mike sat at the water's edge, scooping wet sand into a mound. They had decided the mound was a turtle; Mike was busy digging a moat around their construction when Matilda decided it needed decorating. So off Matilda went, dodging round a beach cricket game, feet sinking into the dry sand, bending down to pick up a shell then heading off towards the rocky platform.

Matilda could have got to the rocks by staying on the dry sand, but a line of towels and people blocked her way. Instead she ran, her feet slapping across the wet sands left after the rapidly receding water. Matilda had almost reached the point where she planned to clamour on to the rocks, when suddenly

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coming swiftly towards her rushed an enormous wave. It seemed to come out of nowhere. Matilda stood gaping as the towering wave loomed over her, unable to move, eyes fixed on the wall of water. Finally the tip of the wave broke and so did Matilda's gaze. She started to run in the opposite direction, but the attempt was futile. The wave overpowered her, overlapped and overturned her. Matilda felt her feet leave the sand as she tumbled under the swirling water, she felt her hands scrape against the rough rock. Matilda made one last grasp at the rock wall, hands grasping, clawing for a hand hold before she was swept around the outcrop, disappearing out of sight of the beach and into the terrifying and treacherous waters of the rip.

Mike had finished his moat and was wondering where Matilda was. He thought maybe she'd become bored and gone back to Mr and Mrs Johnson. So Mike trotted off towards the Johnsons on their towels. But Matilda wasn't there.

'Mum, Dad where's Tilly?'

As the grey storm clouds carried by the strong offshore winds rolled in over the beach, a single raindrop fell, landing with a plop on to the sand, sending the tiny grains flying, distorting the shape of the footprint it landed in. Lightning flashed across the sky, signalling the beginning of the storm. Rain poured out of the sky flattening the sands, erasing Matilda's last footprints from the face of the Earth and leaving the beach a plain canvas.



Isabel Smith wrote this in 2008 when she was in Year 11 at Braemar College in Victoria.