

*The
Sigma Tau Delta
Rectangle*

Journal of Creative Writing
Sigma Tau Delta
National English Honor Society
Volume 91, 2016

Managing Editor:
Dan Colson

Associate Editor:
Kenzie Templeton

Emporia State University
Emporia, KS

Always on the Shore

| George Salis

At the beach he lay on a blue towel, his daughter up ahead. Beside him he had laid an empty, yellow-striped towel, covered here and there by wind-swept sand, and beyond that his daughter's plastic miniature chair. He had put the extra towel there simply out of habit. Fanning it out against a gust of sun-infused air, making sure it was as flat and stretched as can be, the sinew of muscle in his legs taut as he reached over to smooth it down. All of this had been just movement, something accepted as the natural course of a day here, where one remained between two worlds, the foreign and familiar, the dangerous and less so.

He spent most of his time watching his daughter. This was the best way to watch, not too close, not too far—her universe uninhibited by the adult world if only for a moment. She was constructing a sand castle. She had done it many times before, traditionally, ritualistically, each construction becoming larger, more elaborate and more beautiful in its childish way. He would never interfere with her art unless she asked. His job was to inspect it once done and give approval.

Looking for shells and other debris, she flowed back and forth on the shore, like part of the ocean itself. He couldn't decide where her tanned skin ended and where the light-flashed waves began. She was a foot or two taller now. She was growing up, not before his eyes, but faintly with each day. He was compelled to run toward her, anchor her to the sand, if not the earth. But when he lifted himself up, an arm stretched behind his back, he simply waved to her, and she waved in return.

After some time his vision blurred and his lids closed over slowly, not wanting to give up full consciousness, but the gentle brushing of waves, like the combing of golden hair, lulled him over the edge. Before he slept—or was it in a dream?—he heard the voice of his wife, “I love the beach,” she told him, “it reminds me of where I am.”

...

“Daddy look!”

He awoke. He probably hadn't slept but for a minute or two. His daughter was jumping up and down, waving her arms as if she were a castaway. It was time for him to approve the sand castle.

“This is your best one yet,” he said.

She smiled but did nothing else. She waited for him to look some more

Fragments of coquina had been stuffed into seven dome structures, half of a sand dollar was used as the gate of a wall fortified with the tips of cones and the tails of whelks. Such a sundry kingdom. He imagined, and he thought she imagined this with him as they both stared at the sand castle, that little beings of sand would soon march through the gates and fill every twig-turret, shell-barracks, and sand-home. And they would stay there. Not forever, but indefinitely.

He looked back up the beach, at the towel next to his. Half of it had blown over, limply folded like a withering palm.

The waves were a fair distance from the sand castle, but he could see how they would rise, and not destroy it, but simply wash it away. The shore would be new again, afresh, ready to have another sand castle built by another child. He wished, more than anything, that they both could understand this.

George Salis received a B.A. in English and Psychology from Stetson University. He is the recipient of the 2015 Sullivan Award for Fiction, the 2015 Ann Morris Prize for Fiction, and the 2015 Davidson Award for Integrity in Journalism. He contributes criticism to Atticus Review and journalism to Stetson Magazine. He is currently writing his first novel.