

Sand

by Eddy Wang

Francis was sitting on the settee watching the television when Anabelle entered carrying a book and a bottle of dry red wine. Anabelle sat on her corduroy chair opposite him and opened *The Ontology of Sand Sculpting in Post-Fordist Capitalism*. Behind her was an over-stacked bookshelf. Next to Francis was a picture book of sand sculpting. Francis was watching his recent interview on *Idle Conversations with Ezra Cohen*, a talk-show about C-tier celebrities opening up after traumatic events to an audience of middle-brow consumers.

EZRA COHEN: The Toronto Star described your last sand sculpture titled “A Day in the Life of an Office Worker who does not do a Single Piece of Work the Entire Day” as an “absurdist tragicomedy.” What are you presently working on?

“It was surreal: the studio was filled with people in mourning clothes. Black veils and all,” Francis said. Anabelle poured a glass of wine and took a sip. She put the wine bottle on the table separating her and Francis. She hoped to finish a chapter out of her book tonight.

FRANCIS: Well this one’s about a man who has been put on hold on a suicide hotline for so long that the wait finally triggers him to do the deed.

“You know, Ezra got his start as a kid calling people out of a phonebook and asking how they were doing” said Francis. “He was like a therapist if a therapist was a 10 year old boy who hadn’t hit puberty.”

Ezra gives an amicable laugh. Francis looks deadpan into the audience and at the camera.

“There is a plethora of discourse concerning affective labour’s relationship to post-Fordist capitalism in talk-host shows,” Anabelle said as if she had rehearsed the line. Anabelle was a professor in sand sculpture studies. Francis had never understood what philosophical jargon had to do with sand sculpting.

EZRA COHEN: Next question, the last before we talk about Baxter: why sand sculptures as your medium of choice? As you know, on this television program, we are being recorded and archived.

Francis extended his hand to Anabelle, who hadn’t noticed. What she was reading was important research for her first book. She needed to understand the author’s arguments and form a response.

This show is going to be documented and then archived. But with sand sculpting, once you finish exhibiting your piece, it gets destroyed. How do you cope with that?

FRANCIS: I didn’t kno—

“I’m half-way through that book on post-Fordist capitalism and sand I was telling you about,” Anabelle said over the TV, taking another sip of wine.

FRANCIS: *When Baxter was sick, I fell into a state of anhedonia and stayed home all day—the only happiness I felt was when I fell asleep and dreamed, so I'd wait all day to do that—*

“Are you watching my interview?” said Francis over his own interview.

I would make my bed for it to be unmade at the end of the day, I would make a meal only to eat it and have to make the same meal tomorrow—

“Which one?” asked Anabelle.

I noticed how much of my life was dedicated to doing chores I would just have to do again—

“The one playing right now.”

Anyways, I'd always cross this sandy plain on my walk to Baxter's hospital. Sometimes I'd see these dunes appear in the plain, then a few days later they would disappear.

“Oh I hadn't noticed,” said Anabelle.

One day Anabelle was talking about Martin Heidegger.

Francis said nothing.

She said that for Heidegger, things form and re-form in different ways across cultures and times—

“Can I watch it later? This chapter is crucial to my research,” said Anabelle before pouring herself another glass of wine.

See there are arbitrary boundaries between us and things—the sculpture I made is separate from me, but it exists within the same world as I do:

“I talk about you here,” said Francis.

and that world we share is permanent. Matter is never destroyed, only reconfigured.

Francis had not noticed that Anabelle was reading a book. She would always work on her research while they watched TV. She worked best on her research when they watched TV.

EZRA COHEN: *So where does the sand come in?*

“Did you think I did a good job explaining Heidegger?” said Francis.

Francis looked at her. She hadn't noticed. Instead she was sipping at her wine and making sense of the ways capitalism pushes one to view sand sculpting in terms of commodification instead of aesthetics. Francis started to fidget with his fingers.

