

The City Where the Waves Begin

One day last month, Nick, seven years old, gathered his favorite toys—four plastic globes of Mercury, Venus, Earth and Mars, and departed. He, like most people, had heard that all the wetlands beyond the shoreline were available to anyone who cared to live there.

Due to Nick's intense imagination, he suffered from insomnia. He thought that by joining the peasants in their blue shacks, sweet sleep would come.

A stretch of sandbar some ten miles long had developed when the tides began to recede two months ago. Scientists claimed that the axis of the moon had tilted significantly causing the earth's sea lines to retreat. Here was a chance for marginals, malcontents and tormented artists to live on free land and escape the horrors of paperwork produced by lawsuits, insurance settlements, home loan applications and income tax forms.

Children ran about in tattered rags, spending their days building elaborate sandcastles and inventing epic poetry. At night, under the diabolical moonlight, their bare skin left to inhale the fragrant salt air, they lapsed into a refreshing, dreamlike reverie that had eluded them while living in the city. This dreamlike state was entitled, "sleep."

This phenomenon held a natural attraction for Nick. One day last month he left a note atop the computer which said, "Gone to live in the City Where the Waves Begin. Love, Nick." His parents and little sister, Marissa, had gone to visit him several times but couldn't convince him to return. They said his cat was ill, his toy guns were lying useless under the steel white gases of fossil fuel and construction dust. His computer games had become rusty with lack of use

and his second grade schoolteacher was suffering a broken heart. Nick was needed back home.

Still, Nick refused. His parents temporarily gave up, returning home. Yesterday, Nick's mother, Diana, asked her sister, who has been immersed in a lifetime project of composing a contemporary opera of Euripides' Greek tragedy, *Medea*, to use her persuasive talents on Nick. The aunt, anxious to remove herself from the agony of resurrecting Medea, agreed. She drove to where the concrete ended and walked barefoot down the miles of wet sandbar.

As she walked, she noticed that giant palm trees had sprouted from the depths of the muddy shore and shot upwards, penetrating the stratosphere. She recalled having read that there had been several airline disasters since these trees had grown. Sections of aircraft had crashed into neighborhoods of blue shacks where pieces of palm and blue wood burned all night.

Nick's aunt arched her neck backwards, hoping to see where the tops of the palms met the sky but all she could see were the trunks of these giant trees disappearing into cumulus clouds.

She continued toward where the waves began, noticing that a half inch of salt water covered the sandbar. She passed rows of blue shacks until she spotted a boy juggling three plastic globes. The aunt watched the smooth way in which the globes rose into the sky then fell into the boy's small hands. As she got closer, she recognized her nephew, a boy with white skin, blonde hair and blue eyes. She called him. He stopped juggling, dropping one of the globes.

His aunt lifted her long skirt and chased after the globe, blocking its way toward the open sea. She watched the globe struggling in the tide.

"Pick up the Earth, Auntie," Nick said. His aunt did so, handing the wet globe of Earth to him. Then she kissed him profusely. "Whaderya doin here, Auntie?" Nick asked as he ran his left index finger along the coastlines of the Americas.

"Your parents miss you," Nick's aunt said. "Why won't you return?"

Nick said, "Suki won't sleep with me anymore. The quality of

life has greatly diminished at home. I'm a total wreck without twelve solid hours of uninterrupted sleep."

His aunt responded, "Suki's twenty years old, she's ill. We'll get you a new kitten with fresh whiskers and a striped face and she'll purr on your pillow and you'll sleep."

Nick nodded faintly. "What about the rest of the planets? I still need Saturn, Jupiter, Neptune, Uranus and Pluto to make me feel complete, Auntie."

The aunt shook her head. "Those aren't yours. They belong to the neighbors, Nick."

"I know, but I can't sleep without our solar system resting below my pencil bed. Mom told you about my special sleep disorder." Nick said.

The aunt kneeled, noticing the undercurrent growing aggressively in a sharp, diagonal motion. "Alright, Nick. I'll negotiate for the planets but please return with me right now!"

Nick nodded, studying the burgeoning sea for a moment. "In three days, Auntie. No adult can force a child to do anything. I want to enjoy a peaceful sleep a little longer."

"Alright," said the aunt hesitantly. She looked beyond the horizon of blue shacks seeing that the waves were gaining. She kissed her nephew and walked back home. She turned her head, watching Nick juggling the globes, his expression one of simple pleasure. She continued on her way. He was right, she thought. This is the twenty-second century and parents are no longer able to influence their children in any way.

Three days later, the aunt sat at the edge of the concrete, watching the pilgrimage of blue shack dwellers moving toward her. Scientists had warned the public that due to the unstable gravity occurring within the expanding Milky Way, the moon could, at any time, revert to its previous axis. The result would be chaotic tides and deviant moonbeams.

Above the waist deep tide, the marginals carried their children, their animals, their spare possessions. The aunt searched for her little nephew among the wet stragglers. Her eyes widened as she spotted two monstrous walls of water rapidly advancing toward her,

their crests carrying mangled palm fronds and blue pieces of wood.

At last she saw her nephew wading in water up to his neck as he struggled to keep a baby donkey above the water. The aunt waved and shouted at him but her voice traveled nowhere. All that was heard was the sound of the advancing walls of water reconquering its lost land.

Her nephew was almost within her reach but the sound of the sea caused him to turn his head for one last look at the point where the city ended and the waves began.

And even as the salt water invaded the cells of her body, the aunt thought of her nephew, imagining him juggling the globes, recalling his innocent expression. As her mind gradually lost its ability to reason without oxygen, she clung to the memory of Nick's face as long as she could.