

Godot Finally Shows!

by Robert Crisman

Vladimir and Estragon stood hunched at the corner of Ellis and Taylor in San Francisco's Tenderloin district. Bedraggled and spent, they looked dully around them at pretty much nothing.

They could have been thirty, or maybe 100. Who could tell under all the layers of soil, dust, toxins, and smog that begrimed both their flesh and the sewage they wore? They'd tramped through 30-odd countries, feeding on bread crusts and apples they stole, and now here they were, at the end of the line, for them as for so many others.

Back in France they'd finally said fuck it after waiting--what, 50 years?--for that goddamn Godot by the side of that road. So fuck him and fuck Beckett too. They went to hunt up something to eat.

In jail that night after having tried and failed to make off with some bread and some wine in a market in downtown Toulouse, they almost gave in to despair. But then the next morning, a postcard came for them in the mail. On the front of the card, a Far Side cartoon, the one with the cows who just sit there, unable to answer the phone for lack of opposable thumbs. On the back of the card were these words: "Wish you were here. Your good buddy G." The card was postmarked Dubuque...

Amazing? You bet! Especially in light of the fact that I had no other really plausible way of keeping this puppy moving!

Astonished, our heroes served their six months, then set out, determined to get to America now and track down the ghost of their dreams.

In Dubuque, then in Butte, and then in Spokane and Seattle, the Far Side cartoons would arrive at the jails with a "Wish you were here" and a postmark.

At last San Francisco! The Tenderloin now, Ellis and Taylor, 10 o'clock Sunday morning. Godot was supposed to meet them here on this corner.

Zombies dressed much like our heroes careened through the

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streets in slow motion. Up Ellis a ragged line formed, one hundred or so spectres, ragged and torn, waiting to scarf a free meal in Grace Church's basement.

Winos, dopefiends, rockheads galore in this new, deeper level of hell...

Estragon belched again and again in a stream that seemed to go on forever.

"My God," Vladimir said, "what is that, a song to your ancestors? Stop!" He, like Estragon, spoke in the accent and rhythms of East Central Europe.

I should explain here that Beckett thought that they'd come from somewhere in France. Why I don't know. He might've been drunk.

Anyway, back to our story...

Vladimir told Estragon to knock off the belching. Estragon told him, "Eat my mucous and spit, you thrice-raddled sow! Everywhere we go, across Europe and all the way to this cursed shithole, you criticize me. The way I act, the noises I make. You, who've made dumpsters your home from Sevastopol to Seattle, and now in this place. And noises! *You* are a noise! A noise that squeaks when he shits!"

"Says the man who unleashes the sounds of ruminants dying in bombing attacks each time he squats in a doorway!" said Vladimir. "Wildebbeests rumbling inside your bowels and then *stinkbombs* fouling the air like the last gasp of hell! I attribute this to your mother's penchant for coupling with diarrhetic baboons!"

"Diarrhetic--? You syphlitic dog's pimp! How is it you *dare* to speak of my mother this way?"

"How do I dare? You exist, do you not? And are you not your mother's son? In all your simian glory? *Quod erat demonstratum.*"

"*Quod*--what is this you say? I will *kill* you!"

"Kill me? Hah! Toxic pestilence! You can't even kill the stench that you've carried from Bucharest! They had to evacuate Ploesti when you plodded through, you noxious carcass and--"

Estragon pulled out a gun, a Glock 9mm. as it happened, and shot Vladimir dead.

Just at that moment, with the echoes of gunfire still in the air--and what an *amazing* coincidence it was!--Godot finally showed. White-bearded, dressed hip-hop, he bopped to a stop, eyed Vladimir sprawled in the doorway, and then at Estragon holding the gun with a somewhat bewildered look in his eye.

"Homes!" Godot said.

Estragon gaped. "Godot! Is that you?"

Godot laughed. "Call me Mr. Natural, my friend." He looked around. "You need to put that gun in your pants. The rollers are thick around here."

"Rollers?"

"*Politzei*, you dig?"

Estragon said, "Ah!" and shoved the gun in his pants.

Godot took Estragon's elbow. "Let's stand outside this doorway, my man. Somebody comes, we can say, "*What* dead motherfucker? Oh, him? Damned if I know, we just got here."

Estragon blinked, looked down at Vladimir, then shook his head as if there were bees in his ears.

He stared at the long-lost Godot:

"Godot! My *God*... We have been looking for you through two continents! Where have you been? We waited by the side of that road for five decades!"

"Don't get your bowels in an uproar, my man. I had people to meet an' connections to make an' I met 'em an' made 'em an' now here I am. It was tough scufflin' too. Paris, New York, an' then all those cowtowns. I got hung up in Chi for two winters, man! Don't *ever* get stuck in Chi Town in winter! Make you wish you'd tipped up to Moscow and went to work for the Georgians or something!

"Anyway, man, one way an' another, mainly by boxcar, I made to Frisco at last an' got hip in a *hurry*. An' now here I am, cool as a fool who finally made it through school!"

Godot, smiling, stepped back and indicated the clothes he had on with a flourish. They were hip-hop down to the *bone*.

