



COPYRIGHT AND USE OF THIS ESSAY

This essay must be used in accordance with the provisions of the Copyright Act 1968.

Reproduction of material protected by copyright may be an infringement of copyright and copyright owners may be entitled to take legal action against persons who infringe their copyright.

Section 51 (2) of the Copyright Act permits an authorized officer of a university library or archives to provide a copy (by communication or otherwise) of an unpublished essay kept in the library or archives, to a person who satisfies the authorized officer that he or she requires the reproduction for the purposes of research or study.

The Copyright Act grants the creator of a work a number of moral rights, specifically the right of attribution, the right against false attribution and the right of integrity.

You may infringe the author's moral rights if you:

- fail to acknowledge the author of this essay if you quote sections from the work
- attribute this essay to another author
- subject this essay to derogatory treatment which may prejudice the author's reputation

For further information contact the University's Copyright Service.

sydney.edu.au/copyright

Eda Gunaydin

WAITING FOR WAITING FOR GODOT

Or, Talking in Circles Won't Put You in the Loop, But if You've Never Been in (then Spin)

He's old now. He never used to be before.

It's his knee. When he was younger it would give way when he climbed stairs or bent over Benjy's bed to kiss him on the forehead each night. Now it's a constant ache even and especially when he does nothing, and lately all his ailments translate directly into memories, like everything between his brain and his bones is firing backwards.

He doesn't see too good out his left eye either, the relic of an oversight and a reminder of what half a breath feels like when it's followed by no breath at all. He means only to think he got hit by a mate, but now he thinks it as words lined up neatly in rows, caged into poetry like, what? Dancing bears. The cast of the Scottish Play. Think in circles and lose your wheels.

Doctors say he should use a cane for walking, but that feels crap and cheap, like the drop-outs manning the stalls at the carnival who draw your picture with one feature over-the-top. Then you go home and try to dress like a drawing of yourself for the rest of your life, although you already know what you look like.

*

One night he put Benjy to bed and Benjy asked not to be kissed on the forehead like that anymore, and he asked *why, do you think six is too old?*

And Benjy said, *one of my friends told me when you kiss someone on the top of the head it means you're going away for a long time.*

He told him *no, I'll be here as long as you need me.*

That bit him in the behind, to think about it.

*

There's a group in the city for old people who want to be old with one another while doing new things. His wife goes for yoga. She says it's important to learn the correct technique for meditation. It doesn't seem that hard, or mind-opening, to do nothing without noticing. Upstairs from the room where they do yoga is a room for theatre, so he goes there, because when you look at stairs in pain and choose not to climb them—even if you needn't—you can't trust your reasons anymore. It takes him a while to climb up because of his limp, so he walks in late and when he says *sorry to keep you waiting* they clap like geriatrics with nothing better to do and say in the name of irony he'll play the lead in their production. Being called Godot reminds him of the days at the carnival when the kids would call him Gordo or Gazza and every time a wheel broke down or started to squeak they'd grease it rather than replacing the damn thing.

*

His wife has an online business selling figurines she whittles from chocolate blocks. He can't fit anything in the fridge anymore because of it. The other day she enthused about how the clay she uses to make her chocolate moulds for cheap are poisonous, but none of her customers have died yet so they *must* treasure them so much they can't bring themselves to eat them!

When he told her he'd eaten a couple and didn't feel anything, she'd looked wretched.

*

He worries that one day he'll sniff at the air and comment on the sweetness or the nostalgia of the scent and ask what's that's that smell, it's mouthwatering, and his wife'll turn around and tell him she spilt the methylated spirits she was using to clean her blades earlier, and he'll be outed, foremost as a fool—the egg on your face is messier than the scars on your liver.

A year ago the smell'd make him grab a beer from the fridge and be done with it, but he

can't—it's the toxic chocolate. That's probably doing it.

Every year he feels like he's getting rougher and coarser, like he's made out of those marijuana bags the drop-outs at the carnival would carry while they bought shells with googly eyes glued on, as if that made them hand-made. Sometimes all he can think is he's only fit to hold potatoes, like a sack, but only the smallest potatoes.

