

Sandcastle by the Waves

By Amaleq Esmurria

The illustration on the box reminded Joe of when he glued matches together to make toy villagers for twig and leaf huts. He played games with the neighbor girl where they would dig little holes for underground houses. They imagined the village was a prehistoric dollhouse community. The box sat in the toy aisle with the remote control robots, computer kits, and models. It was mute silver. Raising children had been difficult for Joe. He had been an imaginative child and loved talking. He was quieter now. His son Will was always nervous. *I was an anxious kid too*, he thought, scratching his head. "The American Dream," he read on the wall as he left the store. He thought of his father waking him up with the sun to feed the goats. The goats were like horses to Joe at the time. They would push him over. Joe clenched his jaw and squeezed the box. He took a breath and drove home.

Will burst through the door, hung his backpack on the rack, and set the violin case next to the rack. He ran to the kitchen and smiled at his parents sitting at the table. His present sat on the table, too. Joe checked the time, saying, "Let's go to the beach. You can't open your present until we're there." He wagged his finger at Will and said, "Go get dressed. Hurry." The beach was only a 20-minute drive away. Will fell asleep quickly and easily to the sound of rubber on road. Joe woke him up by putting the package on Will's lap. Will rubbed his eyes then tore open the polka dotted paper and saw a pack of Bill-Builder extra small robots.

"You just tell the one with the little crown on through earpiece and they'll build houses and walls. The manual has some pictures," he said as he reached for his phone and started swiping through examples of stick architecture. Most were little village huts that looked familiar

to him. "Why don't you go near the water and try it out?" he asked. "Wet sand sticks together better than dry sand." Will half-ran, half-skipped to the edge of the water, gripping his box. The sky was cloudy. The ground was damp. Will looked and saw no one except for his dad carrying a chair, book, and bag.

He sat and opened the mute silver box. He pulled out a tin lunchbox. It had goggle-eyed robots that looked like matches welded together, stylized on the sides like old communist propaganda. They were marching towards a construction site. Inside the lunchbox a laser pointer and earpiece were in bags glued to the lid. The earpiece fit loose even after shortening all the parts. He had to keep repositioning it to make sure it stayed on. After pushing the ON button, he said, "Get out of the lunchbox over there." He pointed the laser on the sand and tiny robots climbed tiny ladders over the lunchbox. They formed columns and the crowned match stood in front holding his scepter that controlled his vassals. "You'll be King Matty," Will said, pointing his finger at the King in the front. He readjusted his earpiece.

The waves landed near the child and his toys. His father was further back in his chair reading his book. The wind was mild.

"Build a wall," he said and traced a square. They started digging for materials with cupped digits. In minutes they had a courtyard littered with pyramids of sand. The middle held a large pyramid. Will brought twigs and dropped them in the courtyard. The matchstick men set the twigs into the walls like a spiked barricade that was used to stop charging cavalry. King Matty walked along the walls to coordinate the builders. The middle tower reached upwards to half the height of the young boy. Will requested a moat, so they dug around the walls. The waves crawled closer. "Build a dam, quickly!" he commanded as he traced a line in front of the original walls. They dug the front moat deeper and brought the sand to a mound. The rising water wet the

mound. "Dig a ditch leading from the back," he said, drawing a line with the tracing from the back wall a few feet with his laser pointer.

"Don't evacuate. You must weather the storm. There is not enough time to build another castle before winter comes!" Will said frantically as he waved wildly into the air and began jumping up and down. Joe looked up and laughed. Will's theatrics reminded him that his narrative included stocking up leaves for food for winter. King Matty retired to the top of the tower. Will saw his crown as he stood on the balcony.

The water flattened the outer wall. Each wave reached further up the wall. They continued adding sand to the inner wall and dug a ditch from the front of the wall, connecting it to the ditch in the back. It would act as a relief valve if the water didn't stop. "I'll help!" Will said, jumping to get some more twigs and seaweed that were scattered nearby. He dropped them in a clearing in the courtyard. They cannibalized the pile for structural support. The water started weakening the inner wall. Sand melted off the front. There was frantic movement around the castle. Will cheered them on. Matty stood on the balcony coordinating the workers.

The sea reared back and launched a mighty wave towards the wall. The foam rose to Will's toes. It broke through and grabbed two of the matchstick men before retreating. They attempted to grab onto twigs but were not strong enough to resist the mighty sea. The remaining robots fell back and began to build a miniature wall. The courtyard began melting. Water raked the pyramids back reclaiming materials.

Will ran back to his dad and asked, "When will the water stop rising?" His dad looked up from the book and answered, "I'm not sure son, but it'll stop soon. It's ok if you lose some of them. We can get more. Do you want to go home?" He checked his phone for the time, saying, "I have to make dinner soon."

"No, Dad. Just a little longer," Will pleaded and ran back to the castle, holding his earpiece so it wouldn't fall off. He came back to disaster. He looked around the courtyard and saw only half of the robots. The courtyard was flooded. The ditches were working but they weren't enough to stop the onslaught of water. The leftovers congregated on the pyramid and the king was paced on his high patch of land. They made a makeshift pike fence but the water swarmed around it. They could not escape without being swept away. Water soaked the base. The king climbed down the backside of the tower as it crumbled. The pyramid continued to melt. The matchstick robots began to gather closely and lock arms and legs. The king climbed on top. They spread their limbs as wide as they could. The sea roared like a mild hiss and picked up the raft, dragging it out. "WOW!" Will exclaimed and jumped up and down. "Let's get out of here!" They tried to paddle back towards the sand but they could not. They were dragged back to the sea.

Will ran back to his dad. "They're gone! They built a raft and the water took them. Whoosh." He shouted, waving his arms back and forth. "Don't worry son. Let's go home," his dad replied.

"Ok, Dad. Just let me get the box," Will answered. He ran back and got the lunchbox and the cardboard that they all came in. He looked back and saw a speck of grey against the dark water. It was being tossed about but it hadn't dispersed. He ran back to his dad who was folding his chair and looking lovingly at his son. He didn't expect them to be gone so quickly. He knew the robots were disposable toys, but he didn't know if Will had built an attachment to them. Joe asked, "Why didn't you ask them to come back earlier?"

"I thought they could make it. It was really cool though. Their castle would have been so big," Will replied as he stretched his arms out wide.

"Yeah they're neat little guys," Joe answered.

The drive home was silent as Will napped in the passenger seat. They walked into the house. Will's mom was making a costume in the living room. "How'd it go?" she asked, nodding towards Will as he walked by and went to his room. "They all died valiantly in defense of the castle," he declared. He made an exaggerated frown before having a small laugh. "Ooooh, eventful," she said with a smile.

Will's room was quiet.