

Magic moments made of this

By Ruth Ostrow

“I DON'T really want to go out tonight,” I told a friend who rang to find out if I was going to the street party in a nearby town. It had been raining and raining for days. The earth was sodden, my bones were sodden. I had that wintry feeling that told me a B-grade schlock movie and chocolate-coated macadamia nuts would best hit the spot.

Besides, this street festival was no Carnivale. Brazil was not going bush. A few children's rides, a few clowns, a bit of busking and local music, was about the best one could expect.

“Always expect the unexpected,” my girlfriend joked. “You never know what's around the corner. And it is a magical night. Full moon in Scorpio, Buddha's birthday. It is auspicious that all our friends, and their kids, be together tonight.”

I thought about my little girl stuck in front of another bad movie and reluctantly agreed to go. Donning hats, scarves and jackets in case the wind got chilly, we bundled into the car and off we went. We arrived to a spectacular extravaganza: flashing red and blue lights everywhere and spurting water. The buzz was that the local fire brigade was about to set a car alight and douse it with water to show how they put out fires.

“Think we'll give that one a miss,” I said, dragging us off to an outdoor restaurant nearby where we were supposed meet our group of friends.

Hardly anyone had arrived. Trying to get people together at these things is a nightmare. Some friends were spotted wandering in the other direction, others were off chasing children who'd gone missing. Those of us waiting at the restaurant decided to order the \$5-a-meal special. An hour of pleading with waiters later, tiny plates were placed in front of us that were laden with less than I feed my kitten.

I was about to start chewing my own arm, when my daughter burst into tears. “My tooth just came out but I don't know where it is. I lost it. Now the tooth fairy won't come,” she sobbed. Thereafter my loyal crew of friends -- cold, hungry, cranky -- crawled around under the table in the dark, picking up bits of white bird pooh, pebbles and bread crumbs in the hope of placating the weeping child (or else they were secretly scavenging for stray bits of food to eat).

There were rumours the local firemen were about to ignite another car just near us. I imagined the smell of burning rubber. “Time to go,” I announced. Everyone agreed. We stood up and began walking back to our cars, toothless and tired. I caught sight of the Scorpio moon. She was big, full, and smiling down mysteriously.

Just then a friend said he'd read about some Indian music at the local health spa around the corner. We walked down a dark alley and into a space which made us all gasp in delight.

Surrounding us was an exotic Balinese-style garden laden with wild flowers, lush palm trees, passionfruit vines -- a tropical oasis rich in sensuality and scent. Coloured spotlights around the garden bathed areas in blue, gold, aqua. In the centre, a statue of a naked woman basked in red light and men in Indian garb

were sitting under a wooden pergola playing traditional instruments.

The haunting sound of sitar and song wafted to us as we wandered through this Garden of Eden, this world of mystery and magic -- so far away from the noisy, crowded street. We congregated on cushions and chairs around the musicians.

A spa bath in the gazebo behind them boiled and bubbled away. A mist was rising from the heat, curling in the cold night air. Two minutes passed, then three. We kept looking at each other. And suddenly we knew what we had to do. Off went shoes, jeans, coats, jumpers, scarves, and with shrieks of laughter into the steaming water we dived.

So there we all were, lying on our backs, my best friends and me, listening to the most exquisite music in the most exquisite setting, the full moon huge and pregnant above our heads, my daughter sensuous and soft as a baby seal in my arms, gurgling with happiness at this wonderland she believed the tooth fairy had led us to.

There was nothing to do but watch the moon through the passionfruit vines above and thank the universe for this precious moment -- "just around the corner". Human beings have a dreadful habit of pre-judging. We make up things and then believe them and miss out on so much of what life has to offer.

Because of the auspiciousness of the occasion, I decided to make a wish on the moon. I wished I would always remember the lesson of this night -- to remain open to possibility, to the treasures and gifts that even the most unpromising job, relationship, or party, can yield.

And to always, always expect the unexpected magic that bubbles beneath the surface of day-to-day life.

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