

Waiting to Film *Waiting for Godot*

by Mathew Green

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Characters:

JUNIUS BLANCHARD, 50-60s, former mid-range star

RONNIE PLATT, 60s, long-time character actor

LES, 20s-30s, a Production Assistant

ELLIE SANGER, 20s, student actor

QUINCE MORN, 20s-30s, hyperbolic film director

Lights up on JUNIUS and RONNIE, two actors. They are on stage in a theater, but also on a road in a desert. There is a lone, scrubby tree behind them. They are center stage, dressed in raggedy suits and hats. They face out.

JUNIUS

I have enormous respect for directors.

RONNIE

I know that to be true.

JUNIUS

So if you see one around here, give a holler.

RONNIE

Will do.

JUNIUS

This is a terrible idea.

RONNIE

Probably.

JUNIUS

For a movie, I mean. It's a terrible idea for a movie.

RONNIE

Sure.

JUNIUS

Not our being here. (Pause.) Although.

RONNIE

Sure.

JUNIUS

I once worked with Martin Scorsese. (Sighs.) Just for a couple of days. Just for one scene. But. I mean, you know?

RONNIE

Sure. I was there, too.

JUNIUS

You were?

RONNIE

Crowd scene.

JUNIUS

Sure. (Looking up) Are those vultures up there?

RONNIE

(Looking up) Might be.

LES enters, wearing a headset. He speaks as he crosses behind the actors.

LES

How we doing, gentlemen? Need anything? Anything at all?

JUNIUS

(Still looking up) Doing fine. Ready when you are.

LES

Excellent. Excellent. We'll be ready for you any minute now, just hold tight and hang loose, we'll be ready for you.

LES exits, having barely slowed his pace.

RONNIE

(Still looking up) Might be magpies.

JUNIUS and RONNIE tip their hats to the birds, just in case.

JUNIUS

What did you think of Scorsese?

RONNIE

Didn't really get to know him.

JUNIUS

Still. You were there, what, a week?

RONNIE

Eight days. Crowd scene took a while.

JUNIUS

Horses?

RONNIE

(Nods) Marty and I didn't really get a chance to comingle. You were in a proper scene, got to talk to him. (JUNIUS shrugs) What did you think?

JUNIUS

I liked him more than I liked the movie.

RONNIE

Same.

JUNIUS

Goddamn terrible idea, this.

RONNIE

I'm sure you're right.

JUNIUS

An iceberg of Greenlandic proportions. Career-ender.

*A beat. They both laugh heartily.
RONNIE might beat his hat on his
leg. After a moment, they dry up.*

RONNIE

Hackman said the same thing about "Hoosiers."

JUNIUS

Nobody knows a goddamn thing.

RONNIE

It's all about the day and the work.

JUNIUS

It's all about the work on the day.

RONNIE

What did you think of the script?

JUNIUS

What script.

RONNIE

I meant the screenplay. Of the movie.

JUNIUS

I heard you.

RONNIE

Ah.

JUNIUS

I don't know how they ever got the rights.

RONNIE

Maybe they didn't.

JUNIUS

AH. That would explain it. False pretenses.

RONNIE

Terrible scandal.

JUNIUS

So why did you take the job?

RONNIE

Check cleared.

JUNIUS

Same. This goes pear-shaped, we could sue. Call my agent. My publicist. My attorney. Sue everyone involved.

RONNIE

Or they could just change the title.

JUNIUS

Problem solved.

RONNIE

Instead of Vladimir, you're now "Gary."

JUNIUS

And David O. Selznick can rest easy in eternity.

ELLIE enters, wearing a dirty white dress and a big straw hat. She is looking up.

ELLIE

Are those buzzards?

JUNIUS

Vultures.

RONNIE

Possibly magpies.

ELLIE

(Tipping her hat) I thought magpies were smaller.

RONNIE

So buzzards then?

JUNIUS

Vultures.

RONNIE

What's the difference?

JUNIUS

I have no idea.

ELLIE

Vultures are scavengers. They swoop down and pick at whatever's already dead. Buzzards are predators. They swoop down and do the other thing.

JUNIUS

So let's hope they're vultures.

RONNIE

(Indicating her attire) I take it you are working on the film?

ELLIE

I am! (Kidding) How'd you guess.

JUNIUS

It was either that or you'd escaped a kidnapping.

ELLIE

I'm Ellie Sanger. I'm playing Estragon's wife.

