

P2339



TWO PLAYS BY


EDWARD ALBEE

THE BOLDEST NEW TALENT ON THE AMERICAN STAGE TODAY—

**AUTHOR OF WHO'S AFRAID
OF VIRGINIA WOOLF?**

A red rectangular box with a slightly irregular, hand-drawn appearance, containing the title "THE SAND BOX" in black, bold, sans-serif capital letters.

**THE
SAND
BOX**

A large, stylized purple cross that serves as a background for the title "THE DEATH OF BESSIE SMITH". The cross is slightly tilted and has a textured, blocky appearance.

**THE
DEATH OF
BESSIE
SMITH**

A SIGNET BOOK, COMPLETE AND UNABRIDGED

TWO GREAT ONES BY ALBEE

In THE SANDBOX an old woman prepares to die, while daughter, son-in-law, and the Angel of Death keep watch. "The piece began where so many impudent collages have begun, and then went on to insinuate, at no more than a whisper, a mood that embraced all of the diverse elements and turned them into a single, oddly satisfying sigh."—Walter Kerr, N.Y. Herald Tribune

THE DEATH OF BESSIE SMITH is a powerful drama that bares the ugly and shameful circumstances surrounding the tragic death of a great Negro blues singer. ". . . while the incident, itself, was brawling at me, and while the characters I had elected to carry the tale were wrestling it from me, I discovered I was, in fact, writing about something at the same time slightly removed from and more pertinent to what I had imagined. . . . I know only that the play, printed here, is, whatever its failings or successes may be, most exactly what I had to say on the matter."—Edward Albee

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The Sandbox
The Death
of Bessie Smith
(WITH Fam and Yam)

BY EDWARD ALBEE

A SIGNET BOOK PUBLISHED BY
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The Sandbox (1959)

A BRIEF PLAY, IN MEMORY OF MY
GRANDMOTHER (1876-1959)

Music by William Flanagan

FIRST PERFORMANCE: April 15, 1960. New York City.

The Jazz Gallery.

The Sandbox

The 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.

The 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 sky, 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 calesthenics; he does calesthenics until quite at the very end of the play. These calesthenics, 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

(*Motioning to DADDY*) 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 the same 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*)

MOMMY

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 puzzle-ment and fear)

DADDY

Where do we put her?

MOMMY

(The same 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 sand-box 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! Graaaaa!

DADDY *(Dusting himself)*

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

(Again smiling) Hi!

(MOMMY and DADDY move to the chairs, stage-right, and sit down. A pause)

GRANDMA

(*Same as before*) Ahhhhhh! Ah-haaaaaa! Graaaaaa!

DADDY

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

MOMMY (*Impatiently*)

How would I know?

DADDY

(*Pause*) What do we do now?

MOMMY

(*As if remembering*) We . . . wait. We . . . sit here . . . and we wait . . . that's what we do.

DADDY

(*After a pause*) Shall we talk to each other?

MOMMY

(*With that little laugh; picking something off her dress*) 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*) Haaaaaa! Ah-haaaaaa!

MOMMY

(Out over the audience) Be quiet, Grandma . . . just be quiet, and wait.

(GRANDMA throws a shovelful of sand at MOMMY)

MOMMY

(Still out over the audience) 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 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! Graaaaaaa! *(Looks for reaction; gets none. Now . . . 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

(*Same smile*) Hi!

GRANDMA

(*After a pause, a mild double-take, continues, to the audience*) My husband died when I was thirty (*indicates MOMMY*), and I had to raise that big cow over there 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? (*Continues his calisthenics*)

GRANDMA

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

YOUNG MAN (*Sweetly*)

I'll say.

GRANDMA

Where ya from?

YOUNG MAN

Southern California.

GRANDMA (*Nodding*)

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 back to the audience*) Fine; fine. (*Then, once more, back to the YOUNG MAN*) You're . . . you're an actor, hunh?YOUNG MAN (*Beaming*)

Yes. I am.

GRANDMA

(*To the audience again; shrugs*) 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 spots on all the players, including the YOUNG MAN, who is, of course, continuing his calisthenics*)

DADDY (*Stirring*)

It's nighttime.

MOMMY

Shhhh. Be still . . . wait.

DADDY (*Whining*)

It's so hot.

MOMMY

Shhhhhh. 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, keep it nice and soft; that's a good boy.

(*The MUSICIAN nods again; plays softly*)

That's nice.

(*There is an off-stage rumble*)

DADDY (*Starting*)

What was that?

MOMMY

(*Beginning to weep*) It was nothing.