FRANCIS: See, by organizing sand, I could show those sand particles, which have been here way before the dawn of man, some love. It's like, the sand will be reconfigured and I let it be reconfigured because I don't try to hold on to it or preserve it.

Anabelle didn't feel bad for ignoring the TV. Everything Francis said on television was an act. The sand sculpture Francis had been working on had been mostly done by Baxter before the latter was hospitalized. Francis hadn't touched sand for seven months.

The secret is knowing that this sand which I spent so much time with will not stay as it is and our interaction is only passing, yet always existing.

Francis reprimanded himself for wanting attention from his partner. She had supported him in his sand-sculpting career since they had been together and hadn't judge him when he stopped. Francis didn't feel like he had to right to distract her from her work.

EZRA COHEN: So sand sculpting is a way to cope with death.

FRANCIS: ...Yes. Maybe it's what gives me the strength to let go.

Anabelle had worried about Francis ever since Baxter died. But she hadn't had the time to really listen to him. She took moderate sips of wine to calm her nerves. She promised herself she would figure out how to help Francis after her book was published but for now she needed to focus.

Ezra stares at Francis.

EZRA COHEN: Let's talk more about your work partner and best friend Baxter. You two have been working together until the very end. How are you coping?

It was true, or at least Francis thought it was true, that he had been too needy since Baxter had passed. Things were different now. Anabelle had gotten more into her work. Francis less into his. Anabelle used to admire Francis for his artistry. But while Baxter was sick, Francis had lost his passion.

FRANCIS: Baxter used to hold a pack of Q-tips in his hand like cigarettes—he always stuck one end of a Q-tip in his right ear canal—right till the very end.

“Do you need me to turn off the TV?” said Francis, wanting to hear Baxter joke about his ear again.

EZRA COHEN: Did you find him neurotic then?

“You know I work better with background noise,” said Anabelle. She took another sip of wine and twirled her hair. The passage in her book argued against reading critical sand-sculptor studies in the dialectical historical way that dominated the field.

FRANCIS: Sure, but that was why he was such a great sand sculptor partner. You can only really be a sand sculptor if you're neurotic.

Francis felt like background noise in Anabelle's life. Sometimes he thought she was too self-involved. He didn't know what to do with all the leftover emotions he had over Baxter. Francis began to twirl his hair.

EZRA COHEN: Are you neurotic?

He twirled his hair more intensely. A few strands came out.

FRANCIS: Anabelle calls me that a lot.

Anabelle knew she should be attentive to her partner's needs, but when her nose was in her research she couldn't help but see Francis as a distraction. Besides, she noticed herself resenting him for not sand sculpting since Baxter's death. She took a gulp of wine. It washed away her intrusive thoughts and helped direct her attention back to her book. The author was arguing for the intervention of Heidegger into the politics of sand sculpting.

EZRA COHEN: Do you feel guilty over his death?

FRANCIS: Sorry, say that again?

When Francis twirled his hair too hard, he would get these nauseating headaches. It was as if someone squeezed so hard on his temples that his head popped, blowing out his faculty for spatial awareness until he could scarcely tell whether Anabelle was in the room or not.

EZRA COHEN: You were very close with him, and you had to be the one to sign the papers to take him off life sup—

FRANCIS: It's complicated.

Heidegger was Anabelle's favorite thinker. She hadn't noticed Francis twirling his hair. Her own hair twirling knocked the wine bottle off the table. It landed on the settee Francis was sitting on. It didn't spill. Anabelle was careful to seal her wine bottle every time she poured a new glass, a trick she learned from Heidegger's letters to Hannah Arendt.

EZRA COHEN: Tell me more.

Francis didn't know if he twirled his hair because he was anxious or to get Anabelle's attention. He remembered how Baxter used to cradle him and tell him softly to stop twirling his hair when he went into these trances.

FRANCIS: I feel things with it. It's one of those things where I can't tell you because I'm not at this stage of telling, just at the stage of feeling.

