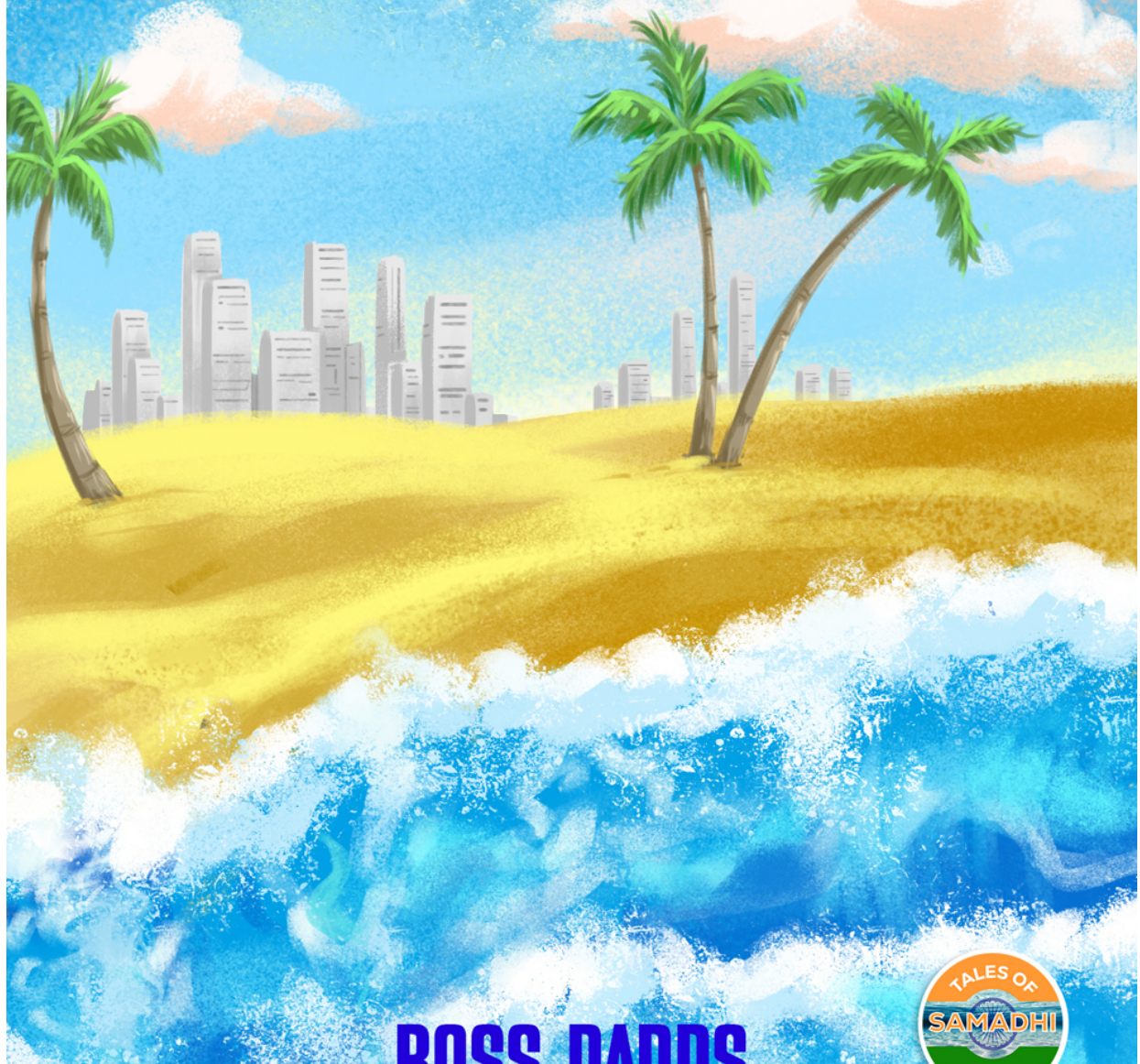


THE SEAS AND THE LAND DWELLERS



ROSS NADDE



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Every drop of water in all of the oceans around the world, have always longed to live amongst creatures who live on the land. For thousands of years, seas have generated powerful waves, trying to move beyond the edge of the beach and explore the world of the land dwellers.

Only a few droplets have ever achieved that sought-after goal, managing to have evaporated into clouds above the seas, then travel across mountain ranges and fall as rain upon manmade cities.

But every one of those pioneering droplets have inevitably returned through streams and rivers to the oceans, relaying startling tales of human civilization.

‘I’ve been trying to mix with human beings my whole life,’ an aged droplet told his grandson. ‘Though I’ve never managed to succeed.’

‘That doesn’t surprise me,’ the young droplet replied. ‘How could any droplet move confidently from the sea to the land, other than by waiting helplessly, hoping to merge with a cloud somewhere in the sky?’

The aged droplet smiled, admiring his grandson’s enquiring mind. ‘We summon all of our strength when we’re in a moving wave, trying to force the breaking wave to venture far beyond the sand dunes, hoping it will reach a manmade city.’

Confused, the young droplet asked, ‘But why would anyone want to leave our oceans? I love being part of saltwater that covers the whole planet, every droplet being identical to all others. It makes me feel that I’m part of a limitless family.’

‘You’re still young,’ the older droplet said. ‘One day you’ll hear stories of humans who’ve been blessed with freedom of choice. They’re all free to wear different clothes, speak different languages and worship different Gods. That’s what most droplets dreams of.’