RONNIE

How do you do. I'm Ronald J. Platt.

JUNIUS

He's playing Estragon.

ELLIE

Whaaaaaaaaaaat.

RONNIE

I haven't seen the entire screenplay, but I was led to believe there were some/

JUNIUS

/war crimes.

RONNIE

/liberties taken.

ELLIE

Oh. Well okay. I mean, that's the job. It's acting, right?

JUNIUS

Not yet it's not.

ELLIE

I mean, I haven't seen the script yet. Quince said he was doing another draft. He said he was adding my scene for today.

JUNIUS

Quince.

ELLIE

The director.

JUNIUS

I know who he is, I just haven't come to terms with it yet.

RONNIE

Director slash screenwriter.

JUNIUS

Judicious use of "slash" I would imagine.

ELLIE

I just got the part yesterday. (Pause) Quince is my boyfriend.

JUNIUS

(Softly) There it is.

RONNIE

Be nice.

ELLIE

But I am an actress. An actor. I'm an acting major.

RONNIE

So was I. Back in ancient Greece. (She chuckles.) It's a pleasure to meet you, Miss Sanger. Congratulations on being cast. We've all been someone's girlfriend at some point. You're here now, and, as the saying goes, there are no small parts...

JUNIUS

Yes there are.

RONNIE

Only small actors.

JUNIUS

Plenty of both.

RONNIE

Junius, you're impossible.

JUNIUS

And yet often correct. It is a ridiculous saying. (RONNIE scoffs.) Ronald, you have played hundreds of small parts. You have played Yelling Man in Crowd, and Suspect #2, and how many reporters and bar patrons and cult members.

RONNIE

More than I can count.

JUNIUS

And it is because you are not a small actor. It takes a great actor to accept a small part, a nameless role, a face in the crowd, and play him honestly.

ELLIE

You played a cult member?

RONNIE

Three of them. Three different cults. Manson Family, Jonestown, and generic Satanist.

ELLIE

(Genuinely) That's so cool. I've only played three roles in my entire career. Well, "career." It's my major. This will be my fourth. Role, not major. I've only had two of those.

RONNIE

What was the other one?

ELLIE

Biology. With a specialization in ornithology.

RONNIE

(To JUNIUS) Study of birds.

JUNIUS

Thank you, I know.

ELLIE

I grew up around birds.

JUNIUS

Had a tree house, did you?

ELLIE

I did! But also my father was an avid birdwatcher.

JUNIUS

Hard not to watch them, what with the flying and all.

ELLIE

Have either of you done this play before?

RONNIE

(As JUNIUS shrugs) He did. In Philadelphia, I think? (JUNIUS nods) He played the other role, though. My role.

JUNIUS

Would you like to trade? I doubt they'd notice.

RONNIE

(To ELLIE) Have you studied the play?

ELLIE

I'm familiar with it.

JUNIUS

Everyone's familiar with it.

RONNIE

Not everyone.

JUNIUS

I take your point, but I imagine you'd be hard pressed to find an acting major who couldn't pick it out of a lineup.

ELLIE

I've done my research.

JUNIUS

I'm not certain what that means. Have you read the play, or did you just go to Wikipedia.

ELLIE

I read several articles about it, reviews, I watched some bootleg clips from when Steve Martin and Robin Williams did it back in the 80s...

JUNIUS

For all the time that took, you could have read the play.

ELLIE

I don't usually waste my time reading plays that don't have a role for me. Or any woman, for that matter.

JUNIUS

Apparently we've fixed that problem, Mrs. Estragon.

RONNIE

Forgive my friend. He's a bit of an asshole when he's kept waiting. Or when he just talks out loud.

JUNIUS

Doing this film without reading the play is like being asked "Can you ride a horse?" and saying "I've seen paintings of horses, I'm sure I can figure it out."

LES enters carrying bottles of water. He hands them to the actors.

LES

Folks, how we doin', have a water, I really appreciate your patience, we're gonna be ready for you in about five more minutes, here's water, just getting set up. Good to see you, any minute, thanks again. (As he exits, speaking into headset) Copy that, water has been delivered. Actors are in a hold.

PAUSE. They all uncap their waters and drink. After drinking, they re-cap their waters and look up.

ELLIE

Still up there.

RONNIE

Definitely not magpies.

JUNIUS

I'm beginning to lean albatross.

RONNIE

"Nobody Loves an Albatross."

JUNIUS

Hah. My God. I haven't heard that title since Rosemary's Baby.

