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# **Castles in the Sand**

## **By R.J. Ryland**

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# CASTLES IN THE SAND

By R.J. Ryland

## **CHARACTERS**

Sam: *a teen boy age 14-17*

Lennie: *a younger teen; any gender*

## **SETTING**

*Present; a sandy beach*

## **PRODUCTION NOTE:**

*The illusion of Sam standing in a waist-deep in hole can be achieved by creating a short sand-colored wall or covering traffic cones with sand-colored cloths with Sam kneeling inside.*

## Castles in the Sand

By Rebecca Ryland

AT RISE:

*SAM alone on a beach waist-deep in a hole, filling buckets of sand with a shovel, appearing to build a sand castle. A beach ball bounces onto the stage. SAM does not react to it in any way. After a moment, Lennie, about SAM's age, runs on and picks up the ball.*

LENNIE

*(Sees SAM and stops)*

Hi.

*SAM does not acknowledge LENNIE.*

LENNIE, *Continued*

What ya doin'?

*No response. LENNIE takes a closer look.*

LENNIE, *Continued*

Looks like you're building a castle.

*SAM turns away; staying on task*

LENNIE, *Continued*

I'm Lennie. And you are...?

*No response.*

LENNIE, *Continued*

We're getting ready to play a game of volley ball. *(Points)* Up there. My mom makes us use a beach ball so everyone can play, even my little brother, Lonny, who's five. Only he usually just bounces on top of the ball.. Want to play? *(No response; sets ball down)* We're visiting my aunt and uncle who have a vacation home right up there *(Pointing)* where we set up the net. My cousin Joy's supposed to keep me company. What a joke. Joy spends ten hours a day with her face in her phone. My aunt said she had to go out and get some sunshine today so she set up the net. I'm glad. I'm tired of sitting on the beach alone reading all day with no one to talk to. Why don't you join us?

SAM

No thanks.

LENNIE

You *can* talk. (*Laughs*) Didn't want to say anything just in case you were a mute or something. I just read "The Story of My Life." Not *my* life. Helen Keller's. You know, the girl in "A Miracle Worker?" It was on the summer reading list. I've been practicing sign language. See.

*SAM looks up just for a moment. LENNIE signs "hello;"*

LENNIE, *Continued*

That means "Hello." (*Waves*) Hi.

*SAM goes back to his task.*

LENNIE, *Continued*

I've never met a mute. But my mom says half her clients start their Zoom sessions *on* mute. (*Laughs again; looks at SAM who does not respond*) Anyway, once they get going, they can't stop talking. And my mom gets paid really well to listen. Come on and join us. There are only four of us, and Lonny really has no clue how to play.

SAM

I said no.

LENNIE

Why not?

SAM

You don't want to know.

LENNIE

*(Moves above SAM)*

Sure I do. A kid sees another kid alone on the beach and seems like the right thing to invite him to play. I'd like it if someone asked me. So what's the issue?

SAM

Do I look like I have an issue?

LENNIE

Maybe something.

SAM

No.

LENNIE

You're not very sociable, are you?

SAM

Go away.

LENNIE

See. No wonder you're down here all by yourself.

SAM

I'm down here by myself because I want to be. Alone. So go away, okay?

LENNIE

I like to be alone sometimes, too. But not three days in a row. *(Pause)* You look tired. Probably all those sirens last night. Kept you awake, too, I bet.

*No response.*

LENNIE. *Continued*

Didn't find out till this morning what it was all about. Joy's phone pinging woke me up early and we went in the kitchen. Our folks were watching the news. They arrested a man just one block from here. Can you believe it? Said he killed three women. Three! Joy said there'll be more bodies, though. When they dig up the back yard. At the house, I mean. Where they arrested him. I was in bed when the sirens went off. You must have heard them?

SAM

Why would I?

LENNIE

Well, if you live anywhere near here—

SAM

I don't—

LENNIE

It was like they were right outside the front door. I looked out the window and saw a bunch of flashing blue lights. And a search light from a helicopter. I have to admit. I was terrified. You know, when something bad happens and you don't know what it is? My mom came to our room and said everything was okay, not to worry, and we'd talk about it in the morning. She kissed me and helped me back to bed, like I was six not thirteen. But I felt a whole lot better. So, you don't live near here? *(No response)* You, know, you're digging an awfully deep hole there. You been digging all night? My dad and Lonny and I built a sand castle our first day on the beach and the hole wasn't half that deep. Or so big. And it took us *forever*. Till the tide came in and washed it away just like that! *(Snaps fingers)*

*LENNIE looks closely at SAM.*

LENNIE, *Continued*

It'll be high tide before you know it. You won't want to be standing in that hole much longer. That sand wall around you'll collapse. You'll be stuck up to here *(Puts hand up to neck)* and I'll have to get my dad down here with a shovel to dig you out.

SAM

Do you always talk so much?

LENNIE

My mom says I do. Says I should pay her to listen like her clients do.

SAM

I won't be standing when the tide comes in.

LENNIE

*(Looking all the more intently at SAM)*

Hmm.

SAM

What?

LENNIE

Mind if I borrow that bucket?

SAM

Yes.

LENNIE

Just for a minute.

*LENNIE takes the bucket. SAM had been filling with sand to dump outside the hole.*

SAM

Hey!

LENNIE

*(Turning the bucket upside down; sits)*

You know, they showed a photo of that man's kid on the news this morning.

SAM

What man is that?

LENNIE

The one I told you about. The one they arrested.

SAM

The madman who killed three women? That psychopath, you mean?

