

All Summer in a Day by Ray Bradbury

Adapted for Reader's Theatre by Friends of the Venice Library

Teacher: "Ready?"

Child A: "Ready."

Child B: "Now?"

Teacher: "Soon."

Child C: "Do the scientists really know? Will it happen today, will it?"

Girl D: "Look, look; see for yourself!"

Narrator 1: The children pressed to each other like so many roses, so many weeds, intermixed, peering out for a look at the hidden sun.

Narrator 2: It rained - for seven years; thousands upon thousands of days filled from one end to the other with rain, and the concussion of storms so heavy like tidal waves. A thousand forests crushed under the rain and grown up a thousand times to be crushed again. And this was the way life was forever on the planet Venus, and this was the schoolroom of the children of the rocket men and women who had come to a raining world to set up civilization and live out their lives.

Child B: "It's stopping, it's stopping!"

Child A & C: "Yes, yes!"

Narrator 1: Margot stood apart from them, these children who could never remember a time when there wasn't rain and rain and rain. They were all nine years old, and if there had been a day, seven years ago, when the sun came out for an hour and showed its face to the stunned world, they could not recall.

Margot: (To audience) Sometimes, at night, I hear them stir, dreaming they remembered a yellow crayon or a coin large enough to buy the world. They think they remember a warmth, like a blushing in the face, the arms and legs and trembling hands. But then they always wake to the tattering drum, the endless shaking down of clear bead necklaces upon the roof, the gardens, the forests, and their dreams were gone.

Narrator 2: All day yesterday they had read in class about the sun. About how like a lemon it was, and how hot. And they had written small stories or essays or poems about it.

Margot: (Reading in a quiet voice) "I think the sun is a flower
That blooms for just one hour."

William: "Aw, you didn't write that!"

Margot: "I did, I did!"

Teacher: "William!"

Narrator 1: But that was yesterday. Now the rain was slackening, and the children were crushed in the great thick windows.

Child A: "Where's teacher?"

Child B: "She'll be back."

Child C: "She'd better hurry; we'll miss it!"

Narrator 1: They turned on themselves like a feverish wheel, all tumbling spokes. Margot stood alone. She was a very frail girl who looked as if she had been lost in the rain for years and the rain had washed out the blue from her eyes and the red from her mouth and the yellow from her hair.

Narrator 2: She was an old photograph dusted from an album, whitened away, and if she spoke at all her voice would be a ghost. Now she stood, separate, staring at the rain and the loud wet world beyond the huge glass.

William: "What're you looking at?"

(Margot said nothing.)

William: "Speak when you're spoken to." (He gives her a shove.)

Narrator 1: But she did not move; rather she let herself be moved only by him and nothing else. They edged away from her and would not look at her. She felt them go away.

Child A: (To audience) She won't play with us, even in the fun echoing tunnels underground.

Child B: When we tag her and run, she just stands there blinking.

Child C: When the whole class sings songs about happiness and life, she just pretends to move her lips. It's only when we sing about the sun and summer that she even tries.

Girl D: But she still stands there staring at the rain drenching the windows.

Narrator 2: Of course, the biggest crime of all was that she had come here only five years ago from Earth, and she remembered the sun and the way the sky was when she was four in Ohio. THEY had been on Venus all their lives, and only two years old when the sun last came out. They had long since forgotten the color and heat of it. But Margot remembered.

Margot: (With her eyes closed) "It's like a penny."

Child C: "No, it's not!"

Margot: "It's like a fire, in the stove."

Child A: "You're lying; you don't remember!"

Girl D: "You're just a weirdo, scared of water. Remember last month how she refused to get her head wet in the shower room, screaming and crying?"

Narrator 1: (To audience) After that, dimly, dimly, she had sensed it, she was different, and they knew her difference and kept away. There was talk that her parents were taking her back to Earth next year; it seemed vital even though it would mean the loss of thousands of dollars.

Narrator 2: And so, the children hated her for all these reasons of big and little consequence. They hated her pale snow face, her waiting silence, her thinness, and her possible future.

William: "Get away!" (Giving her another push) "What're you waiting for?"

Narrator 1: For the first time, she looked at him. And what she was waiting for was in her eyes.

William: (Savagely) "Well, don't wait around here! You won't see nothing!"

Narrator 2: Her lips moved but nothing came out.