RONNIE

Now that guy was a small actor.

JUNIUS

You see?

ELLIE

What are you talking about?

RONNIE

It's from the scene in Rosemary's Baby, when Mia Farrow is talking about her actor husband's credits.

ELLIE

I haven't seen it.

JUNIUS

Really.

ELLIE

No way. Yuck.

RONNIE

Not a fan of horror movies?

ELLIE

No, horror is fine. But it's Polanski. I wouldn't go near that movie. That's just gross.

JUNIUS

Because it was directed by Polanski?

ELLIE

Well, yes.

JUNIUS

And therefore it's a bad movie?

ELLIE

Well, it was made by a bad director.

JUNIUS

I have to disagree. He was quite a good director.

ELLIE

But a bad man.

RONNIE

We're not arguing that. (Preemptive) Junius, we are not arguing that.

JUNIUS

(Raising his hands) He made some very good films.

ELLIE

But... who cares?

JUNIUS

I do. I care. Because Chinatown is a very important film. Or Knife in the Water.

ELLIE

I'm not denying that they're influential films, but I've never seen Knife in the Water, and I never will, because he directed it.

JUNIUS

But you've seen Chinatown.

ELLIE

(Beat) I have.

JUNIUS

Before you knew anything about the director.

ELLIE

Yes. And yes, I thought it was good.

JUNIUS

Chinatown doesn't need you to think it's good. It's Chinatown. It IS good.

RONNIE

(Placating) Okay.

ELLIE

(Responding to JUNIUS) All right. So?

JUNIUS

So then after you learned about Polanski, you changed your opinion of the film, didn't you? Now you look at it and instead of a great film it's what, it's now evidence you sift through.

ELLIE

I understand the point that you're making. I'm just saying that I can't enjoy art that's made by bad people.

JUNIUS

And I'm saying that you don't understand the point that I'm making because the point I'm making is that you can and do enjoy art made by bad people, all day every day all your life. You just don't know they're bad. And you lose a lot of beauty and meaning in the world when beauty and meaning are dependent upon either the artist's purity or your ignorance.

ELLIE stands a moment, stunned, insulted, then uncaps her water and drinks.

RONNIE

You should hop down, Junius. We have to return the soap box to the prop department.

JUNIUS

Polanski can kiss my ass, Ronald. While burning alive and kneeling on broken glass. But Rosemary's Baby is still great.

RONNIE

He wouldn't have to kneel. He's incredibly short.

JUNIUS

The work has to mean something. On the day. We have no control over anything else. (To ELLIE) Miss Sanger, I've made eighty-six films. He's made more than that. I have a hundred and forty credits on the Internet Database thing. I've acted with Dennehy and James Earl Jones and Jimmy Caan. And so has HE. And today, I'm getting my day rate to stand here and drink water until they tell me they're ready to shoot this potential disaster. Last month, I got my day rate to cry over some poor dead girl in a slasher movie you'll never see because the actor just below me on the list was unavailable and the actor just above me was too expensive. Today I'm here. In September, I'm going to get my day rate to stand beside the person who makes the horrible mistake in the lab that creates the next great super hero. And I'll BE that guy on the day. Because that's the point. You'll believe he has kids and dogs and degrees on the wall. Because it's all about the work on the day. You can't say it's great today and then decide it's bad tomorrow.

RONNIE

Junie, if it helps, it might be bad today.

JUNIUS laughs and drinks some water and crosses far right.

JUNIUS

I have enormous respect for directors.

RONNIE

I've heard that about you.

JUNIUS

(In ELLIE's direction) You're saying this film has one?

ELLIE

(To JUNIUS) Sorry?

RONNIE

What other roles have you played, Miss Sanger?

ELLIE

Me? Oh. Well, I've only acted in two plays so far. If you don't count Mary in the Christmas pageant and Snoopy in the third grade. But no, I was-- I was Maggie in *Cat on a Hot Tin Roof*, and then I played *Antigone*.

RONNIE

(Impressed) Really.

ELLIE

(Nods) Those were both last year. Fall and Spring semesters.

RONNIE

Those are wonderful roles, Ellie. That's very impressive.

JUNIUS

And what about this year?

ELLIE

Sorry?

JUNIUS

Antigone and Maggie the Cat were last year. What about this year?

ELLIE

Oh. Well, this year, I haven't had as much... time to devote to auditions and... rehearsals. And I've been concentrating a bit more on building up my film credits. Such as they are.