When Francis got those hair-twirling induced headaches, the world closed in on him. All he wanted was to hear a voice. He would twirl his hair a lot while sand sculpting but Baxter was always there. He

and Baxter connected a lot over those neurotic things they did. Baxter with the ear. Francis with the hair.

EZRA COHEN: *Can you explain?*

FRANCIS: *You know, it's like... Anabelle recommended me a lot of literature on medical assisted death. I can't say I've made much sense of it. But it's like when you're a kid and you're experiencing things you have no way to process. This is the equivalent of that but in adulthood, you know, it's like something you have no words for.*

Anabelle was good at calming Francis down with her voice. If only she had noticed. Baxter always noticed. Maybe Anabelle noticed but she didn't notice.

EZRA COHEN: *Wittgenstein said the limits of your language are the limits of your world. Do you feel your struggle to understand the passing away of Baxter somehow limits your experience of him passing away?*

"Do you know where the wine is?" said Anabelle. He didn't respond.

FRANCIS: *I was worried but I realized I had to let go. Though there was this part of me which felt real guilty for wanting to let go. I felt like I was abandoning him.*

EZRA COHEN: *Though—*

"Do you know where the wine is?" she asked again. Francis snapped out of his trance

"It's next to me," he said, tossing her the bottle.

"Thank you," Anabelle said, pouring another glass. "Are you okay?"

FRANCIS: *No but see I felt like I did. I felt responsible for him—*

"Yeah," said Francis before directing his eyes back to the television.

"Okay." said Anabelle, bringing her attention back to her book.

--something inside me felt responsible for his life and so when I signed those papers I felt responsible for his death. Like it was my fault he died.

"Are we going to the sculpting studio tomorrow?" asked Anabelle nonchalantly as she got more into her book.

"Yeah." said Francis.

EZRA COHEN: *So how do you feel now?*

Why wasn't Anabelle watching? Didn't she know he was confessing his feelings on the television? The confessional was heard all over the country. Yet the person to whom it was really addressed to did not hear anything.

FRANCIS: *I really don't know. Sometimes you feel a darkness in the soul and other times a night of the soul.*

The way the author in Anabelle's book wielded his words brought immediate pleasure to her. For her, there was nothing outside the text.

EZRA COHEN: *St. John of the Cross makes that distinction.*

The world was tuned to the static of a dead TV channel as Anabelle's mind began to suture the concepts inscribed on the page.

FRANCIS: *With the night, we know what causes our grief, but with darkness we don't understand. It's the darkness which gets me. Like it's a flood of emotions I keep at bay every day, but you know, sometimes, I feel like I'm still drowning.*

Anabelle did hear Francis's confession in the first few weeks of Baxter's passing. Yet Francis wanted Anabelle to keep comforting him in his heartache.

And I don't really know why but I don't focus as much on my work. Things make me sick. I'm not mourning, more just apathetic... Like construction, I feel like the sound of construction.

It was as if Francis was lost to the white noise of everyday life. Did Anabelle tune out of everything inside him? He had not been able to broadcast to her the language of mourning that would give him closure.

Like the moment when you wake up and things seem fine and you can tell yourself things seem fine, but then you just hear this noisy construction outside.

Anabelle had finished her chapter. She closed her book and left to go to sleep.

and it keeps going on and on and it fills your head and you can't escape it. It's like there's this noise all in my head and it grates me and grates me and grates.

Francis and Anabelle arrived at the beach the morning after Francis's interview aired. The crashing tides interplayed its harmonies with seagull squalls as sailboats drifted across the backdrop of Lake Ontario. It smelled like salt and fish, like moisture in the air, like sea breeze and beach vegetation. The sky was soft blue and filled with emdash-looking clouds. The swaying maple trees glittered with dewdrops. Francis and Anabelle walked down the boardwalk until they got to the sand sculptor studio. They glimpsed the sand-covered angel that guarded the entrance to the studio. Its pupilless eyes disinterestedly watched as Anabelle unlocked the door.

