

Simply Yes

by Sophie Stocker

Inspired by Matthew 5 vs 37, 'Let your 'Yes' be 'Yes,' and your 'No' be 'No,' for whatever is more than these comes from the evil one'.

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I was fifteen when I met Mabel. I was a pastor's kid whose world seemed like every shade of black and white. My mind was often riddled with thoughts that didn't seem like my own, nor like those of the God I had been told about my whole life. On the outside I was tidy, I kept to myself, I lived to please others. On the inside I was a slave to my mind, and in my blissful ignorance I was slowly drifting from who God called me to be.

I found myself at an art class after school one Thursday. There was a rusty, faded sign hanging up that read, *'Impact Art, all welcome'*. I signed up. Perhaps it would impact my ever-consuming wrestling thoughts. Sometimes I wished I could take my brain out, give it a good scrub, wring it, and hang it up to dry.

The art room was your typical chaotic concrete-smelling concoction. Before me were ten wooden chairs lined up against two tables covered in streaks of dried paint - the forgotten discards of peoples fearfully and wonderfully made creations. They seemed to make their own unique portrait, longing to be admired. There were two seats waiting patiently for a companion. One was between two older ladies, and the other was at the end of the table with a seemingly broken leg. After standing there

awkwardly for almost one entire rotation of the earth deciding where to sit, I chose the broken seat.

As we went through the formalities of introducing ourselves, my attention was drawn to a figure at the opposite end of the table. She looked like she had lived a thousand lifetimes, though so young at the same time. She was thin, her skin wrinkled like textured canvas art. She wore an old sweater patched together with various coloured fabrics, and blue sweatpants with white stains like clouds in the sky. Her long, brittle hair reminded me of the colours the sky turns as the sun sets. Despite the deflated expression on her face, I could see a little white touch of hope in her eyes, like a dove waiting to be free. She said her name was Mabel, and that she was looking forward to making some friends.

I surprised myself that I was quite good at art, but even more so that I upheld my commitment to art class. Each week announced one new fact we had learnt about ourselves or the world around us. One particular day, our inspiration was, *'Your future'*. Painting had, in a strange way, led me to encounter God and understand him better. One part of the bible I had never heard my father preach about was the book of 1 Kings during the building of the temple. I didn't blame him; it's a bunch of very specific instructions to the Israelites on how God wants them to build his temple. Something I came to realise was that it is one of the most beautiful metaphors in the bible. After Jesus died and rose again, he gifted us his Holy Spirit, and we became his temple because he lives in us. If God cares so much about the creation of his temple, how much more intricately designed must we be? How much more intentional is each cell in our body and string of our soul? We are far too precious to dwell in fear

and insecurity. This fresh revelation got me so fired up with joy that I blurted it out as my fact for the week. It was the first time in years that I hadn't wrestled with uncertainty. There was no war in my mind. I declared myself Switzerland and prayed that the peace would last forever. I looked around at faces plastered with shock, processing my outrageous burst of joy - all but one. Mabel. Her eyes were floodgates waiting to burst as she stared in wonder at the girl who had just single-handedly shaken the entire clay-set art class. She blinked away her tears and looked back at her blank canvas.

As the weeks passed, I learnt about some of the other artists. There were seven of us left. The two older ladies I saw on the first day with the seat between them were sisters, Gale and Frankie. They were constantly bickering about miniscule inconveniences, such as who used the washing machine first that morning. I sometimes wondered if that seat was meant for Jesus, if they grew up in faith but somewhere along the way they stopped inviting him in. Mabel was a widow who lived five minutes out of town by the river, and every Thursday she would drive her little red corolla to art class. She said she had a feeling it's holding on by a thread. I used to feel like that too.

It was four weeks since my newfound boldness sparked, and we were learning about clay art. Mabel seemed to have found this boldness too - so much so that for her fact of the day she invited us all to celebrate her sixty-eighth birthday. She said it with a smile like hope was knocking on her heart and I couldn't help but smile too. That Sunday in church, we had learnt about a man called Jeremiah in the bible. God sends him to a potter's house, and he watches a potter choosing to reject or reshape his

flawed pots. God says to Jeremiah, "Can I not do with you, O house of Israel, as this potter does?". God has the ultimate power to restore or judge mankind, and something told me He was working on moulding some hearts at art class.

