

## A Second Look

Crawling through a winding tunnel, I came upon a sky of glass. It breaks and heals each time I look and blink. Perhaps a strong stare will release the air? I dust off my bare legs but dirt still clings. Thoroughly ensnared by my journey, I am more than before and less than tomorrow; unlikely to recall the gathered deformities. Stretching long like a lethargic yawn, I take heart that my labors have not found rest. The hilly grasslands move like ocean currents through the sonorous winds, and I stifle laughs through a smile as the long grass licks my legs. There is a sun, however; its placement is refracted by my destructive probing. So, I trod forward, my hands tickled by the grass tips lightly striking my palms: a sensation between a light stab and a brush.

I trekked for maybe hours until the rolling prairie began to change shape as I neared a waterfront. Long grass shifted into soggy reeds and a sandy shore. I excitedly rushed to cool waters, but stopped just in time to see a remarkable enigma at my feet: an elaborate city molded delicately by grains of sand. The most prominent part of this beach civilization lie closest to my feet: a winding castle with a tower stretching up, up nearly to my knees. The city grew ever shorter and scattered as you went to either side. Villages and farms littered the outside of this grand city. The walls shined as the setting sun sparkled every solitary grain uniquely. I could even make out, as I went to my knees for a better view, little people going about their business wholly unaware of mine. I particularly found the city market fascinating as the population's commercial traffic seamlessly walked around each other. I noticed that as I looked away, every second look brought forth a change. People had shifted their positions, guards changed shifts, and new buildings stood erected where mere sand was. I found myself closing my eyes and joyfully looking back. It was as though I was reading a never ending book by an author I deeply loved.

The sun melted down beyond my vertical peripheral, and sank half down the horizon.

Then I saw it.

The little sand people were fleeing in my direction. It was chaos. Wagons overturned, horses galloping away in a frenzy; I could even see the terror etched in their nearly imperceptible faces. Many looked right at me as if pleading. And beyond? A massive wave that was washing up on shore. Before I could even understand this catastrophe, the hungry water swallowed up the little farms, villages, markets, castle, and ultimately, the people. All were turned to mud. I desperately tried to save some of them, delicately grasping them in my hands, but they only crumbled as the rest of my friends washed away. The sun was nearly completely digested by the horizon now, and I stared angrily at that last long sliver of light shooting out of the sea, and watched rebelliously as it split a thousand times, refracting so violently that it was as though another sun was birthed by my hate. My eyes couldn't take any more however, and I returned my gaze to the corpses of my only friends as the now blazing sliver of celestial light burned out instantly into night. My rage extinguished; I had only the absence.

I knew not the comfort of other lives before now. I began to wish I stayed in that embryonic earth.

Wished that I could be once more in its loving embrace. Gripped on all sides with certainty and safety. I had begun to feel it: the lack of you, and I was lesser for it.

I wept for hours. Hot tears streamed down my face into the muddy sand, as I banged my fists savagely. Until, my face pressed up against beach, I sobbed silently into my first sleep.

Upon the morn, I groggily felt my first conscious thought wiggle through my wild subconscious reign: "Who said that?"

I'd heard a collection a harmonic sounds pierce through my dreams. It was like hearing wind on a world with no atmosphere. I blearily opened my eyes, and my opaque vision cleared up into a towering image before me: another wave.

Though this wave was of sand. It organically bent at a wide angle until it crested perfectly, the sand dripping down truly taking on all the qualities of a liquid suspended in the air. But within this massive sculpture of a wave lay a city winding all the way through the still turbulence with buildings hanging off the inner crest like stalactites. And, unless my recently weary eyes betrayed me, I beheld thousands of little people staring up at me whether right side up at the bottom of the waves, sideways at the middle, or upside down at the top, their faces pinched up into cheerful smiles, and their arms all waving at me. Though their actions were arrested in my eye, I was overjoyed at their resurrection, ever more now that they could perceive me. I took note of their evolved architecture. The churches were replaced with cathedrals, the once tent speckled marketplaces now held strong buildings with artistic columns holding them up. The legislative buildings were no longer open arenas but glamorous, steeped colossuses. They had entered a new age, and they were enchanted by my presence. I tried talking to them, but found no purchase to my words. Instead they wrote on the sand, and I was delighted that I naturally understood them.

“New life. Strange home.”

I nearly wept again at their words. The emptiness within me was overflowing. We exchanged words that slowly became more dignified and informative. I learned that they called their city “Amare,” and that their first city saw me but didn't understand, so they worshiped me until their demise. The survivors seemed heartbroken to see my tears at their sudden demise, and realized I was no God. When they rebuilt their city, they reflected on their destroyer, creating a monument to their end with a new beginning.

We spoke for hours until their words brought me low again. They told me their scientists expected a new wave to destroy them at daybreak. There was nothing that could be done to avert it. I begged them to slowly evacuate with me, that I would take care of them the best I could, but they refused; wishing to die in their city. They knew they could not stop me from trying; I loved them so. However, I trusted they knew themselves, and promised to respect their wishes.

We talked of our journeys. They were enchanted by my tales of the wider, wild world. Especially the shattering sky. I enjoyed many simultaneous conversations of my own with fishwives, merchants, military members, priests, and a rather talkative leper. I listened intently as tales of mundanity and dramatic severity washed over me. These people's lives tethered together and expanded in complexity with every voice.

Then the sun sank deeper.

None of the denizens of Amare seemed scared or troubled by their imminent destruction. They all joined hands in the city center from the highly council member to the lowly loquacious leper. They all looked toward the sun as though they could see it clearly. The waves swept the glorious city in its image and crushed them utterly, though this time there was no fear.

No tears fell. I sank into myself as the sky blushed black. Noticing before closing my eyes a message the Amarians sent me on the ground, partly obscured by the tide:

“Every life born will certain fade away  
But you, dear love, will know our day”

Now I wept; their memory stained my cheeks.

Upon the morning, a dreamless sleep revitalized me. I looked around greedily for sight of another city, and found, an empty shore. The water lapping up the beach timidly, as my heart sank. Remembering their epitaph, I gathered my strength to leave this edge of the world that had seduced me so. I walked away smiling that this world had much to offer, forcing away thoughts of my absent companions, until I stopped at the edge between the beach and grasslands, and gave the beach a second look.

There I found a most curious sight.

Though there was no sprawling city or winding art piece filled with talkative people, there was a shocking form coming from the sands: the form of a person slowly being molded by unseen forces out of the beach.

It's progress was halted by my observation, so I covered my eyes with my shaking hands until I felt smooth fingers peel mine away.

It was someone much like me, but different in all the beautiful ways. Her eyes were piercing and green. Her fingers explored me and the world with jubilant fascination.

She held my hand happily and pointed up. Though I shook my head. Still she pointed up, and hand in hand, I so acquiesced.

The sky was awash with clouds. The sun piercing through as it could, but no matter how long I stared, I saw beyond myself unreserved and unbroken with you.