RONNIE

We all have to start somewhere.

JUNIUS

Indeed.

RONNIE

You know, before he became a brilliant orator, Junius had his big break playing a juvenile delinquent on Hawaii Five-O.

ELLIE

I... don't know what that is.

RONNIE

What was that character's name, Junius? I forget.

JUNIUS

I believe it was Young Punk.

RONNIE

And the rest is history.

JUNIUS

It certainly seems that way. (Beat.) What was the third role?

ELLIE

Sorry?

JUNIUS

The third role. You said this was your fourth role. You mentioned your two star turns on stage. What was the third?

RONNIE

Junius. Manners.

JUNIUS

Presumably it was in film?

ELLIE

It was, yes. (Pause. JUNIUS waits.) I had a small role in Quince's other film. His first one. It wasn't as... serious as this one. I mean, it was serious, it was a comedy but it was serious. It just wasn't... literary. Like this. (Pause. JUNIUS waits.) I played a girl at a party. Her name was Party Girl. I had two lines. I was just filling in for another girl who flaked on the day. I was there anyway, and Quince knew I could act, so I got the part. The movie was about two guy friends who are throwing a surprise birthday party for their other friend at their apartment. And people keep arriving, and every time the door opens, they think it's the other friend, and everyone ducks down and yells Surprise, and each time it's not him. And my first line, when a few people have come in and they're not him, she says, "I don't think he's coming." And as the night goes on, people are drinking and getting wasted, and finally when everyone they know except the one guy has come in, there's a knock at the door, and everyone gets real quiet and ducks down, and my character, Party Girl, she can't stand it, and she says, "I can't take another disappointment," and then... she takes off her top. And she's Party Girl, so there's no bra, and the door opens, and she's standing there with her breasts out, and it's a policeman at the door saying, "I'm sorry, your friend was in an accident, and he's dead." And the film just ends with these two guys standing there, stunned, and me standing between them, tits out, crying.

PAUSE. Finally, JUNIUS crosses to ELLIE and extends his hand.

JUNIUS

Party Girl. How do you do. I'm Young Punk.

They shake. RONNIE extends his hand, and ELLIE shakes with him as well.

RONNIE

Angry Teen with Hot Dog.

ELLIE laughs, charmed, and does a small curtsy.

RONNIE

No small actors.

JUNIUS

I could name twenty.

They all uncap their water bottles and drink.

QUINCE enters, full of coiled energy and enormous fragile confidence. He crosses to JUNIUS first to shake hands.

QUINCE

Hey. Mr. Blanchard. Seriously. Seriously? Thank you. Quince Morn. I'm so grateful. I saw your work with Robert Benton, and Lumet. You're a prize fighter, a matador, and I'm so grateful.

JUNIUS

Okay then.

QUINCE

(Immediately moving on) Ronnie Platt. Goddamn. Thank you. Are you kidding? Thank you.

RONNIE

Happy I could help out.

*QUINCE backs away from them,
basking, and almost bumps into
ELLIE.*

QUINCE

Ellie! My god you're beautiful. You've met these war horses? Look at you! Even with the dirt. Even with all the fabric, my god. Look at you. So you've met these legends?

ELLIE

We've met. They've been keeping me company.

QUINCE

Babe, with all your talent, all your sexy intelligence, I have never been jealous of you until just this second. To spend time with these lion tamers. Seriously? I'm overcome with jealousy. (To JUNIUS) That scene with Eric Roberts, when you were both really fresh and going for it, Jesus, I could watch that, I could drink it like a vampire and be immortal. What a gift.

JUNIUS

Thank you, Quince. I wonder if you have an update on today's filming? It seems we're a little behind.

QUINCE

We are, and I could not be more apologetic. This was an unforeseen bit of producorial oversight that descended like nightfall on our golden moment together, but I want to reassure you that we shall be victorious and our reward shall be art that

will last forever. I think we're... maybe an hour from having everything ironed out, and I mean wrinkle-free, and then there will be nothing to stand in the way of our mutually assured glory, my friends.

ELLIE

An hour?

QUINCE

No more than 90 minutes, on my honor as a gentleman. And when we're ready, the shot that Henrik has come up with for your first scene is going to blow the top off your mind. I mean it's sincerely next level genius. I mean Gordon Willis level vision, just cutting through reality to heaven in light and dark. Have you met Henrik? Because I'm telling you, our DP is both the butcher and the chef. He does it all, and it's all delicious.

