

Born on March 12, 1928, in Washington, D.C., **Edward Albee** was adopted as an infant by Reed Albee, the son of Edward Franklin Albee, a powerful American Vaudeville producer. Brought up in an atmosphere of great affluence, he clashed early with the strong-minded Mrs. Albee who attempted to mold him into a respectable member of the Larchmont, New York social scene. But the young Albee refused to be bent to his mother's will, choosing instead to associate with artists and intellectuals whom she found, at the very least, objectionable.

At the age of twenty, Albee moved to New York's Greenwich Village where he held a variety of odd jobs including office boy, record salesman, and messenger for Western Union before finally hitting it big with his 1959 play, *The Zoo Story*, the story of a drifter who acts out his own murder with the unwitting aid of an upper-middle-class editor. Along with other early works such as *The Sandbox* (1959) and *The American Dream* (1960), *The Zoo Story* effectively gave birth to American absurdist drama. Albee was hailed as the leader of a new theatrical movement and labeled as the successor to Arthur Miller, Tennessee Williams, and Eugene O'Neill. He is, however, probably more closely related to the likes of such European playwrights as Beckett and Harold Pinter. Although they may seem at first glance to be realistic, the surreal nature of Albee's plays is never far from the surface. His best known play is *Who's Afraid of Virginia Woolf?* (1962).

Albee describes his work as "an examination of the American Scene, an attack on the substitution of artificial for real values in our society, a condemnation of complacency, cruelty, and emasculation and vacuity, a stand against the fiction that everything in this slipping land of ours is peachy-keen."

### **The Sandbox** by Edward Albee

A Brief Play, in Memory of My Grandmother (1876-1959)

Players:

The Young Man, 25, a good-looking, well-built boy in a bathing suit

Mommy, 55, a well-dressed, imposing woman

Daddy, 60, a small man; gray, thin

Grandma, 86, a tiny, wizened woman with bright eyes

The Musician, no particular age, but young would be nice

Note. When, in the course of the play, Mommy and Daddy call each other by these names, there should be no suggestion of regionalism. These names are of empty affection and point up the pre-senility and vacuity of their characters.

Scene. A bare stage, with only the following: Near the footlights, far stage right, two simple chairs set side by side, facing the audience; near the footlights, far stage left, a chair facing stage right with a music stand before it; farther back, and stage center, slightly elevated and raked, a large child's sandbox with a toy pail and shovel; the background is the key, which alters from brightest day to deepest night.

At the beginning, it is brightest day; the Young Man is alone on stage to the rear of the sandbox, and to one side. He is doing calisthenics; he does calisthenics until quite at the very end of the play. These calisthenics, employing the arms only, should suggest the beating and fluttering of wings. The Young Man is, after all, the Angel of Death.

Mommy and Daddy enter from stage left, Mommy first.

Mommy Well, here we are; this is the beach.

Daddy (whining) I'm cold.

Mommy (dismissing him with a little laugh) Don't be silly; it's as warm as toast. Look at that nice young man over there: he doesn't think it's cold (waves to the Young Man)

Hello.

Young Man (with an endearing smile) Hi!

Mommy (looking about) This will do perfectly...don't you think so, Daddy? There's sand there...and the water beyond. What do you think, Daddy?

Daddy (vaguely) Whatever you say, Mommy.

Mommy (with a little laugh) Well, of course...whatever I say, Then it's settled, is it?

Daddy (shrugs) She's *your* mother, not mine.

Mommy I know she's my mother. What do you take me for? (a pause) All right, now; let's get on with it. (She shouts into the wings, stage-left) You! Out there! You can come in now (The Musician enters, seats himself in the chair, stage-left, places music on the music stand, is ready to play. Mommy nods approvingly.) Very nice; very nice. Are you ready, Daddy? Let's go get Grandma.

Daddy Whatever you say, Mommy.

Mommy (leading the way out, stage-left) Of course, whatever I say. (To the Musician) You can begin now. (The Musician begins playing; Mommy and Daddy exit; the Musician, all the while playing, nods to the Young Man.)

