

Play Acting

“What did you say you used to do?”

“Act.”

“That’s one for the books. Never had an actor before.”

The wheelchair crunched through the gravel as the two men crept down the garden in hope of a few minutes sunlight from behind the clouds, before the evening set in.

“Tele?” The porter coughed, dried his nose with the back of a blue veined hand, wrinkled into rivers of pulsing anxiety. “Anything I might have seen you in?”

The wheel hit a rock. The porter struggled for a moment, before swiveling the chair around the obstacle. For a second the actor felt guilty, another unwanted piece of baggage. “The stage,” he said, as they caught their breath.

“Never saw that.”

The porter could do with a smoke. Nearly there. He’d push the old actor out into the light, then hide behind a tree trunk and have a quick fag.

“Beckett mainly.” The old actor spat. It would be dark soon if they didn’t hurry up: and it was damned frustrating to have to wait on somebody else’s body weight to get you there.

“Ah Godot and all that.”

“Spend my life waiting for him.”

“Does he come in the end?”

“Everybody does. One way or another.”

“Well now I wouldn’t say that. There used be a priest here. Never once took off that dog collar of his. We had a bet he slept in it. Being a priest is hell.”

They shared a silent chuckle, surprised by the brief bond their wheezes were weaving. A bird tripped, chirped its way to freedom. There was a faint rustle of plates being cleaned after lunch, the whiff of roast beef stuck to a pan.

“What happened the priest?”

“What happens us all.”

They nodded and huddled: one pushed, the other pulled, until they both lost their sense of direction.

“Had a woman here once. Just popping out for a minute she said. And that’s what she did. Popped out. Popped off. Like that Scot in the Antarctic.”

“Oates actually.” The actor had been in a play about that particular disaster. He remembered the fake snow flakes sticking to a heavy tweed coat.

“Wild was he?”

The Porter coughed. The actor grunted.

“They all died in the end though, didn’t they?”

“They did. Not much else to do in the Antarctic,” said the actor.

“Not much else to do here either.”

They pondered. Thoughts of a cig, a quick shot of brandy: if they could only get away from each other long enough to fulfill their secret pleasures.

“Are you all right now?”

The actor had forgotten his lines. The breeze tingled with the hint of rain, the rustle of leaves beginning to fade before falling.

“I’ll put on the brake. You’ll be fine,” said the Porter before shuffling off behind a shrub in search of a puff. “Back in a second.”

The actor shook his wheelchair. It wouldn’t move. His hand rustled, fuddled in the innards’ of his coat and wrapped itself around the husk of a brandy bottle.

Make it a long second prayed the actor, through bitterly chapped lips. There was nobody to disagree. Beckett would have approved.