William: "Nothing! . . . It was all a joke, wasn't it?" (Turning to the other children) "Nothing's happening today. Is it?"

Children: (Blinking and then understanding began laughing and shaking their heads) "Nothing, nothing!"

Margot: (Whispering and with helpless eyes) "Oh, but . . . But this is the day, the scientists predict, they say, they know, the sun . . ."

William: "All a joke!" (Seizing Margot roughly). "Hey everyone, let's put her in a closet before teacher comes!"

Margot: "No, no." (Falling back)

Narrator 1: They surged about her, caught her up protesting, pleading, crying back into a tunnel, a room, a closet. They slammed and locked the door and saw it tremble from her beating and throwing herself against it. They heard her muffled cries. Then, smiling, they turned and went and back down the tunnel, just as the teacher arrived.

Teacher: "Ready, children?" (She glanced at her watch.)

Children in unison: "Yes!"

Teacher: "Are we all here?"

Children in unison: "Yes!"

Narrator 2: The rain stopped. It was as if, in the midst of a film of an avalanche, something had first gone wrong with the sound apparatus, cutting off all noise, all of the blasts and repercussions. And then, someone replaced that film with a peaceful tropical slide which did not move or tremor.

Narrator 1: The silence was so immense and unbelievable that you felt your ears had been stuffed or you had lost your hearing altogether. The children put their hands to their ears and stood apart. The door slid back and the smell of the silent, waiting world came in to them.

William: (To the Audience) The sun came out.

Girl D: (To Audience) It was the color of flaming bronze and very large.

Child A: (To Audience) And the sky around it was a blazing blue tile color.

Child B: (To Audience) And the jungle burned with sunlight. And we rushed out, yelling, into the springtime.

Teacher: (Calling after them) "Now, don't go too far. You've only two hours, you know. You wouldn't want to get caught out!"

Child C: (To Audience) But we were running and turning our faces up to the sky and feeling the sun on our cheeks like a warm iron and almost burning our arms.

Child A: "Oh, it's better than the sun lamps, isn't it?"

Child B & C: "Much, much better!"

Narrator 2: They stopped running and stood in the great jungle that covered Venus, that grew and never stopped growing, tumultuously, even as you watched it. A nest of octopuses, clustering up great arms of fleshlike weed, wavering, flowering in this brief spring. It was the color of rubber and ash, from the many years without sun. The color of stones and white cheeses and ink, and the moon.

Narrator 1: The children ran and played hide-and-go-seek and tag, laughing, on the jungle mattress and heard it sigh and squeak under them, resilient and alive. But most of all they squinted at the sun until tears ran down their faces and put their hands up to that yellowness and that amazing blueness. They savored everything in that blessed sea of fresh air with no sound and no motion. Then, wildly ran in shouting circles for an hour and did not stop. Until . . . suddenly one of the girls wailed. Everyone stopped.

Girl D: (Holding out her hand and trembling) "Oh, look, look."

Narrator 2: In the center of her opened palm, cupped and huge, was a single raindrop and she began to cry. The children glanced quietly at the sky as a few cold drops fell on their noses and their cheeks and their mouths. The sun faded behind a stir of mist. A wind blew cool around them. They turned and walked back toward the underground house, their hands at their side, their smiles vanishing away.

Narrator 1: A boom of thunder startled them, and like leaves they tumbled up on each other and ran. Lightning struck ten miles away, five miles away, a mile, a half-mile. The sky darkened into midnight in a flash. They closed the door and heard the gigantic sound of the rain falling in avalanches, everywhere and forever.

Child A: "Will it be seven more years?"

Child C: "Yes. Seven."

Narrator 2: Then one of them gave a little cry.

Child B: "Margot! She's still in the closet where we locked her."

Narrator 1: They stood as if someone had driven them, like so many stakes into the floor. They looked at each other and then looked away. They looked at their hands and feet, their solemn, pale faces down.

Children: (In unison) "Margot."

Girl D: "Well . . . ?"

Narrator 2: No one moved.

Girl D: (whispering) "Go on."

Narrator 1: They walked slowly down the hall in the sound of cold rain, through the doorway to the room, lightning on their faces, blue and terrible. They walked over to the closet door slowly and stood by it.

Narrator 2: Behind the closet door was only silence. . . . They unlocked the door, even more slowly, and let Margot out.

The End

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