"I got cash an' talk trash. I'm dressed, pressed, an' shined for success. I got bling an' damn near *everything*. They call me on time

for dinner 'cause I am a winner! I'm known as ho's pet an' pimp's fret. I got a hall-of-fame name an' plenty of game, competition is lame, an'--"

"Yes, but, Godot! We are here, starving, broke! Vladimir and myself in this accursed city, though Vladimir is now dead as you see. And you, I am happy for your good fortune, but--"

Godot laughed. "My man, my man!" He threw an arm around Estragon's shoulder. "It's you an' me now, my Romanian brother! We'll throw you under a shower, hoss, an' scrub your ass an' floss all the moss, an' you'n me are gonna go party! Your first night in town, I'm gonna take you around, to the hot spots an' flesh pots, an' make all the ladies start fussin' an' cussin' an' fishin' an' wishin' an' wantin' some kissin', see what it is that they all been missin'! It's double-your-fun like the number one gun, right here an' right now, you don't even have to ask how! Them girlies gonna give you the yum, make you cum, an' then steam you an' ream you, you go out the door, you come back for more! Don't even have to keep score 'cause there's *lots* more in store! You be Smackwater Jack in a *Cadillac*, Mac, SUV, VIP like it's free, for the whole *world* to see, with a blonde in the front seat an' three in the back, an' a punk in the trunk if you like it like that!"

Estragon just gaped at Godot, blinking polyrhythmically now, as if he'd just gotten the news he was born on the Planet Zarandax.

Godot laughed again. "Estragon, baby! Don't look at me funny! You worried about money? I'm the bank, brother, an' I got the *honey* an'--"

"Godot, please! I am needing subtitles already! I--"

Godot stepped back and regarded his friend. Dropping the bop and all the hip-hop, he began to speak slowly, solemnly now, in the accents and rhythms of East Central Europe.

"Okay, my friend. It is need-to-know time. So, real story, okay?"

"Yes, Godot, thank you."

Godot indicated the street with the sweep of his arm. Armies of dopefiends and rock heads shuffled and scuffled around them.

"Do you see all this, my brother?"

"Yes, Godot, I see this."

"Tell me, what do you see?"

"I see the Night Of the Living Dead, Godot."

"Indeed you do, brother, and at 10 o'clock in the morning as well. Dopefiends and dopefiends for days upon days. Homeless for miles around. Eighty-year-old women with tin cups in doorways. The sick, the wounded, the dead, the wish-they-were-dead, they are all here."

Estragon stared, wide-eyed and blinking.

"These people all make me look like the Czar of the Russias, Godot, dressed in ermine and jewels! We were told San Francisco is a city of gold! What happened here?"

"Crack, AIDS, budget cuts, the corporate erasure of *hope*. This is a city in *freefall*, my brother. Like all of America, it is on its way down the tubes. And the people no longer even bother to care!

"Do you know, Estragon, what the mantra of the American people is? Hooray for me and fuck the world! *Hooray for me and fuck the world!*" Godot laughed. "Look all around you! What you see here is a nightmare--more than that, a nightmare *cartoon*! It is *funny*, my friend! Until it jams itself right down your throat... And then you see, all around us, and from one end of this city to the next, and throughout this state and the nation--the whole ball of wax, as they say. Corrupt, ugly, vicious, and *doomed*."

Godot's laughter now pealed like doom's soundtrack.

Estragon stammered, "Yes, but, but--why did we come here then, brother? Merely to watch people die? We saw such as this in Berlin in the rubble after the war. Why come here now?"

Godot laughed again.

"Estragon, Estragon! Come awake, my dear brother! Berlin, yes, the rubble, *nothing* but rubble. But America! Hah! It is fast becoming a shithole, yes--but a *gilded* shithole, my friend! Less than a mile from here, on Montgomery Street, there are gleaming towers of wealth, *vast* wealth, even now! As there are in all America's cities! And the wealth controlled from within these towers continues to *grow*! A gilded shithole, yes, yes, but--it is Gold Mountain still, as our Chinese friends say, as always!"

"Gold Mountain? My God, Godot! You mean goat shit and piss! *Look* at this, brother! This is a sub-basement of hell!"

"No, brother, Gold Mountain! Rivers of milk, and the honey drips like the dew! It is poisoned of course, but these people *pay* for their poisons! It is their joy to pay through the nose for their poisons! They've come to believe that shit tastes like sugar! And I am the man with the sugar, my brother! And now you! Together we shall feed all these people their sugar!"

Estragon blinked and stared at Godot. "Do you mean..."

"Yes, brother, drugs! We shall sell these people their drugs!" Godot laughed. "Do you know how it was that I came to leave Europe?"

"No, brother. We waited for you for decades in France and heard *nothing*."

"Yes, well, after the war, it was necessary to flee. I had thrown in my lot with Vichy my friend, and Klaus Barbie and I... Well, no need to go into all that. But I and others, we needed safe passage away. It was ODESSA and Otto Skorzeny who gave us that passage. And the Americans, of course. And so, down the ratlines we came with no one the wiser, at least none who'd tell and, *voila*, we became new men, as they say, and *free*. And then the Americans put us to work."