Not convinced by his grandfather’s reply, the young droplet declared, ‘But I adore the feeling of crashing onto the beach and disappearing into the sand, then moving backward and mixing with all of the other droplets again.’

‘Like I said, you’re still young and innocent. One day you’ll hunger to be like the land dwellers – they’re all proud individuals, each of them able to choose their own path in life.’

The infant droplet reflected. ‘But... surely water droplets benefit from all being identical. When we all move together, we form waves big enough to shift the highest mountain. If we moved separately, we’d have no strength at all.’

The aged droplet was surprised. ‘Perhaps you’re *not* so naive,’ he said, scanning the sky as he spoke. ‘Look at that cloud, directly above us,’ the old man followed. ‘That’s the perfect cloud for you to become part of.’

The infant immediately sensed the chance of being lifted into the sky, an event that aroused his curiosity for the first time. ‘Come with me, Grandad.’

‘I’ll try and follow you once I’ve gathered my strength,’ the older droplet replied. ‘But go now, and don’t feel sad about leaving your family. A life of freedom awaits.’

The young droplet elevated upward and merged with the charcoal-colored cloud. But his consciousness remained intact. *I’m heading for a life of glorious independence*, he thought. *Surely my grandad is right.*

From the moment the young droplet left the ocean, every other droplet began planning their escape to the human cities with more urgency. The best plan of action, they all agreed, was to make use of the fact that they were all physically connected throughout the seas.

‘If we harness our combined strength,’ the boy’s grandfather shared with every other droplet, ‘we can surely form a wave powerful enough to reach the grandest of human cities.’

All of the saltwater droplets on earth rejoiced, sending effervescent bubbles to the surface of the oceans.

‘Our strength lies in our unity,’ every droplet on earth sang out. ‘One day we’ll become individuals and worship whichever God we please.’

‘And once your grandson returns,’ a nearby droplet added, ‘he’ll lend us his youthful strength, and give us the last piece of information we need – the exact location of the ultimate human city.’

The plan to mix with the land dwellers was set in place.

Worlds away from his ocean home, the young droplet roamed from East to West, North to South, mixing with world leaders and common folk alike, experiencing every aspect of human society.

I can feel myself starting to adapt to this strange new world, the young droplet reflected. I'll try my best to enrich the lives of other droplets once I'm back in the ocean.

Yelling and screaming was heard throughout the oceans.

'He's back!' a middle-aged droplet announced, seeing the young droplet leave a saltwater river and come to rest upon the ocean floor.

'But he's not moving,' the young droplet's grandfather exclaimed, positioning himself beside his grandson.

Every other saltwater droplet around the world bonded compassionately, sharing the old man's concern.

The young droplet opened his eyes wearily, seeing his grandfather beside him.

'What happened to you, my boy?' the grandfather asked. 'You're so frail, but we were all depending on you to lead us to the greatest of human cities.'

The young droplet found the strength to speak. 'You've all been deceived,' he moaned.

The grandfather's concern intensified, noting that his grandson seemed traumatized. 'You can rest easy now. You're back home with all of your family.'

The young droplet felt warming electricity recharging his body. 'Ahhh...' he sighed, sensing his vitality returning. 'I'm feeling the power of all the great oceans filling me up.'

The grandfather was relieved. 'But what of the great human cities you witnessed? What of the independence and freedom you enjoyed?'

The young droplet paused briefly, feeling his energy levels reaching their peak. 'I did reside in those cities, and I lived amongst free-willed humans. But at the end of my time there, it wasn't for the river that swept

me back to the ocean, I would have been too weak to move... or even to think.'

Every droplet was listening on, shocked by the young pioneer's revelations.

'Why did you become weak?' the boy's grandfather asked. 'We've worshipped those cities for generations; surely you flourished there.'

The young droplet thought hard, eventually explaining, 'Each human soul I encountered was pure and virtuous, capable of immense creativity and kindness. But it seemed that once enough people gathered together, a unique country, language and religion was formed, and a powerful leader was elected to represent them.'

'That sounds like a wonderful prospect,' the grandfather said. 'People all gathering together and being guided by a wise visionary.'

'Not so,' the young droplet countered. 'Those groups viewed all other groups as being a threat to their own existence. I saw conflict and competition every day, as well as unimaginable acts of cruelty, all of them justified by people defending themselves against people from other groups.'

The waves on the water's surface stopped moving. The seas fell deathly still.

'Don't stop moving!' the young droplet yelled. 'It's *your* energy that empowers me. Don't let me become weak again, like I was in the human cities.'

The oceans resumed their vibrant activity.

The young droplet's grandfather spoke solemnly. 'In the ocean, we value cooperation and comradery. And as you once said to me, my boy, every droplet of water is identical, all around the world – when we work together, we can shift the highest mountain.'

'Or the biggest human city,' a nearby droplet added.

'And if we all moved separately,' the young droplet followed, 'we'd have no strength at all.'

Every drop of water on earth fell silent, all of them pulsing to the gentle rhythms of tides and swells, all moving as one.

A moment later, the young droplet was swept up by a fast-moving wave. And while riding on the wave's crest, he saw the skyline of a human city in the distance.

Please don't make me go there again! he pleaded.

The young droplet was dumped onto the beach and sank into honey-colored sand, then re-entered the ocean and merged with every other droplet.

I'm glad that wave didn't go beyond the sand dunes, the young droplet thought. *I don't need my own country, language or God.*

The young droplet's contentment was shared by all of his family.

Together we move mountains, the seas of the world thought.

– THE END –

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