

The Sandcastle Man
A short play by Linsey Watkins

Characters:

Conroy, The Sandcastle Man: mid 70s, wears khaki shorts, blue button up short sleeved shirt, and a bucket hat with a string.

Isa (pronounced EE-Suh): teenager, wears a gray hoodie and jean shorts.

Setting:

A South Carolina beach, fall or spring time. Beach is not highly populated, a small beach town that doesn't have many visitors.

Start of play

ISA is walking on the beach at night. She walks with her head down, but no real sense of motivation for where she is going. She passes a sandcastle. The sandcastle is immaculate; it is detailed to perfection. She looks at the sandcastle for a while before deciding to jump on it. She jumps on it with aggression. She smashes it completely until there is no longer a beautiful sandcastle, just a lump of sand. She walks back in the direction she came.

It is the next morning, Isa walks on the beach and tries to find where the sandcastle she smashed is. She finds CONROY working on a new sandcastle.

CONROY

He doesn't look up; he just knows she is there.
Hello.

ISA

Hi. Was this your sandcastle?

CONROY

It was. *(He looks up at her.)* You must be new to this town. What's your name, darlin'?

ISA

Isa. How did you know I'm new?

CONROY

I'm Conroy. I'm known around this place as The Sandcastle Man. Been building sandcastles in this same place every day for about 30 years. That's a whole lot more days of building than you've been alive I reckon.

ISA

Showing concern/guilt

You'd been working on that castle for 30 years?

CONROY

Shoo, no, are you kidding? I'd been working on that castle for a coupla days. I'll work on a castle until it rains or the tide washes it away or something else happens that makes me have to start over again.

ISA

Oh.

CONROY

The only thing life can guarantee you is that things will happen that we can't control and we will have to adjust accordingly. I don't know about other folks, but it's more comforting to me to know that every time I start building a castle I'm building something finite out of material that can easily be knocked down. And that when it does, I can build it back up again every time.

ISA

That sounds miserable.

CONROY

Why don't you help me? You might come to find it as peaceful as I do.

Conroy offers Isa a shovel, she takes it after some hesitation. She waits for instructions.

CONROY

Ever done this before?

ISA

I haven't been to the beach since I was really little. I just moved here from Michigan.

CONROY

Ever build a snowman?

ISA

Yeah

CONROY

Well it's not like that. But it isn't too difficult. You can work on smoothin' it out.

*Isa begins to smooth a bit and ends
up breaking a piece
This frustrates her*

ISA

Damn it!

CONROY

Almost chuckling, but not in a way to mock her frustration. Soft, gentle
Hey, now, it's okay. It happens. We're building with sand.
The secret is a soft yet firm grip on it.

ISA

That's impossible.

CONROY

Ah, the old trick of impossibility. Don't fall for it.

*If Isa wasn't at least trying a little bit
to be polite she would probably say,
out loud, "you're really weird"
Instead it just shows on her face
Beat*

ISA

Sorry for swearing

CONROY

What're apologizing 'bout what you say for?

ISA

I dunno, I guess cause you're old. It's like rude to say that kinda stuff in front of old people.

CONROY

A pretty hearty laugh
Oh boy, Darlene would like you.

ISA

Who's Darlene?

CONROY

Why, the heart and soul of this here castle.
Pronounce your name for me again?

ISA

Ee-suh

CONROY

Boy that sure is pretty.

ISA

It's weird.

CONROY

Or maybe you're weird

ISA

I'm not weird you're weird

CONROY

Higher pitch laugh this time, not creepy though
You are right about that

ISA

I gotta go home

CONROY

Good idea, you oughtta get back 'fore it gets dark. Thank you for the company, Isa. Come by anytime. I'm always here.

*Isa walks away, Conroy keeps
working until the lights fade*

*Isa approaches Conroy's spot, he
was right, he is there*

CONROY

Isa, I'm glad you came back! Today we get to start on some detailing.

ISA

Some hesitation, but mostly a sense of needing to get it off her chest

Did you know that I was the person who knocked your sandcastle down the other night?

CONROY

I assumed it might have been you.

ISA

Are you mad at me?

CONROY

No.

ISA

But don't you want to know why I did it?

CONROY

Nope (*he keeps working*) want to fill the bucket with some more water then we can search for some shells together to add more detailing?

*Isa takes the bucket, Conroy smiles
at her.*

*The lights shift as it is later in the
evening now*

ISA

You started doing this 30 years ago?

CONROY

That's right.

ISA

What made you start?

CONROY

My wife.

ISA

Darlene?

CONROY

Good memory. That's right.

ISA

She liked to build sandcastles?

CONROY

She died in a car accident 'bout 31 years ago.

ISA

Oh... I'm sorry.

I'm kind of confused, though.

You don't have to talk about it, though.

CONROY

He does not say any of this with pity or grief, he is telling a story. No tears or shakiness in his voice.

