

# Concrete Ocean

SHORT STORY

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The ocean recedes, white caps foam in the distance. The sun melts into the horizon, birds dot the clouds like blueberries in cream. Couples stroll hand in hand, leaving footprints in the placid sand. As dusk settled over the beach, flashlights began to light up the coastline. The neon orange fences found in construction sites caught the light from the moon, guarding precious nests of turtle eggs.

Distant sounds of excavators, dump trucks, and the rumble of engines begin at seven am sharp. Disturbing the waves crashing, the tourists sleeping in, and my library class. The construction began slowly, starting on the north side of the island. Our small island town was excited to have something to talk about, how the workers spoke a language we barely understood, how the state-of-the-art equipment glistened in the sun. Every Friday on my way home, I always bought a cherry coke and skittles from Craig at E-Z Shop. I pass the old houses balanced on rickety stilts, the town hall trailer, the dive bar. The manager at the gas station asked me every Friday, “Becca isn’t it wonderful? Our small town is growing!”

“Yes.” I replied, nodding my head and smiling in response, trying to understand why he was happy. My mom, always cheerful, came home in tears that Friday. She explained her small shop was being closed in favor of the new condos. Her shop was never successful, but she always made enough to get by. We didn’t know this time would be different, that we wouldn’t get by. Almost everyone turned a blind eye to the encroaching construction. My mom gave me a new opinion. She told me of residents leaving, her business collapsing, longtime tourists not coming, and most of all, the turtle nests disappearing.

It seemed like overnight, I began to notice the wood frames of giant buildings, the cement poured into foundations for the structures. Fumes streamed from the gas guzzling trucks, plaguing our once blue skies with smog. It seemed to coat everything, the bright colors of the stilt houses now covered with a thin, grey

vener like crêpe paper. The seagulls began to fly lower, trying to avoid the toxic fog. My mom started keeping me inside, saying she needed my help cooking dinner. But I miss the sand between my toes, the ocean lapping at my feet. I miss counting the turtle eggs nestled in the sand, the excitement of seeing them hatch in the months to come.

My bedroom had one big window overlooking the serene beach, and every Sunday morning I peeked through the blinds, counting and naming the turtle nests. Each Golden Girl got a nest Blanche- Rose- Dorothy- Sophia. I noticed each week one seemed to disappear, and steadily the orange construction tape guarding them was gone too. The footprints of loggerheads imprinted into the sand seemed to have been erased, replaced by concrete and plywood. In late October, when the turtles began to hatch, nests of twenty or so eggs would only hatch one or two. Two turtles bravely let the water guide them to their home, the waves crashing over their little fins. As the eggs hatched, buildings grew closer to the shore.

The turtles, once the hallmark of our beach, now disappeared. The last turtles to hatch came on a cold and rainy day. As I watched them work their way down the shore, little did I know, the ocean was turning to concrete.

My mom and I packed our belongings; we tried to convince ourselves leaving was our best option. We lingered on the memories of beach walks, shell collecting, hunkering down during hurricanes. My mom, in desperate need of money, was frantically searching for jobs. Her once piercing hazel eyes became grey with despair, her caramel hair laced with grey. I spent my last days with the sand between my toes, the wind whistling in my ears, and the sound of excavators all around me. Our island as we used to call isn’t ours anymore, it belongs to the hotels, the condos, the new buildings.

Soon our town was no longer remembered for its loggerhead haven, but for its luxury that almost no one could afford. The private beaches, presidential suites, the seaside golf courses. The one-way roads became highways, the couple of stores became strip malls. The seagulls were no longer flying everywhere, the pelican lines anywhere to be seen. ■