LENNIE

Psychopath or Sociopath. My mom's a psychologist, which you may have figured out.. so while we ate breakfast she explained the difference between a psychopath and a sociopath from a *professional* point of view. Then I went to my room and googled it so I could understand what she said. Joy acted like some serial killer getting arrested down the street was the single most

LENNIE, *Continued*

awesome thing that ever happened in her life and spent the rest of the morning posting about it on Instagram. She's obsessed with true crime podcasts when she isn't texting or posting. Or watching YouTube videos. She stalked him online and showed me his profile photo.

SAM

You mean his mugshot?

LENNIE

Not him. His kid. Looked like a regular boy who could have been sitting across the aisle from me in English class..

SAM

But he isn't. He's the son of a serial killer.

LENNIE

And the son of a mother who is desperately worried about him.

SAM

Is that why you came down here? Pretending to invite me to play a game? Just to rattle on about some lunatic and his loser kid?

LENNIE

The wind blew the ball away. That's why I came down. *(Pause)* But, you do kinda look like him.

SAM

So, what if I do?

LENNIE

I don't know.

SAM

You think I'm that kid? *(Crawls out of the hole)*

LENNIE

Could be. We've been here a week and I haven't seen a single other kid on the beach except you. It's a private beach, you know. *(Stands)*

SAM

Thanks for pointing that out. *(Takes step towards LENNIE)*

LENNIE

*(Steps back)*

The public beach ends a half block that way.

SAM

Didn't know that. Guess that proves I'm not from around here.

*SAM takes another step towards LENNIE.*

LENNIE

*(Taking another step back)*

Or you came here thinking no one would see you. I might not have noticed if the ball hadn't rolled so far down the beach.

SAM

So, now what are you going to do? Go tell your *Psychologist* mother you met a psycho?

LENNIE

No.

SAM

Or scream?

LENNIE

No.

SAM

Right. Not much to say now, huh?

*LENNIE's cell phone rings. They reach into their pocket for the phone.*

SAM, *Continued*

Put it down.

LENNIE

I need to answer. I've been gone awhile..

SAM

*(Looks up at the vacation house)*

That her by the net?

*LENNIE looks back up the beach.*

LENNIE

Yes.

SAM

Wave to her.

LENNIE

I—

SAM

Wave!  
*(Aggressively)*

*LENNIE waves; BEAT.*

LENNIE

She's going back inside.  
*(Concerned)*

*SAM picks up the bucket and heads back into the hole.*

SAM

Put the phone away.

LENNIE

Ok.

*LENNIE puts the phone away; SAM goes back to shoveling sand into the bucket.*

LENNIE, *Continued*

*(After a long pause)*  
I saw her on the news. Your mother. Crying.

SAM

Yeah, well, it's for the best.

LENNIE

Running away?

SAM

The apple doesn't fall far from the tree.

LENNIE

What's that supposed to mean?

SAM

There was a sniper on the roof next door.

LENNIE

Wow..

SAM

I wish they'd shot him.

LENNIE

What good would that do?

SAM

Keep him from ever hurting anyone ever again.

LENNIE

Did he do it?

SAM

*(Looks up; during speech comes back out of the hole again)*

Look, I haven't seen my dad in eight years. He shows up yesterday asking if he can stay with us a few days. I didn't even know who he was. An hour later our house is surrounded by cops. I hid in the attic.

LENNIE

So, you don't live with him?

SAM

He doesn't live with my mom and me so tell your cousin they'll have to look somewhere else for more bodies. They hauled him off in handcuffs with a bag over his head. And took my mother in a patrol car. She must not have told them I was inside. Probably too freaked out to think straight.

LENNIE

Wow.

SAM

The cops stayed in the house at least an hour. But they never checked the attic. Pretty lame.

*SAM sits on the sand.*

LENNIE

*(Also sitting)*

If they didn't know you existed... I mean, do serial killers have kids?

SAM

That's a stupid question. I'm right in front of you.

LENNIE

I know. But whoever thinks about them?

SAM

*(Jumping to his feet)*

A bunch of people. Like your cousin and a million other insta-stalkers. I got a zillion messages before midnight. Sayin' they're coming for me next. Going to come and get me before I kill, like my father who I don't even know. What a worthless piece of crap I am. That I'm destined for murder. We got the same DNA. Cruel. Hateful messages. Death threats. Kill me before I kill. And half those people were kids I know. From school. From playing ball. From—

LENNIE

I'm sure you're not like him.

SAM

Yeah, well. It crossed your mind. I saw it on your face. When you figured out who I am.

LENNIE

Only for a minute.

SAM

That's all it takes to destroy someone's whole life. And everyone here and anyone I ever meet anywhere I go, will look at me that exact same way.

LENNIE

But that's not who you are. Right?

SAM

How can I know?

*Sits again; LENNIE joins him.*

LENNIE

Well, I'm no expert. But Joy told me that sociopaths show signs early on. When they're young. Things like torturing animals and cutting off their heads. Dogs, mostly. Cats sometimes. Have you ever killed a cat?

SAM

Of course not.

LENNIE

See.

SAM

*(Genuinely curious)*

What about psychopaths?

LENNIE

I think they're kind of the same. Just more cunning and manipulative so you probably wouldn't catch them if they did kill a cat. Or a dog. From what my mom said, and what I read online, it's more about childhood abuse that creates a sociopath and genetics a psychopath.

SAM

*(Back to his feet)*

There you go. It's in my genes. I'm going to grow up to be just like him. I will.

*SAM returns to the hole.*

LENNIE

*(Goes to SAM)*

You don't have to. I mean, even if it is in your genes, there are lots of successful psychopaths. That's what I read on the Internet anyway.

SAM

Successful at killing.

*SAM starts to lie down.*

LENNIE

What are you doing?

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