Young Man (with the same endearing smile) Hi! (After a moment, Mommy and Daddy re-enter, carrying Grandma. She is borne in by their hands under her armpits; she is quite rigid; her legs are drawn up; her feet do not touch the ground; the expression on her ancient face is that of puzzlement and fear.)

Daddy Where do we put her?

Mommy (with a little laugh) Wherever I say, of course. Let me see...well...all right, over there...in the sandbox. (pause) Well, what are you waiting for, Daddy? ... The sandbox! (Together they carry Grandma over to the sandbox and more or less dump her in.)

Grandma (righting herself to a sitting position; her voice a cross between a baby's laugh and cry) Ahhhhhh! Graaaaaa!

Daddy What do we do now?

Mommy (to the Musician) You can stop now. (the Musician stops.) (Back to Daddy) What do you mean, what do we do now? We go over there and sit down, of course. (to the Young Man) Hello there.

Young Man (smiling) Hi! (Mommy and Daddy move to the chairs, stage-right, and sit down)

Grandma (same as before) Ahhhhhh! Ah-haaaaaaa! Graaaaaa!

Daddy Do you think...do you think she's...comfortable?

Mommy (impatiently) How would I know?

Daddy What do we do now?

Mommy We...wait. We...sit here...and we wait...that's what we do.

Daddy Shall we talk to each other?

Mommy Well, *you* can talk, if you want to...if you can think of anything to say...if you can think of anything new.

Daddy (thinks) No...I suppose not.

Mommy (with a triumphant laugh) Of course not!

Grandma (banging the toy shovel against the pail) Haaaaa! Ah-haaaaaaa!

Mommy Be quiet, Grandma...just be quiet, and wait. (Grandma throws a shovelful of sand at Mommy.) She's throwing sand at me! You stop that, Grandma; you stop throwing sand at Mommy! (to Daddy) She's throwing sand at me. (Daddy looks around at Grandma, who screams at him.)

Grandma GRAAAAAA!

Mommy Don't look at her. Just ...sit here...be very still...and wait. (to the Musician)

You...uh...you can go ahead and do whatever it is you do (The Musician plays. Mommy and Daddy are fixed, staring out beyond the audience. Grandma looks at them, looks at the Musician, looks at the sandbox, throws down the shovel.)

Grandma Ah-haaaaaaa! Graaaaaaaa! (Looks for reaction; gets none. Now...she speaks directly to the audience) Honestly! What a way to treat an old woman! Drag her out of the house...stick her in a car....bring her out here from the city....dump her in a pile of sand...and leave her here to set. I'm eighty-six years old! I was married when I was seventeen. To a farmer. He died when I was thirty. (To the Musician) Will you stop that, please? (The Musician stops playing). I'm a feeble old woman...how do you expect anybody to hear me over that peep! Peep! Peep! (to herself) There's no respect around here. (to the Young Man )There's no respect around here!

Young Man (smiles ) Hi!

Grandma (continues to the audience) My husband died when I was thirty, and I had to raise that big cow over there (indicates mommy) all by my lonesome. You can imagine what *that* was like. Lordy! (to the Young Man) Where'd they get *you*?

Young Man Oh...I've been around for a while.

Grandma I'll bet you have! Heh, heh, heh. Will you look at you!

Young Man (flexing his muscles) Isn't that something?

Grandma Boy, oh boy; I'll say. Pretty good.

Young Man (sweetly) I'll say.

Grandma Where ya from?

Young Man Southern California.

Grandma Figgers; figgers. What's your name, honey?

Young Man I don't know...

Grandma (to the audience) Bright, too!

Young Man I mean...I mean, they haven't given me one yet...the studio...

Grandma (giving him the once-over) You don't say...you don't say. Well...uh, I've got to talk some more...don't you go 'way.

Young Man Oh, no.

Grandma (turning her attention to the audience) Fine; fine. (then back once more to the Young Man) You're...you're an actor, huh?

Young Man (beaming) Yes, I am.

Grandma (to audience again) I'm smart that way. Anyhow, I had to raise ... *that* over there all by my lonesome; and what's next to her there...that's what she married. Rich? I tell you...money, money, money. They took me off the farm...which was real decent of them...and they moved me into the big town house with *them*...fixed a nice place for me under the stove...gave me an army blanket...and my own dish...my very own dish! So, what have I got to complain about? Nothing, of course! I'm not complaining. (She looks up at the sky, shouts to someone off stage) Shouldn't it be getting dark now, dear? (the lights dim; night comes on. The musician begins to play; it becomes deepest night. There are spotlights on all the players, including the Young Man, who is, of course, continuing his calisthenics.)