Mabel made sure to stay behind to write down her address so that everyone knew where to go for her birthday party. She was so giddy as people approached her, promising her their presence. "Hand on my heart, I will be there," said Gale. I had never seen Mabel so full of joy, it was contagious. "Will you come, dear?" Mabel asked me hopefully. "Yes", I smiled at her as I took a photo of her address. She held my hand between hers and said, "Thank you".

My parents graciously let me go to Mabels that Saturday, but they had a conference to attend, so this meant I had to walk. The problem was that it was forecasted to be the biggest thunderstorm of the year - in the middle of summer. I had been conflicted about whether I should go, with little motivation to be utterly drenched by the rain. Suddenly, I felt prompted to open my bible. I was reading Matthew, and the next verses were about oaths. *'Let your 'Yes' be 'Yes,' and your 'No' be 'No,' for whatever is more than these comes from the evil one'*. As I read it, something inside my spirit shifted. I remembered when Mabel first invited us to celebrate her birthday. I said yes. I had to be true to my word.

The rain engulfed me as I said goodbye to the concrete streets and became a show for the cows. My hair matted and my shoes sloped; Mabel's birthday present much the same. With every squidge of a footstep, I reminded myself that my yes was a yes. I soon came down a long driveway to a small pink house with ancient willow trees

and gardens that looked once very loved. Cracked concrete steps led me up to a door holding a damp eviction notice, and quiet music captured my attention. I followed it around the side of the house to find a sheltered porch with some deflated blue balloons and a soggy cake ruined by the rain. Then I saw a familiar figure sitting on a camping chair in the corner. Mabel slouched, posing the same defeated look I saw when I first met her, but the twinkle of hope in her eyes had gone. She looked down at a brown leather book I could only imagine was a photo album. No one else came. My heart broke for her as I remembered their empty promises; their oaths assuring her they would be there. *'Let your yes be yes and your no be no'*. No one is as perfect as God so as to faithfully fulfil their oaths each time without fail. It is inevitable that humans will fall short, it is our nature. The only way we can ease the impact at landing is to avoid the extra words that attempt to prove our sincerity.

I knocked my hand against the wooden pane and Mabel's glassy eyes met mine. In an instant, a bright smile appeared on her face, but it swiftly disappeared, replaced by a look of confusion. "You came so far, in the storm. I'm sorry", she sighed as a tear dropped onto one of the photos. "Hey, it's okay. Let's make today good, shall we?". I handed her the soaking wet bag of new paintbrushes and we both laughed. We spent the rest of the day painting and eating soggy birthday cake. "There's something different about you", Mabel said as her kind eyes looked over her canvas at me. I got to tell her about Jesus, and all of a sudden I had never been more grateful for thunderstorms, the Word of God, and a simple, *'Yes'*.

Thursday came around bringing beautiful sunny skies. I skipped up to the door with the rusty sign and into the classroom I looked forward to seeing each week. I found

my seat and gazed around the room. *'Mabel must be late'*. Her seat on the opposite side of the table was empty. *'Or maybe her little red corolla finally gave up on her'*, I thought to myself as our teacher took his seat. His usual vibrant self looked solemn. He rested his elbows on his knees, deep in thought, and said, "Mabel passed away late Sunday night. She lost her long battle with cancer."

There was a deep grieving pause in the room. His words hit me like a thousand shards of glass straight to my heart. *'She's gone?'* I looked around the room, at the sadness, the guilt. My eyes began to flood, and I turned them to the window to hide my tears. I silently hoped I would see Mabel out there, running up to the door, new paint brushes in hand, ready to paint her heart on a canvas. But as I gazed out the window, through my blurred stinging eyes, I saw a silhouette of a dove floating by, finally free.

When the very silent art class finished, my teacher handed me a letter. I opened the envelope to see shaky handwriting that read;

'I suppose if you are reading this letter, I am no longer painting with you.'

I know this comes as a surprise, and I'm sorry I didn't tell you. I didn't want to burden you more than I already had. I battled with breast cancer for many years after my husband passed away, and despite the tiresome effort it was to get out of bed each morning, I looked forward to art class - mostly because I met you. Watching you become bold in yourself and so assured in your faith started a fire in my own soul. I felt excited again, and even more to have made a friend, even if it was only for a few

months. I celebrated many birthdays alone, so it was no surprise when no one turned up on Saturday - but then you did. You changed my perspective on life, and you showed me who Jesus was, simply by choosing to say yes - yes to come and see me but also to commit to art class and to be bold in yourself.

I went to church for the first time today. I gave my life to Jesus. All I can say is thank you my dear, thank you for saying yes.

Mabel.'