

The Sandbox

By Peter Wood

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The stage is bare except for a sandbox, at least eight foot square and nine inches high. There is plastic bucket in the sandbox of the kind children play with in sandboxes and beaches. In the distance there is the sound of children playing. Closer, a piano plays in the style of Satie.

The stage is empty for 90 seconds after the lights go down on the audience.

A SMALL CHILD runs from one side of the stage. S/he is carrying what adults see as a stuffed animal and what s/he sees as a totem. S/he stops at the sandbox. Considers it. Turns away. Pauses. Then suddenly turns and jumps as close to the center as s/he can.

S/he plays. Humming a small tune in counterpoint to the piano and feeling free to converse with the stuffed animal.

Three minutes pass. Then, slowly, the OLD MAN enters. He uses a cane and moves achingly. He is dressed in a worn, black suit that is baggy on his thin frame, but he is barefoot. He wears a pork-pie hat. His breath is loud and amplified slightly throughout the theater.

The Old Man walks slowly to the sandbox. The Small Child plays on, noticing but choosing to then ignore the Old Man.

When the Old Man gets to the sandbox, he slowly and carefully sits down next to the box. The little girl plays on.

OLD MAN

This thought, this one thought has been plaguing me lately. I say lately, but it may well be for years. At some point I seem to have reached an equilibrium of pain and aging and body failing and so each day is, has been, much like the last for a very long time now. I no longer keep track of time, letting it keep track of me instead. I'm always slightly cold, so the seasons mean less. I see poorly. I taste very little. But this thought. This thought.

Pause.

OLD MAN

What if I killed her. Oh, not in the murder sense of things, obviously I didn't *murder* her. No. But what if I killed her by bringing her to live where we lived, by buying the food that we bought, the liquor that we drank. Disease is not a judgment on morality. This I understand. This I believe. But could it not be a judgment on choice? Is there a difference between those two? What choice did I have? Did she have?

Pause.

OLD MAN

I miss her.

Pause.

OLD MAN

Such a meaningless phrase.

The Small Child sings "Frere Jacques" The Old Man watches. Listens. Hums along. Coughs.

OLD MAN

You are beautiful.

SMALL CHILD
(holding up stuffed
animal)

This is my friend, Bilby.

OLD MAN

Hello Bilby.

SMALL CHILD

My name is . . .

S/he goes to the Old Man and
whispers in the his ear.

Then goes back to the center of the sandbox, grabs a handful of sand and throws it at the Old Man. The Small Child's laugh is pure, innocent. The Old Man sputters and spits. S/he grabs another handful of sand and throws it again. Again, he sputters and spits out sand. Then the Old Man bangs on the side of the sandbox with his cane. Hard and repeatedly, making a high, whining sound. The Small Child watches, whispering to the stuffed animal. Finally the Old Man stops his pounding. Is still.

The sound of a heartbeat in the distance. And the creak of a rusty swingset.

OLD MAN

It's alright. Funny. Aren't I funny.

SMALL CHILD

Funny.

Silence. For a long while. The two stare at each other. Then look away. Then stare again. The Old Man makes a funny face. The Small Child giggles.

SMALL CHILD

Funny!

OLD MAN

Can I see Bilby?

SMALL CHILD

No. Bilby is shy.

OLD MAN

Please?

SMALL CHILD

No.

OLD MAN

Can you at least ask Bilby?

No . . . Ok.

SMALL CHILD

S/he whispers with the stuffed animal.

SMALL CHILD

Bilby says yes, you can see him. BUT . . . you cannot touch him. Ok?

OLD MAN

See but not touch.

SMALL CHILD

Ok?

OLD MAN

Ok.

The Small Child holds Bilby up in front of him/her and comes close to the Old Man. Suddenly, the Old Man grabs Bilby. The Small Child screams as the Old Man gently kisses the top of the stuffed animal and then holds it out, giving it back to the Small Child, but s/he is backing away.

SMALL CHILD

You touched him. You touched him. You touched him. Now he's not mine any more.

The Small Child cries and starts digging in the sandbox with the plastic bucket. Digging far deeper than should be possible. Quickly, the Small Child disappears.

OLD MAN

No. I. Wait. I'm sorry. I didn't know. Didn't realize. He's still yours. Really I . . . don't go. Please don't go.

The Small Child is gone.

The Old Man weeps.

After a long while, he slowly, painfully stands, still holding Bilby and steps into the sandbox where he goes to the upstage right corner of the box and slowly, painfully sits once more.

OLD MAN

I'm sorry Bilby, I didn't mean to take you from her.

He begins to idly play with the stuffed animal and over the course of several minutes transforms into himself as a small child. He sings "Frere Jacques" then looks up.

OLD MAN

Nuh. It's not mine. I just found it. Here.

He tosses the stuffed animal a couple of feet in the direction of an unseen person.

OLD MAN

You can have it. I'm too old for stuffed animals. I turn 6 next month.

He takes off his hat and begins to dig in the sand with it.

OLD MAN

I haven't seen you here before. My name is Peter. My dad's a teacher and my mom works at a bank. I have a stupid younger brother who is only three and he's ok, I guess but I liked it better without him. Do you wanna be friends?

Pause.

He smiles.

OLD MAN

Hi Natalie.

He plays in the sandbox with the ghost of Natalie. The lights slowly fade. The sound of a heartbeat slowing, slowing. Then stop.

The End.