

South Coast Writers Centre Competition – “*Empty shells are full of stories.*”

Empty Shells

Written by: Lani Watt (500 words)

When I was a kid, I remember my grandma taking me for a walk along the beach. It was a day just like this; scorching hot sun like needles prickling your skin, and the humidity encouraging the sweat to plaster your shirt to your back. But the sea breeze was heaven, and the water lapping over your feet as you walked the shore reminded you why the beach was the best place to be at that very moment.

I was a bit of a rough nut, as everyone liked to tell me. Shells were being tossed haphazardly into the basket Grandma used to keep her sewing threads in, sand littering over the top of them. ‘Why?’ was my favourite question at that age. I wouldn’t learn until I was growing up myself just how annoying that could be incessantly. “Grandma, where do shells come from?” Patience of a Saint, Grandma had.

“They come from the sea,” Grandma explained, as she handed me one that I had decided was a pretty cool looking one. Aqua-blue, shiny, clean. It didn’t immediately go into the basket with the others.

“Why?” I had shot back, studying the shell.

“Maybe they’re the souls of the beautiful people who passed away when they’re no longer with us. It’s a lovely view for them, don’t you think, Liam? Perhaps this is why we feel compelled to collect some and not others? They’re the souls we’ll always stay connected to,” Grandma mused and I still remember the knowing smile she gave me then.

That was when I started to gather the shells out of the basket and put them back in the sand, carefully, with the opening facing out to the water. I kept that one cool shell she gave me.

“What are you doing, sweetheart?” Grandma asked.

“I don’t want to take someone else’s friend home.”

Some things as you grow up just stick with you. I remember looking back over the beach from the direction we came, seeing hundreds of shells littered all over the place. It was nice to think about, even back then. But now, since I lost you, I keep coming back here.

I’ve been sitting here yet again looking at the beach. I keep getting drawn back here. This was *our* place. I’ve lost count of how many times I’ve had to come here to feel like you’re still with me. But today is the first day I have ever sat right down beside an empty shell that is almost identical to the aqua-blue one I kept way back when. Your favourite colour.

Now I’m older, I don’t know if I truly believe Grandma’s sweet musings of the world and the beauty of the relationship between shells and the beach. What if they’re really not empty shells? I can’t leave this one here, I have to take it with me. Just in case.

For some reason, today it feels easier to turn away from the water and walk away without looking back.

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