

Beach Daze

The air, thick with humidity, embraced Maggie like a warm hug from a friend. Before having children, she lived for these long summer days. They were mostly spent in bathers, book in hand, stretched out on the sands of Lorne. Not that much reading was ever done though. There were always too many opportunities for people watching! Maggie enjoyed gazing at the lifeguards, the lively beach cricket game, the Instagrammers trying to get the perfect shot and the bronzed bodies of the surfers rolling in on the waves. Even when the days were cooler and rain threatened, Maggie loved nothing more than strolling the quiet beach with a coffee in hand and breathing in the salty air. *Lovely Lorne* is how she always referred to her favourite holiday spot. It never disappointed.

Maggie sighed. The summers were different now. As if to prove her point, the baby monitor lit up and the wails of her daughter filled the room. On her way to the nursery she planted a kiss on the head of Flynn, who remained focussed on his bowl of two minute noodles. Maggie never in her wildest dreams imagined she would feed her kids such rubbish but she was exhausted. She was sick of the tantrums over food, the lack of sleep and therefore the lack of motivation to cook. So, noodles it was.

As soon as Rosie saw her mother's face, her own scrunched up wailing face beamed. Not a tear in sight.

"Hi baby girl," whispered Maggie, scooping up the little girl and holding her close.

"Mum. Mummm. Muuuuumm," cried Flynn with increasing volume from the lounge.

"Coming honey!" she yelled, heading back towards the impatient call of her three year old.

"What's up Fl..." she trailed off. The bowl of noodles now sat upturned on top of the little boy's head. They spiralled down his face, over his clothes and pooled around his feet. Maggie took a deep breath, then another. How had this become her life?! She knew she had two options. The first was to plonk the kids in front of the TV and have a cry as she mopped up the noodle mess. Quite a realistic option really. Or, alternatively, get everyone out of the house. Right now. Break the monotonous cycle of long days at home and walk right out that door for an afternoon of fun with the kids. Be one of *those* Mums.

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Maggie's anxiety was through the roof as she pulled into the familiar carpark. What was she thinking? The 20 minute drive had been hellish, with both children crying at various points and one brief stop after Rosie vomited over herself. Maggie's white knuckles gripped the wheel as she stared ahead and wondered whether to just reverse straight out of the park and head back home. Home to the mess, and the noodles, and the four walls that kept them in far too often. She undid her seatbelt and swivelled around in her seat to smile at Flynn and Rosie.

"Who's ready for the beach?!"

Unloading the car was a marathon effort. Baby carrier, towels, bathers, rashies, hats, sunscreen, toys, buckets, spades, snacks, floaties, wipes, nappies, sun shelter and kids were carried to the first possible empty patch of sand. Flynn hopped around on the towels, desperately trying to get his small feet off the scorching afternoon sand. Rosie immediately dropped her half-chewed rusk into the sand then continued to eat it along with handfuls of extra sand. The process of sun screening two writhing, protesting children proved only second in difficulty to erecting the sun shelter which had

been out of action for some time. Still, with gritted teeth, Maggie persisted. “I *am* a beach person, and my children *will be* beach people. We will have a *lovely* family afternoon at the beach.”

With shelter up and sunscreen applied, Maggie picked up Rosie and took Flynn by the hand as she walked them down to the water’s edge. She looked out to the horizon and felt the foamy bubbles tickle her toes. Maggie breathed deeply. *Lovely Lorne*. She plopped Rosie on the wet sand and watched the little girl pat her hands in the shallow water. She continued to hold Flynn’s hand while he jumped little waves with squeals of delight. Maggie was internally congratulating herself. She imagined other women on the beach looking at her and saying, “Now there’s a Mum who has it all! Look at her enjoying a nice day at the beach with her adorable kids. I want to be just like her!” Maggie smiled smugly at her own fantasy.

It was at that exact moment that an enormous gust of wind, seemingly from out of nowhere, whipped across the beach. Maggie turned just in time to see her blue beach shelter get wrenched from its position and go tumbling down the beach towards unsuspecting families, leaving a trail of her belongings in its wake. She quickly scooped up a sand covered Rosie and grabbed Flynn’s wrist as she ran like a mad woman across the now searing sand. Flynn screamed in protest and managed to make a run back towards the ocean but tripped at the very last step and plunged his face into the salty sea. He came up spluttering and screaming. Rosie, unhappy with her brother’s volume, joined in. With a hysterical child on each hip, Maggie accepted the destroyed shelter back from a cranky older gentleman who had been in its path. *Food*, thought Maggie. Food fixes everything. She ran back to where most of her belongings had tipped out of the tent to find the lunchbox of snacks upside down in the sand, being attacked by hungry seagulls.

“I want to go HOOOMMEEEE,” wailed Flynn. It was the best suggestion Maggie had heard all afternoon.

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Later that night after their usual bedtime story, Flynn’s little hands pulled her in close.

“Mummy,” he whispered. “I love the beach. Can we go back tomorrow?”

By Shannon Ingleton