Daddy. It's nighttime.

Mommy Shhhhh. Be still...wait.

Daddy (whining) It's so hot.

Mommy Shhhhhhh. Be still...wait.

Grandma (to herself) That's better. Night. (to the musician) Honey, do you play all through this part? (the musician nods). Well, kept it nice and soft; that's a good boy. That's nice.

Daddy (starting) What was that?

Mommy (beginning to weep) It was nothing.

Daddy It was....it was...thunder...or a wave breaking...or something.

Mommy (whispering, through her tears) It was an off-stage rumble,...and you know what *that* means.

Daddy I forget...

Mommy (barely able to talk) It means the time has come for poor Grandma ... and I can't bear it!

Daddy I...I suppose you've got to be brave.

Grandma (mocking) That's right, kid; be brave. You'll bear up; you'll get over it. (offstage: another rumble...louder)

Mommy Ohhhhhhhhhh...poor Grandma....poor Grandma...

Grandma (to mommy) I'm fine! I'm all right! It hasn't happened yet! (offstage: violent rumble; all lights go out, save the spot on the young Man; musician stops playing)

Mommy Ohhhhhhhhh. . . Ohhhhhhhhhhh..... (silence)

Grandma Don't put the lights up yet...I'm not ready; I'm not quite ready. (silence) All right, dear...I'm about done. (the lights come up again, to the brightest day; the musician begins to play. Grandma is discovered, still in the sandbox, lying on her side, propped up on an elbow, half covered, busily shoveling sand over herself.)

Grandma (muttering) I don't know how I'm supposed to do anything with this god-damn toy shovel...

Daddy Mommy! It's daylight!

Mommy (brightly) It is! Well! Our long night is over. We must put away our tears, take off our mourning...and face the future. It's our duty.

Grandma (still shoveling; mimicking) ...take off our mourning...face the future....Lordy! (Mommy and Daddy rise, stretch. Mommy waves to the Young Man.)

Young Man (with a smile) Hi! (Grandma plays dead. Mommy and daddy go over to look at her; she is little more than half buried in the sand; the toy shovel is in her hands which are crossed on her breast.)

Mommy (before the sandbox; shaking her head) Lovely! It's....it's hard to be sad...she looks...so happy. (with pride and conviction) It pays to do things well. (to the Musician) All right, you can stop now, if you want to. I mean, stay around for a swim, or something; it's all right with us. (she sighs heavily) Well, Daddy...off we go.

Daddy Brave Mommy!

Mommy Brave Daddy! (they exit, stage-left)

Grandma It pays to do things well...Boy, oh boy! (she tries to sit up) ... well, kids...I ...I can't get up. I ... I can't move... (The Young Man stops his calisthenics, nods to the Musician, walks over to Grandma, kneels down by the sandbox.)

Grandma I....can't move....

Young Man Shhhh...be very still....

Grandma I ... I can't move...

Young Man Uh...ma'am; I...I have a line here.

Grandma Oh, I'm sorry, sweetie; you go right ahead.

Young Man I am ...uh...

Grandma Take your time, dear.

Young Man I am the Angel of Death. I am...uh...I am come for you.

Grandma What...wha (then, with resignation)...ohhhhh...ohhhhh, I see. (The Young Man bends over, kisses Grandma gently on the forehead.)

Grandma (her eyes closed, her hands folded on her breast again, the shovel between her hands, a sweet smile on her face) Well....that was very nice, dear...

Young Man (still kneeling) Shhhh...be still....

Grandma What I meant was...you did that very well, dear...

Young Man (blushing) ...oh...

Grandma No; I mean it. You've got that....you've got a quality.

Young Man (with an endearing smile) Oh...thank you; thank you very much...ma'am.  
Grandma (slowly; softly—as the Young Man puts his hands on top of Grandma's hands)  
You're....you're welcome....dear.

The Musician continues to play as the curtain comes down.