

The Fearful Expectation of Unanticipated Beauty

A short play by Jake Lewis

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Characters

Gunnar (M) - 40s+, an artist

Runa (F) - 40s+, an artist

Sigrun (F) - 20s-30s, an aspiring artist

Setting

A coffee shop at the foot of a volcano in Iceland

Present day

“May your trails be crooked, winding, lonesome, dangerous, leading to the most amazing view. “ – Edward Abbey

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Lights rise on: a coffee shop at the foot of a volcano. The volcano is steaming.

There is a large picture window upstage looking out on the volcano. Several tables are placed in front of it. At the one most center, GUNNAR sits with RUNA. They both hold a steaming coffee.

GUNNAR: Good coffee?

RUNA: Mmmm. Yes. Quite hot.

GUNNAR: Not as hot as that out there! *(Indicates the volcano.)*

RUNA: No, a few degrees cooler, I'd say!

They both chuckle and sip their coffees.

GUNNAR: Runa?

RUNA: Yes, Gunnar?

GUNNAR: You know what this view reminds me of?

RUNA: No, do tell me!

GUNNAR: Your painting!

RUNA: But I have done many paintings. You must be more specific!

GUNNAR: Ah, yes, of course! Silly me. The painting of the volcano!

RUNA: I had a feeling you meant that one. But you are forgetting one important detail!

GUNNAR: Am I? What is it?

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RUNA: In my painting, the volcano is erupting!

GUNNAR: I did not forget that important aspect, but implied that this view was reminiscent of your painting in some ways!

SIGRUN enters, in a bit of a hurry. She sees RUNA and GUNNAR and quickly approaches them.

RUNA: Why, hello, Sigrun! Are you ok? You seem harried.

SIGRUN: I am ok, yes, for the moment. However, if I stay too long, I will not be ok! Nor will either of you!

GUNNAR: Whatever do you mean, Sigrun?

SIGRUN: Just look for yourself! *(Points out the window.)*

RUNA: The volcano?

SIGRUN: Yes, the volcano!

RUNA: What of it?

SIGRUN: It is going to erupt any moment now!

GUNNAR: Like your painting!

RUNA: Then it will look a lot more like it!

SIGRUN: Why are you sitting here as though you are not worried?

RUNA: Should I be worried? *(Looks around.)* No one else is.

GUNNAR: Tell us, Sigrun, why we should be worried.

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SIGRUN: Are you daft? If the volcano erupts—*when* it erupts— this coffee shop will be reduced to rubble!

There is a loud noise as that of an earthquake; the dishes rattle and the three people grip onto something.

RUNA: Oh, my! That was an earthquake!

GUNNAR: How thrilling!

RUNA and GUNNAR continue to pleasantly sip their coffees.

SIGRUN: Did you not hear me? Was that tremor not enough? If you continue to drink your cappuccinos, you'll fall victim to the liquid, hot magma, right along with this cafe!

GUNNAR: These are not cappuccinos, Sigrun. They are macchiatos.

RUNA: What a terrible thing if this lovely bistro were destroyed.

GUNNAR: As an artist, I do think there's something quite compelling about dying in a place where their product is all about energy and vitality.

RUNA: It would make a nice painting, wouldn't it? A hand reaching up out of the oozing, red lava, holding a steaming mug of java.

GUNNAR: I do believe it would be your crowning achievement!

RUNA: Hm! Maybe I'll continue to ponder it later. Ideas need time to percolate, but coffee, once percolated, cannot wait!

GUNNAR: Well said!

RUNA and GUNNAR continue to pleasantly sip their coffees.

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SIGRUN: You two are like...sliding glass doors who get struck on their tracks!
You will not budge of your own accord!

SIGRUN, flustered and frustrated, runs off stage for a moment.

GUNNAR: What has gotten into Sigrun, do you think?

RUNA: Oh, dear Gunnar, you know as well as I do the temperament of an artist!

GUNNAR: I do, yet there seems to be something greater behind her behavior.

RUNA: Not enough coffee, perhaps!

GUNNAR: Mm, that must be it!

RUNA and GUNNAR continue to pleasantly sip their coffees.

SIGRUN re-enters with a paintbrush a bag of grounds from the coffee. RUNA and GUNNAR look on quizzically. SIGRUN gets up on the table with the brush and grounds, sticks the brush into the bag, then pulls it out. She begins painting on the window. She is drawing lava streams.

GUNNAR: I believe this is what is called immersive art!

RUNA: Sigrun, have you checked with Einar if it is ok to paint on his windows? I am a devout believer in public art and civil disobedience, but this seems impulsive.

SIGRUN: Maybe you will only understand the danger you are in – we are in – through my painting!

GUNNAR: Ah! The volcano is crying! That is very interesting!

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RUNA: No, Gunnar, those are not tears! They are lines of connection, signifying man's complex relationship with nature!

SIGRUN: It's lava!

GUNNAR: Why would lava be represented by the color brown?

SIGRUN: Because they didn't have any red paint lying around!

RUNA: But there is plenty in the workshop! I say, Sigrun, for a public art installation, you have not seemed to give this much forethought.

GUNNAR: Perhaps she is attempting to create a more spontaneous piece.

SIGRUN: I didn't think I'd need to draw a picture to tell you that you will die if you don't move your asses out of here soon!

Almost as an echo of SIGRUN's anger, another earthquake occurs, this one bigger. Lava begins to flow from the volcano behind the window.

GUNNAR: Now there, you see? Lava is reddish-orange.

RUNA: It's quite beautiful in its movement, isn't it?

GUNNAR: I feel...quite...mesmerized by its unpredictable flow.

RUNA: And its speed!

GUNNAR: How quickly it destroys everything in its path!

RUNA: Well! *(She stands, places down coffee, and gathers her coat and bag.)* I have finished my drink – a bit more rushed than I had preferred – and feel it is time to return to the real world.

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SIGRUN: Yes! Go! Now!

GUNNAR: *(Also standing and preparing to leave.)* Me as well. Thank you for meeting with me today, Runa. As always, a pleasure.

RUNA: I am delighted to share such moments with you, dear friend!

SIGRUN: For the love of all that's holy, exchange the pleasantries later!

RUNA: The young do not value moments like these anymore. Face-to-face communication and the exchanging of gratitude. Everything in their lives is about the next *moment* or the next *thing*. They fail to see there's beauty to be observed in the silent space. In the fearful expectation of unanticipated beauty!

GUNNAR: Hear, hear! An artist of canvas and wordsmithery!

They link arms and exit.

Another earthquake is heard/felt, the lights in the cafe flickering, tables shaking, etc.

SIGRUN hops down from the table, and finally breathes a sigh of relief. She begins to exit, but stops before she is fully offstage to turn around

In the flickering lights, mixed with the eruption behind the window and the music created from the bass of the earthquake and soprano and alto tones of the rattling furniture, as well as voices shouting, the scene on stage becomes a captivating work of multimedia art.

Amidst the chaos, SIGRUN exits.

Stage goes black.

The End