"It's funny how things stay the same even though so much has changed on the outside," said Francis. The studio beach was a large house that hosted the work of sand sculptors in Ontario. Inside the studio were a series of dividers, separating a multitude of other sand sculptors' work. "This is where we first met remember? Baxter introduced me to you," he said.

“That was a long time ago,” Anabelle said. “I remember I was writing a chapter of my dissertation on his work.” Anabelle had been interviewing Baxter when she was a PhD student as part of her dissertation on the Heideggerian trends of emerging sand sculptors in Ontario.

“That was when we just starting to work together. He was a lot better than me back then,” said Francis. He didn’t remember how he and Anabelle fell into a relationship when they first met. They just connected.

“Will you attempt to sculpt?” Anabelle asked. She would have to return the key to the studio within a week. A week was enough time to make significant progress on Francis’s project, Anabelle thought.

“I don’t feel I have it in me,” Francis said.

Anabelle had booked the studio with the Canadian Council for Sand and Ice Sculpting two weeks before, believing that working would help bring Francis’ mood up.

“How’s the book going?” asked Francis to change the subject. Anabelle was continuing in her study of *The Ontology of Sand Sculpting in Post-Fordist Capitalism*. She had gone back into her daily routine a month after Baxter’s death. Working made Anabelle feel better. The same could not be said for Francis.

“Swell. This one is going to be important for my first book, so I’m making sure to read it thoroughly,” explained Anabelle while pouring herself a glass of wine. Her alcohol consumption doubled in the past two months.

“Will you come and sit with me by the beach?” said Francis. He had taken off his slippers. “The last time we strolled by the beach was over a year ago when Baxter was still alive.” Francis looked out at the lake. The receding wave left drifts of zebra mussels by the sea shore.

“Let me think,” said Anabelle. Anabelle thought the beach might distract her from her looming publication date. But she knew it would make her guilty for not doing enough work. Francis did not think much about work. He laid on his side and cupped his ear against the floor to mimic the sound of waves, feeling how the sand particles tickled the nerves in his ear canal. That was how Baxter felt with his ears. That’s why he would always scratch his ears with those Q-tips. He forgot so much of what Baxter had told him, but all those little mannerisms were etched in his memory.

Anabelle closed her book and stood up. It might do her some good to go by the beach. She took a big gulp of wine.

“Why did Baxter feel the ends of his Q-tips before putting them in his ears?” Francis asked. They began to walk towards the beach. She was holding the wine glass in one hand and Francis’s hand in the other. Feeling she had not done enough work, she grabbed her book and put it under her arm.

Anabelle took a deep breath, “Baxter was convinced Q-tip manufacturers designed each end of the Q-tips differently to account for physiological differences between the right and left ear,” she said before taking a sip of wine to quench that drive to work. “Which for the record I do not believe.”

They sat down by the beach and watched broken objects of a past time wash ashore. In Anabelle’s mind, Baxter was certainly smarter than her partner and talking with him was helpful for her research. However, he would always go on long tangents which made it difficult to spend large periods of time with him without getting annoyed.

“Nevertheless, his theory was founded on the observation that (1) right-handed people had heavier right-hands than left-hands and (2) in order to keep their body symmetrical, the right ear canal had to be thinner than the left ear canal,” said Anabelle. She paused to take another sip of wine. It was not that Anabelle had an incredible memory that made it possible to recall Baxter’s Q-tip neuroses. No, Baxter recited his theory of Q-tips to her every time they spoke.

“Q-tip manufacturers, Baxter thought, must have accounted for this fact and designed one of the Q-tip ends to be thinner to appease the neurotic ear-itching market of mostly right-handed consumers,” Francis never minded Baxter’s tangents.

