

This Winter's
August

play
by Eckenroth Authors

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Translated by Peter C. Woods

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The job of the artist is always to deepen the mystery

Francis Bacon
1561 – 1626

Cast of Characters

Zelda, 22, student

Robert, 46, her father

Agnes, 44, her mother

The Twins, 12, her siblings

Gunter, 72, her grandfather

Elfriede, 74, her grandmother

Gunter as a child, 8, Gunter's alter ego

The Pie Lady, 53

5 Female Patients/Extras

Color blind cast required

Time: today

Place: Gunter's and Elfriede's apartment

The development of Gunter's illness is not told chronologically

Set:

In the center a sofa, a coffee table, two armchairs, two chairs; right and toward the back a kitchen unit with sink, to the right the coatrack and front door.

Option for scenes 7 and 12: Five hospital beds float in the air; a pie assembly line

Note: The private thoughts are italicized asides, every character is occupied with his/her stream of consciousness and all find their own style of expressing this "audible silence."

The lines attributed to the Twins should be divided between the two.

The writers ask to refrain from projected images and microports.

Prelude

Bedroom, Elfriede wakes up, Gunter is getting dressed

Elfriede: (looks for the alarm clock) 3:48 am. (turns over, turns on the light. Gunter is up and almost fully dressed, puts his hat on while humming.) Gunter, what's going on? Why are you up in the middle of the night?

Gunter: (hums busily)

Elfriede: Are you sleepwalking? You've never been a sleepwalker. (sits up slowly) Gunter!

Gunter: (annoyed) What? (ties his tie fastidiously)

Elfriede: Why are you dressed, where are you going? It's the middle of the night!

Gunter: Look out, look here, (puts on his jacket) that's what you think.

Elfriede: What do you mean, that's what I think? Look at the clock. Gunter, look at the clock, it's not even 4, Gunter, come to bed.

Gunter: (about to leave)

Elfriede: Gunter!

Gunter: What? (gets his shoes)

Elfriede: Where are you going?

Gunter: Ha, where! Elfriede, what kind of a question is that. To the mine, of course! I'm running late as it is!

Elfriede: (breathing in fits and starts) It's been 35 years since you worked in the mine. That was one of your first jobs. What is this? Are you confused, did you sleep poorly? – – Gunter, did you have a bad dream? – – you haven't worked in the mine for 35 years! Lie back down!

Gunter: No, Elfriede, I really have to get going. I'm already much too late. Please just leave me alone. (out)

Elfriede: What's he going to do now? Get into his car and drive away? What kind of nonsense is this? (gets out of bed) Is this part of getting old? This confusion? Gunter, please lie back down. Who is this person who's leaving right now, what is he thinking? You're confused because of a bad dream. You don't work in the mine anymore. This is nonsense. Are you going to drive to Duisburg? (nearly crying) Gunter, please, what are you doing? I want to go to sleep, and you should, too. We're going to Bochum tomorrow. We can't do that if we're tired. The mine isn't even there anymore. Gunter! You're nearly 80.

Gunter: (comes at Elfriede waving around a hammer) Elfriede, leave me alone! You have no idea what you're talking about.

Elfriede: Gunter, what are you doing?

Gunter: I'm gonna fix the bird house. It's about time I did. If I don't put it out soon, the birds won't come this year – not at all.

Elfriede: (feebly) Gunter, wouldn't it be better to do that tomorrow? – – It's the middle of the night.

Gunter: Look out, look here.

BLACKOUT

Prologue

A dark stage, spotlight on Zelda

Zelda:

What does it mean not to be able to say goodbye? Is it a lost goodbye? I stand here looking at my grandfather suffering from dementia – at my *grandpa* – who's forgotten me? He doesn't remember who I am anymore. The last time I was here, he still remembered. He smiled then –

(The light gradually begins to illuminate Gunter, on the sofa)

– smiled at me. Maybe the memory was even there. Of all the great times we had together. But maybe not. Still, he remembered me, and that's what counts. Dementia creeps up slowly. It'll get worse before long. – How can I tell what the right time in this process is to say goodbye? How can I know? Today he forgot his entire childhood, and tomorrow he'll invent a new one? And in the middle of it all there are shreds – single, clear, little shreds – and even they will soon disappear in the void of complete absence of memory? My existence will disappear there, too, and then I won't even be a shred of memory – just an unfamiliar face, smiling sadly? How am I supposed to know? When did it happen? When did the last clear moment disappear? Should I have recognized it? Should I have been there for it? Was I there – – ?

(The light on Gunter extinguishes)

Isn't – wasn't it – isn't it me who's leaving? Me, leaving his mind. And nobody to blame. Without telling him goodbye? Without him being able to tell me goodbye? When was the last time I was here?

It's been forever – at that point he could still say a few words; now he doesn't even talk anymore, now he doesn't recognize me anymore, and I ask myself what happened in the meantime and why I wasn't there. I'm not there for him –

(Snow drifts down softly)

I don't know how the things disappear from his memory. It doesn't matter whether it happened slowly or all at once; I wasn't there for him. There was always something more important in my own life. How can I make up for that wrong?

(Fade in on loved ones – dressed in winter coats, turned-up collars, hats, boots – slowly gathering in the background behind Zelda)

I should have been there. It's a wrong that weighs on me and that I can probably never make up for; but could I have avoided it? He stares with empty eyes, and I don't know what's in his head. It's not me. And maybe not anyone else who existed in his world just a couple of weeks ago, either. (puts a hand to her throat) – – – there's a hole in the ground in front of me, I'm faltering, but I can't fall in; instead I stand here and endure the nausea and the pressure, ball my fists and swallow. I just wasn't here more. It's over – gone! – and what could be worse than to stand there and have lost someone? Lost. Without having said all of the important things beforehand, or just having been together. How much time did we get together? It should have been much more, so much more that I could remember twice. Something is unraveling without me having known about it before? Is it a wrong that reasserts itself with renewed strength every time?

(a growing feeling of unrest arises in the company)

Is this guilt...is it guilt that I always feel, guilt that everyone feels when something like this happens, regardless of whether it's dementia or death? Missed opportunity – Can anyone avoid such guilt? That's the real issue here. No one can do a thing about this disease, but the guilt is still there. I still feel guilty. There was – is – was – never enough time. Was there no chance to say goodbye?

Endings don't happen neatly – there's just a sudden end – and that hits home – full force.

Gunter: (in Bermuda shorts, Hawaiian shirt, sunglasses, and flip-flops pushes through the gathering)

(completely serious) Come on, kids!?! – – Let's go off the deep end!

All: Gunter!

Gunter: (cheerfully) Look out, look here –

BLACKOUT