That's alright, I have no problem talking about it. Darlene and me used to live in the city before I moved here. Darlene, she really hated living in the city. We only lived there because of my job. I cared a lot about that job so Darlene never complained about the city because she knew my job made me happy, and the pay wasn't too bad either. I promised we'd move eventually, though, 'cause I hated her being unhappy on account of me. So I promised her whenever we had kids we'd move. But come to find she had problems with fertility so we never had kids and we stayed in the city. A damn shame she couldn't be a mom; she was one of those women who was made to be a mom, she would have been an amazing one. So, then I promised her after I retired we could move, and she told me she'd like to go somewhere on a nice quiet beach... She was driving home from the store one night and a drunk driver hit her. She died at the scene. The part of it all that upset me the most was thinking about every little thing that could've been different to make it not happen. What I had to learn was that there are some things I just can't control. I drove myself crazy thinking about everything that could've gone differently. Darlene wouldn't have wanted me to fixate on what I can't control. I can't go back and tell Darlene to wait 5 more minutes before leaving the store, or tell her that we should just order in and she can go the next day. And I can't build every castle to be exactly as the last, but that's okay.

ISA

So, you don't get mad when they're knocked down because you can just build another one in its place?

CONROY

I like to build. It's soothing. I don't mind when it's knocked down, it's a chance start over. I was a big hit with the town, too, when I first moved here. People loved to come see what the sandcastle man was making. I was in the paper a coupla times. That was pretty neat.

Isa is silent for a while

Everyone handles grief differently, I learned how to be constructive rather than destructive. It wasn't an immediate reaction, though, that's for damn sure. I wanted to break things for a while.

ISA

I like that you decided to build sandcastles instead

CONROY

Me too

ISA

I am sorry, though. About knocking down your castle.

CONROY

No need to be. Apology accepted. You could knock down the rest of my castles so long as you keep comin' to help me build the next one.

ISA

I start school soon. But I can still come by after.

CONROY

Alright, but I can't help with no homework. I don't think my mind is quite what it used to be sometimes. Don't like to be reminded of that by strugglin' on school work.

ISA

I promise to never bring homework anywhere near the sacred kingdom.

CONROY

Sounds like a good plan to me, your majesty of the sand.

Isa laughs at this

ISA

Your majesty of the sand is a better nickname than The Sandcastle Man. You should ask for a promotion.

Now Conroy laughs

CONROY

I'm sure you've got someone waitin' on your for supper, we can call it a day.

ISA

Okay. See ya tomorrow, Sandcastle Man.

Lights fade

When the lights come up, Isa is already at Conroy's spot with him building. They are having a conversation.

ISA

All the girls at my school are just so preppy. They wear beach clothes and pink flower pattern dresses.

CONROY

You tried bein' their friend yet?

ISA

They're mean. I don't wanna be their friend.

CONROY

Well, you gotta have some friends Isa.

ISA

Well... you're my friend.

CONROY

You're my friend, too! But you need some more friends. Some friends who aren't old men who build sandcastles.

Isa kinda sits on this for a while, but she is not bothered by it. Just thinking.

ISA

My grandma said you can come over for dinner if you want.

CONROY

Well, that's very nice of her, but that's alright.

ISA

You don't have to tonight, but like, if you ever want to. I don't know. I eat alone at school a lot, and I don't like it.

CONROY

It don't bother this old geezer much.

Beat

ISA

I know you said to never bring my homework... and I didn't... but I didn't feel like eating alone at lunch today, so I brought my lunch with me.

Isa pulls out a brown paper bag and the homemade sandwich inside. She opens it and offers a piece to Conroy.

CONROY

Why thank you, I 'spose we do deserve a sandwich break after all this work we've done for our castle.

The two sit in silence for a while and eat their halves of the sandwich.
Beat

ISA

Suddenly grief stricken, confused, angry, but no tears. A confession. Beat.

My brother killed himself two years ago. It made my parents so crazy they turned on each other and started fighting all the time and now they're getting divorced. So, now I live here with my grandma while my parents try and get their shit together. I really hate my brother for that.

CONROY

Sometimes people feel too stuck in this world to think they will be able to survive in it. Those people hurt too much to be able to do anything about how it will affect those they leave behind. Fair or not, it's the people who are left behind who now havta take on the job of coping.

Conroy finishes the last of the detailing on the castle, then stands up and admires the castle, he motions to Isa to come enjoy it too. She joins him. They look.

CONROY

Look what you helped me create, Isa. One of my finest castles yet—'scuse me, *our* castle.

ISA

It's beautiful. I'd like to shrink down and live in it.

CONROY

It's starting to get dark, you should be gettin' home. Hopefully those dark clouds in the sky clear up by mornin'.

ISA

Okay. Goodnight, Sandcastle Man.

CONROY

Goodnight, Isa. I'll see you tomorrow.

Isa starts to walk away but then turns back

ISA

Thank you.

Conroy nods.

Lights fade

*We hear the sound of pouring rain.
It is thunder storming.
The castle is destroyed by violent
rainfall.*

*Isa comes back in the morning and
checks out the damage. She expects
Conroy to already be there but he is
not. She waits for him for a while
then goes home.*

*Isa comes back again and Conroy
has still not returned. Isa starts to
feel upset. She doesn't know what to
do with this anger and confusion she
feels.
Finally, she looks around for
Conroy's shovel. She finds it. She
begins to build a new castle where
the last one was ruined.
*Lights fade**

End of play