JUNIUS

(To RONNIE) Is it the sun? I think I might be having a stroke.

QUINCE

I can get you a better hat. A bigger hat. Ellie, can Mr. Blanchard wear your hat. I mean, are you kidding? What an honor. If I had a hat, I would beg him to wear it.

ELLIE

Would you like my hat?

RONNIE

Keep your hat. I'm sure he'll be fine.

QUINCE

(Calling off) Can we get Mr. Junius Blanchard a beach umbrella, please? We have a national treasure here, and I'd like him to know, to FEEL how much we value him and his commitment to his art!

JUNIUS

I'm fine, Quince. Thank y—

QUINCE

Everybody's good? Everybody's feeling it? You know you lines?

RONNIE

I know my lines. I know his lines.

JUNIUS

I know his lines.

QUINCE

Excellent.

ELLIE

I haven't seen my lines yet.

QUINCE

It'll be fine. You sure you don't want a bigger hat?

JUNIUS

Wouldn't dream of it.

QUINCE

Just say the word. Think I'm kidding? No sacrifice is too great for actors such as yourselves. I am not joking around. The two of you. Gladiators. (Looking up) Oh my god, how long have these birds been here?! (To the others) Can you see these birds? Excuse me, I have to go find Henrik. This! This is the shot! These birds are the whole movie! (Crossing off) Henrik! Les! Where the hell is Henrik?

QUINCE exits excitedly. JUNIUS, RONNIE, and ELLIE stand on stage, perhaps near the tree, and they watch him go. They sip their water.

JUNIUS

You remember that week you spent with Scorsese?

RONNIE

I miss those horses. I loved those horses.

They laugh. ELLIE joins in, part of the club.

After a moment, LES the PA enters.

LES

(Into his headset) Copy that. (To the actors) Hey, folks. So we just got some news. It seems that the rights to this film were never 100% ours, I guess, and so until we've sorted things out with the Beckett estate, it looks like we have to halt production. Possibly indefinitely. Quince wanted me to express his most profound apologies. He's distraught about this. Had to

lie down. So we're going to need you to go ahead and get out of costume as soon as you can, and we'll be in touch with your representatives as soon as we know more. Can I get anybody any more water? No? Everybody good? Can't thank you enough everybody. It's been a pleasure working with you.

LES exits the way he entered.

JUNIUS, RONNIE and ELLIE stand a moment, stunned, then they begin to laugh again. Not wildly, but from someplace deep. Their laughter subsides, and ELLIE hugs RONNIE.

ELLIE

It was nice almost being your wife, Mr. Estragon.

RONNIE

The pleasure was all mine, Party Girl.

ELLIE

Mr. Junius Blanchard? It was something getting to meet you. You are a fist fighter and a rodeo rider and several other things, apparently.

JUNIUS

I am. I really am. (He smiles.) Go audition for another play, Miss Sanger. As soon as you can.

ELLIE

I intend to. And I'll read this play, I promise.

JUNIUS

Don't. Read something with a good role for you. And then go do it. You know why? (She nods.) You know why.

RONNIE crosses away from them and turns. He recites the following monologue, gaining in quiet intensity.

RONNIE

Doctor Crawford? I don't, uh, I don't know what to tell you. I mean, when we came in here, I was sure there was no hope. And then I saw you. I saw you with your surgical scrubs and your good, steady hands, and I began to have hope. And when my boy was in surgery, and the chaplain came around, asking if I wanted to pray for my boy or for your steady hands, I said no. I said, I have all the faith and hope in the world. I said I looked in that doctor's eyes and I saw my boy's future. Alive, in recovery, learning to walk again, leaving this hospital, finishing school, getting married, having kids, and being a man I'd be proud of. I said I didn't need to pray. And that's when God decided He was gonna show me. That's when He looked down and saw my arrogance and decided He was gonna teach me a lesson. And He did. Because your hands weren't as steady as they shoulda been. And my boy didn't grow up or grow old or even make it outta that operating room. He didn't do anything but die on that table, right where you stood. So I wanted to find you and tell you that I know all about God's plan now, and what He thinks of arrogance. And I wanted to tell you that maybe it's you who needs to pray.

JUNIUS

That episode never aired. Show got cancelled mid-season.

ELLIE

Damn shame.

RONNIE

Nobody knows a goddamn thing.

*They exit, drinking their water.
Only the tree is left on the
stage.*

CURTAIN.