It's a shallow metaphor.

*

Geriatrics with nothing better to do don't like to share, and like him none of them have read the play, but unlike him they talk about it enough to make the action a conceptual throwaway, like the plot of a novel.

It reminds him of the first time he broke his knee, when he used to be in the business of leaping before he looked.

I run onto the roof because my wife dared me to jump off onto the trampoline and she said I bet you can't do it, though of course I could, but after we got home from the hospital and our parents almost drove us to elope they were such an earful I found out she meant can't do it with your dignity intact, and on that count she was right. So I married her, because a girl who doesn't wince when your leg is back-to-front is a keeper of—of something.

You laugh, but try having a leg like Snoopy, hey? Cheers, yeah, another snag. While I'm here.

The memory makes him so convincingly nauseated he puts on a green face for long enough to have her buy the book for him online.

“That was worth three Terrachoca Warriors,” she says, delighted, when his grimace deepens.

*

He walks up the stairs three times the next month to sit in a room listening to geriatrics with nothing better to do do nothing better but complain about their husbands, their wives, how after Penny retired all she wanted to do was talk about fishing and now Canin is so idle

Vietnam is a topic of discussion again, though one is dead in the water and the other the ground.

The first time he walked in on it he said, “What are you all doing?”

And they said, “We’re acting.”

And he said, with great dignity, “If you say you are you’re probably not.”

The third time he thinks to join in, because *when in Rome*, and *Jeepers creepers, how did I learn that phrase?* The fourth week he doesn’t go because he’s at the library instead, which houses every book on gardening and Vietnam there is, like a jar of bile sat on your nightstand.

He climbs up the wheelchair access ramp to avoid the kids on the stairs. When he explains his predicament to the girl at *Queries* she smiles, which has always made him suspicious.

“So you’re still waiting for *Waiting for Godot*?” she queries, though he’s on the question mark side of the desk. “There aren’t any copies in this branch, though I can put in a reservation for you.”

“Sure,” he says.

He fills in a form that asks for his name, date of birth, phone number, and lies about the second so they won’t try to upend their pensioner discount over him, subsidise his card, and the first and third because she doesn’t have a method of asking politely that’ll stop him.

“There you go, Earnest. I’ll give you a call when we get it in,” she says, smiling again. “What are you gonna do? Art imitates life, I guess.”

He pockets his library card and scrunches his face.

“Why would it?” he queries.

*

On the sixth week he arrives—late, because he’s sort of Method—to find his geriatrics sat in a circle, all of them wearing boots and Sam with a rope tied around his waist.

Renny skitters effusively back and forth and Corbin prods at what looks like an abscess on his arm with a bleached chicken bone.

“Everything oozes!” he says, then laughs until he pierces his skin and so whimpers after that.

“Are we running lines?” he queries and Renny eyes him like a madman.

“No, why would we?” she says. “That play is dry as table salt.”

“This is absurd,” he says, and sits and watches.

*

At home his wife is holding two envelopes in her hand.

“Did my book come?” he says.

“Yes,” she says. “But it’s in German, I think.”

“Of course it is,” he says. “What’s the other?”

“We’re being liquefied,” she says.

“Are you drunk?” he says.

“Liquidated,” she says.

“I don’t think so.”

“Litigated,” she says, and bursts into tears.

“Figures it’d be the dullest of them all,” he says.

*

On the seventh week they invite their living partners to the theatre room for their live performance, and when Canin arrives in his wheelchair he finds out there’s been an elevator around the corner the whole time.

There are four chairs in the centre of the room and they’re all occupied.

“Am I even in this play?” he says. “Have any of you even read it?”

“Of course you are,” they say. “Why would you be in the title if you weren’t the star?”

“Just saying it doesn’t make it true,” he says.

“Sit in the front row till it’s your go,” says Renny, so he takes a seat next to his wife while she tries to think away her demons, as if every time you shoot a gun what you were thinking during matters more than the bloody hole left for pulling the trigger.

They both do nothing while the players take turns stumbling through passages and affecting the world-weariness that can only come from weariness with the world.