“You know, we were both neurotic,” said Francis, who enjoyed calling himself neurotic. He liked to latch onto negative aspects as defining features of himself.

“He was the kind of neurotic that thought too much about things while you’re the type to obsessively twirl your hair,” said Anabelle. Anabelle knew of the ways Francis romanticized his neuroses, but choose to ignore it to keep good relations.

“How did you feel about Baxter?” asked Francis. The beach contained so many memories of Baxter within the folds of its sands. By feeling the sand rub against his skin, Francis found himself thrown into the past.

“He was your best friend. Of course I cared,” said Anabelle. The urge to be productive hit Anabelle like a wave mid-sentence.

“But how did *you* feel about him?” pushed Francis. The way the waves hit the shoreline reminded him of how Baxter used to take his shoulders and stand him in front of the lake, telling him to focus on the rhyme and flux of water.

“I...well...” said Anabelle. She took a sip of her wine to calm her stress and focus on the situation.

“Well?” said Francis. He started to twirl his hair.

“I thought he was neurotic and overtly emotional,” said Anabelle. “But I was glad you had someone to talk to and share your compulsions and emotions with so closely,” She spoke her mind. When she was calm she could speak her mind, but when she was stressed she avoided difficult conversations. These days, she was often stressed.

Francis said nothing.

“Though it’s not productive to idealize those who have passed. We should just see them as the flawed people they were,” said Anabelle. When Anabelle began to speak freely, she would notice more flaws about people. She thought to herself that Francis needed too much approval from others.

“Did I do the right thing taking him off life support?” said Francis. He twirled his hair to the rhyme of the waves, as if the curls of his hair were dancing in parallel to the curls of water.

“Does it matter?” said Anabelle. “You did it. There’s no going back.” The tone of her voice made it feel like she was teaching him.

“It does matter. I want to know how you feel,” Francis said. The first time they met, they had a long conversation by the shore about sand-sculpting. Back then, Francis felt like they could converse on matters as equals. Now, Anabelle has learned far too much for them to really talk.

“You read the papers I sent you about medically assisted death?” asked Anabelle. For her part, her long conversations with Francis had become less engaging once she understood the simplicity of his thought.

“But I want to know your opinion,” said Francis. He used to like academia, but academic jargon now made him irascible.

“Based on my personal convictions, I believe you were in the right,” said Anabelle. “Though I think the framework of viewing this problem in terms of right or wrong is unproductive.” What annoyed Anabelle was that Francis didn’t see how thinking from another perspective could change his experience of reality, something Anabelle had learned from reading Heidegger.

“That doesn’t stop me from looking at it that way,” said Francis. Francis knew there were many things he could say which would make Anabelle accept his positions but because he didn’t use the proper vocabulary to say it, Anabelle thought less of him. For Anabelle, the way that a problem was framed was the primary issue.

“But I’m saying you *can* look at it in another w—” said Anabelle.

“I don’t think you get it though. I don’t *feel* like I can. I *feel* like I have to address this problem in this way.” Francis thought Anabelle was repressing her emotions through layers of ideas.

“I get that, but my claim is that human agency allows us to address problems in different w—”

“Maybe for you, but I think we’re different.” Maybe he needed to develop a more resilient life philosophy, thought Francis. But this talk wasn’t about ideas, it was about emotions.

“I think for you too.” Anabelle seldom saw Francis so willing to argue. Oftentimes he stayed quiet when frustrated. When they first met their conversation flowed like a tide, ebbing and flowing naturally. When they got into their first fight, Francis stone-walled her.

Francis said nothing.

“It’s like the past never happened to you,” muttered Francis.

“Excuse me?” said Anabelle. Francis’s hand jittered as it twirled his hair.

“What makes us different, Anabelle, is that you’re always worried about the future, always thinking about what you have to do next, stressing about your book publication or the conference you have to host next week—you’re always living in some future event.” The hair twirling made him light-headed and willing to say what was on his mind.

