



Two Shells Meeting, by Anne Lindbergh

People are like that here. Strangers smile at you on the beach, come up and offer you a shell, for no reason, lightly, and then go by and leave you alone again. Nothing is demanded of you in payment, no social rite expected, no tie established. It was a gift, freely offered, freely taken, in mutual trust. People smile at you here, like children, sure that you will not rebuff them, that you will smile back. And you do, because you know it will involve nothing. The smile, the act, the relationship is hung in space, in the immediacy and purity of the present; suspended on the still point of here and now; balance there, on a shaft of air, like a seagull.

The pure relationship, how beautiful it is! How easily it is damaged, or weighed down with irrelevancies -- not even irrelevancies, just life itself, the accumulations of life and of time. For the first part of every relationship is pure, whether it be with friend or lover, husband or child. It is pure, simple, unencumbered. It is like the artist's vision before he has to discipline it into form, or like the flower of love before it has ripened to the firm but heavy fruit of responsibility.

Every relationship seems simple at its start. The simplicity of first love, or friendliness, the mutuality of first sympathy seems, at its initial appearance -- even if merely in exciting conversation across a dinner table -- to be a self enclosed world. Two people listening to each other, two shells meeting each other, making one world between them. There are no others in the perfect unity of that instant, no other people or things or interests. It is free of ties, or claims, unburdened by responsibilities, by worry about the future or debts of the past.

--Anne Morrow Lindbergh