"Put you to work? Doing what?"

"Fighting the communist bastards, my brother! Everywhere in this world, from Tehran to Tegucigalpa, Medellin to Marseilles, Kandishar to Kabul--the frontiers of *freedom*! And I was there every step of the way in the trenches!"

Godot smiled. "Wars, my brother! Covert proxy wars, in Laos, Angola, you name the place. Afghanistan, the first time! We brought in Osama to take out the Russians! We trained him and then turned him loose and the next thing you know, the Russians retreated to Moscow and died!"

"And, brother, this is important. Do you know how we paid for these wars?"

"No, brother."

"With *sugar*, my brother! Heroin in Laos and Saigon! Cocaine in

the Andes! Heroin again in Afghanistan, brother! Congress is cheap and my Masters told us, get the job paid for and done, and we did!"

"Yes, Godot, but--what war is there here?"

Godot laughed long and loud. "What war is there *here*? My God, look around you! Is this not carnage you see?"

"Yes, brother."

"Yes indeed! And it is worse in places like Camden, Detroit, East St. Louis, Chicago's west side, the south Bronx. And it is all the same war, Estragon!"

"*What* war, Godot?"

"The war of the rich to stay rich by blaming the poor for all of America's ills."

"I--"

"Who better to blame for America's ills, Estragon? Who easier than these?"

"Yes, but--"

"Estragon." Godot swept the street with his eyes. "Do you see all these dregs? These black and brown dregs that litter the streets like the spawn of some plague?"

"Yes, brother. I see white ones as well."

"Those are anomalies, my brother, white trash, windblown, forgotten. You see, crime, drug addiction--it's all been dressed up in *blackface* by the people who bring us our nightmares."

"People? Who, brother?"

"The people who bring us the Six O'Clock News and who finance campaigns for high office. The ones who rant about crime and keeping the middle class safe in their beds late at night tucked away in exurban enclaves."

"Oh, those people..."

"Yes, brother, those people. Their job is to scare the all the white people *witless*. To that end, all the dark-skinned people in this *world* have been turned by their magic to gangbangers, terrorist Muslim fanatics, bone thugs with big dicks who have come for your wife--or *you* for that matter! Black and brown people have *always* been feared by the whites, and now the media spinners have given us

monsters to play with! And as a result, all those whites who shiver in closets have given it over to people like me to save them from hordes here at home and all over the world, to defend what they call their culture, their honor, their blood! And their oil, of course..."

Godot's grin was the coldest thing this side of an icepick. "It is war to the *death*, Estragon! In Afghanistan now, and here on these streets that you see with your very own eyes. War to the death--and I am a hero, sent to slay dragons!"

Godot, the man with the sugar. A hero? A knight sent to slay dragons?

"You are a *rogue*, Godot, out to line your own pockets!" Estragon, getting hip quick.

Godot laughed again. "Yes, of course! What else would an American hero be in this day and age? John Wayne is dead! And meanwhile, the Americans' God is telling them, blessed are the rich! The mask has come off and behold the fangs!"

"Godot, they will catch you and throw you in jail! Are you mad? Selling heroin, crack--"

Godot sneered. "They will *never* throw me in jail, Estragon. Do you want to know why?"

"Yes, Godot, please tell me why."

"My Masters do not want it known what we do. They don't *care* what we do, money is money, all for the wars, and the rakeoffs of course, and we work off the books--but were we exposed, the blacks would make noise, and even the whites would not understand why we feed the streets sugar. Sugar has turned the streets into nightmares that keep them awake. It's also what we have told them we're trying to stop in Afghanistan now as we speak. The Taliban, dope-dealing *devils*, and so forth..." Godot laughed.

"And, if by some rare chance we get caught, so what? I have a get-out-of-jail-free card, my brother, signed by my Masters, who will *never* allow their loose ends to dangle, especially in jail.

"And, as I told you, I am a *hero*. A villain, yes--but what *is* a hero these days? Is he not bent? Is he not flawed? Is not the Lone Ranger a Saturday morning cartoon, Never-Never Land's own, a myth for

small children? Adults roll their eyes. What matters to them is who *wins*. What they want is a *winner*, someone who can help them believe that they too might somehow win, even as they sink in the quicksand that passes for life all around them.

"They want winners! And believe it, my brother, people like me? *We are the ones who are winning!*"

Estragon stared at Godot. Godot grinned and grinned.

"So. Estragon. Are you with me?"

Estragon looked around once again at the streets. He chewed the insides of his lips. He seemed to shudder.

"Yes, Godot, I am with you."

Godot laughed. "As soon as we bathe you, my friend, *then* you are with me."

"Yes, yes, of course, but--"

Estragon looked at Vladimir's body sprawled in the doorway.

"What about Vladimir?"

Godot glanced down at the body. "Collateral damage, my friend. A casualty of the war. There are thousands just like him littered in doorways all over town. We let the police do their jobs."

Godot took Estragon by the arm. "Come now, my brother. We've business elsewhere."