She said nothing. There had only been one previous time in their relationship when Francis had pointed out Anabelle’s obsession with the future. It was when they were travelling to Montreal and Anabelle insisted they leave the sand sculpting museum in order to catch their train. Francis told her not to worry and that he was engaged in a piece about sand-sculpting and trauma.

“You’re always talking about some future event and it gets tiring,” said Francis. Francis twirled his hair the way the breeze twirled the sand, spinning bits of sand and letting them dance over the water.

“Perhaps the past happens for you too much Fran—”

“Look,” said Francis, “I’m not saying I am not free from faults. I pine too much. I regret too much. But you think too much,” said Francis.

The water roared. Anabelle took a deep breath. In the distance a flock of seagulls squalled as the sailboats were coming to shore.

“Do you want me not to? All my life people have told me to stop thinking and to look pretty, but I’m proud of the academic legacy I built—”

“No I’m not saying that you shouldn’t think. I’m saying you need to feel more—”

“You can’t make me feel,” said Anabelle. She took a big sip of wine.

“But there are things which just *make* you feel. Like the way our hands feel when they are interlocked. Like the texture of the water against our feet. Like the light breeze against the hairs of our backs. Look. Feel. Just observe it happening. Don’t think about your book, don’t worry about what will happen next week. Just feel,” said Francis. The world was always opening up, that was Heidegger’s point. Anabelle clenched the sand in her hands. There was a sensation in it but it didn’t have much impact.

“You’re an artist. I’m an academic. We’re different—”

“You’ve read about it haven’t you? So look. Look at the way the sunlight shines on the water. Look at how it glitters and sparkles. You’ve read it hundreds of times in all the books in your life, but look at it like you’re looking at it for the first time, with that wonder authors capture in their descriptions.”

Francis had only ever argued with Baxter, but Francis repressed the memory of those times to let himself idealize their relationship.

She tried to sip some wine but found it hard to swallow the liquid.

“...What do you want from me,” she said after regaining her composure.

“To feel with me,” said Francis, pulling his hair.

Could she feel when she, as Heidegger would say, was enframed, tied, to her study?

“I can’t when I’m focused on wor—”

“Stop focusing on —“

“Stop interrup—“

“No.”

“I can’t focus on my w—“

“Focus on the people in your life. Focus on me,” said Francis. This was the first time Anabelle heard Francis shout. She forced the wine down her throat.

“I’m going to keep reading my book,” said Anabelle. She hadn’t read enough on *this* to know what to do. She needed to get out. She needed to get out now.

“No...” said Francis. He was light-headed at this point from twirling his hair too much. He grabbed her arm as she was standing up, causing her to drop her wine glass. At the same time, Francis momentarily lost his consciousness from the hair twirling. He fell head first towards the wine glass. Anabelle saw Francis fall from the corner of her eye and reflexively turned around and pulled his arm. Though she stopped him from hitting his head, she was not strong enough to stop him from falling. His body tumbled downwards with his hands out, as if trying to find heaven in the sand below. As he continued to spiral downwards, one of his hands hit the wine glass, crushing it and shattering it to a multitude of pieces. It all happened in a moment. The shock snapped Francis out of his hair-twirled induced trance. He sat up. Anabelle looked at Francis and Francis looked at Anabelle. Then, they both looked at Francis’s hand. It was bleeding. That same hand which created all of Francis and Baxter’s sand sculptors was covered in glass shards. It was redder than the sun that was starting its descent. Blood beams of shards mixed in with sand.

“Why does it hurt,” said Francis.

“You’re bleeding,” replied Anabelle.

“The wine just fades into the sand,” said Francis. His other hand sifted the bloody wine.

“We need to get you back,” said Anabelle.

“We all turn to sand don’t we?” The wound opened up the world as if the cut had let the beach in.

“Come on, let’s get those glass shards removed.”

“When he brought his nose up and tip-toed a bit to smell the roses...”

