

A Child:

Is there anything sweeter than when a little one curls up with you, when that tiny person whom you hold dearest in the world folds into a ball of pajamas and sighs, when she surrenders to the cradle that is your arm? It is the sum of life. It is the reason for your life. You are central to her picture of the world. She does not imagine a world without you. She has no idea that life without you is possible. Whereas, you know very well that tomorrow the world could be sadly different. It does not occur to her that you might not be here next Monday or a week from next Monday. Imagine that. How lucky we are to have this little one. She and you, together for this moment and that's all. It's that simple.

I'm glad she's tiny. I'm little too. There's a world out there built for bigger people, people on TV, people who are sports stars, people who are news anchors. I guess they're more imposing. I guess they're easily recognized, from a distance. We're not. We're big enough to see each other. There are times that we see only each other. I love those times. Dissolved in laughter from making up dumb ways to pronounce the names of relatives or seriously concentrating on how to spell "Mississippi", we pay pure attention, one to the other. There is no distraction; there is nothing else we'd rather be doing. Eye contact, soul contact, you name it. We have contact.

Tonight they are in the bathtub together, Veronica and Ella. It's the final night of our lovely, long visit and Grammy is savoring these last hours, doing her best to ignore the inevitable. Tomorrow we will be gone, human airline baggage flying from SFO to ORD to LSE, headed home and seeking consolation from each other. Tonight the two of them are wet and happy and playing rock, paper, scissors in the tub. Out here, on the left coast they call the game Rochambeau. I don't know why. They do a lot of things out here and I don't know why.

Our girl missed a day of school today. Yes, she has a cold, but I'll bet you dollars to doughnuts that she was playing for an extra day with us when she told her mom that she could not possibly attend classes today. Lucky for her, half her classmates were out yesterday. It made the decision to keep her home with us virtually guilt free.

We, the grown ups, are so full of reasons not to do things. Not to do things like stay home, sing too loud, turn a hundred cartwheels, bounce the cat, eat candy and make yet another craft project. Kids are full of reasons to do things. Reasons like it's fun, it feels good, it makes mom smile, it makes the dog bark, it makes me feel like the boss, I need to do it and the best reason of all...just because. We oldies have been out of touch for so long with the simple desire to do something just because we are capable of doing it that we end up sitting. Sitting and shaking our heads at the kids as they show us what being in the present means, what freedom is.

Last night we watched that wonderful bit of nonsense called "Mama Mia". The room contained four humans, the grandparents, the momma and the girl. There came a point where no one could help it any more. When Ella insisted that we, "Dance, people!" the room was full of folks jumping about and laughing. Believe me when I tell you that I don't dance. I'm infamous for it, ask Veronica. But when the voice of innocence and joy demanded that I dance...I danced. OK, it wasn't pretty but I think I got away with it.

They do that for us don't they? They ask us for things we long ago decided we were done with. They ask us to do things we have been declining to do for years. Really, who else would you give a piggy back ride to? Who else would you play cats and dogs with? Who else would you tickle and tickle and tickle until you were both crying? They free us, albeit momentarily, from our world of routine. Grownups have routine. Children have imagination. Grownups have responsibilities. Children have wishes. Grownups know that tomorrow will be very much like today. Children have no idea on earth what will happen tomorrow.

I don't want to go back. That's not it at all. I just want to be sure that I pay attention, that I savor our time with her while she's still practicing the art of being a child.