“Hey show me your hand.”

“He’d look up and smile.” Francis saw the whole world in a grain of sand.

Anabelle opened Francis’s hand.

“That’s a big one, stay still,” said Anabelle.

She started to take the shards out.

“Those were the good days.”

Tears hit Francis’s hand.

“Things are going to get better.”

Anabelle kept taking shards out of his hand.

“I just wish I could take away his pain.”

Her mascara was smudged.

“When he cried, I just wished I could make things better”

“Francis...”

“If I could feed him with kisses until his wounds healed” said Francis.

Somewhere in the studio was an unfinished sand sculptor Baxter had started on.

“Come on you’re going to be okay.”

There were so many shards in Francis’s hand.

“I feel guilty taking him off life support.”

“It’ll be okay,” said Anabelle.

The more she looked, the more she saw pieces she hadn’t notice before.

“I told him visiting him at the hospital wasn’t burdensome.”

“Baxter loved you, Francis.”

It was hard to see it all with tears in the eyes.

“But it was.”

Anabelle pulled Francis towards the water.

“Open your hand.”

Francis didn’t hear her.

“I hated seeing him like that.”

“Come on,” said Anabelle.

She opened Francis’s hand and put it in the water.

“It was a relief when he died.”

“We’ll get you healed.”

Anabelle started ripping pages from her book.

“No, I didn’t mean that.”

“Sometimes we have Freudian slips.”

Anabelle was taking deep breaths.

“He was the only one I felt comfortable sitting with and doing nothing together.”

“This will stop the bleeding.”

She started to bandage Francis’s hands with her pages.

“I’m always so anxious around people.”

Francis looked off into the distance.

“You’re going to be okay.”

“Not with him”

“Hey look at me,” said Anabelle.

Anabelle took Francis by the shoulders and stared at him.

“But when he became too much work to handle in the hospital.”

“You were under a lot of stress,” said Anabelle.

Anabelle's book was smeared in red.

"I just wanted him gone."

Francis's eyes slipped away from Anabelle.

"Sometimes we have intrusive thoughts."

"But I didn't want him dead," said Francis.

"But it's okay."

Anabelle held Francis's shoulders tighter.

"It disgusts me what I think sometimes."

"It's okay."

Anabelle wrapped her arms around Francis's body.

"Why did you distance yourself?" said Francis.

He dug his head into her breasts.

"I didn't mean to," said Anabelle.

The sand absorbed her tears.

"I'm so angry at you Anabelle."

Francis put his hands over Anabelle's back.

"It's okay."

She clenched her hands against his back and gave a little gasp.

"The way you talk about sand sculpting annoys me," said Francis.

"I talk too much."

"The sound you make drinking wine disgusts me."

"I know."

"I despise you," said Francis.

"I am not a good person."

Francis gripped Anabelle tightly.

“I don’t despise you.”

“I know you didn’t mean it.”

“I love you.”

“I love you too.”

“I’m sorry.”

“I’m sorry too.”

They wept in each other’s arms and held each others’ bodies as the waves took the broken wine glass out to sea.

“Do you promise to be better?”

Francis looked up at Anabelle.

“I do.”

“Do you?”

Anabelle smiled at Francis.

“I do.”

They laid flat on their backs on the beach sand, Anabelle’s hand brushed against Francis’s chest. They looked at the wind blowing the sand the same way it always had since the dawn of time.

When Anabelle woke up, she stretched her arms and continued to work on her book. What she wrote today was the best thing she had ever written. Deciding to take a break, she walked into the studio kitchen to get a drink. Francis was working on the sculpture Baxter started before he died. With his bandaged hand behind his back, he was carefully sculpting a sand face with his other hand. The face, previously anonymous, now resembled Baxter. It was as if the sand was given life through Francis’s hands. Francis acknowledged Anabelle and Anabelle acknowledged Francis. They had no need to say a word. Anabelle sat on the floor and watched.