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The Godot Particle
by Beth Huber

“The Godot Particle” had its first staged reading at the March, 2023, Mid-America Theatre Conference Playwright’s Symposium in Minneapolis, MN. Two dramaturgs were assigned to the project as well as a director and three actors. A twenty-minute Q&A capped off the reading, where two major threads of discussion dominated. Given that “The Godot Particle” pays tribute to *Waiting for Godot*, both in characters and structure, the first appropriate question revolved around the essence/identity of Godwin. Who were they and were their actions intentional? When you, as an audience, are told that something is important, you scrutinize it more closely, as we do with Beckett’s *Godot*. Some audience members of “The Godot Particle” interpreted Godwin to be a ‘watchmaker god’ based on a few biblical references in the play. Others questioned whether Godwin himself had been created by the scientific flip of a switch. If either is your answer, or something completely different, you are justified in thinking it. The second conversational thread revolved around elements of quantum physics in the play. The story takes place in the CERN laboratory, where scientists discovered Higgs boson, also known as *the god particle*. As the author, I suggest that both conversations were about the same thing: the presence of a creative force and our characters’ willingness to see themselves, or not, as active participants in their fate. Your interpretation of “The Godot Particle,” therefore, is just as absurdly reasonable as mine.

CAST OF CHARACTERS

VALERIE..... A physicist, same age/race/ethnicity as
Edgar

EDGAR..... A physicist, same age/race/ethnicity as
Valerie

GODWIN.....,, A physicist of any age, race, ethnicity,
or gender

SCENE

We are in a non-descript place with only one waist-high, flat, large control panel on the floor downstage. The front of the panel is painted with the letters CERN

TIME

Is a construct.

(AT RISE, we see VALERIE and EDGAR, both wearing lab coats, staring hesitantly down at the control panel. After a moment, EDGAR starts to move his hand toward the panel, but quickly retracts. They continue to stare, not moving)

Flip the switch. VALERIE

Flip the switch. EDGAR
(to himself)

Edgar? VALERIE

Valerie? EDGAR

Flip the switch. VALERIE

I...no. EDGAR

(They continue to stare at the panel without movement)

Flip the... VALERIE

Remember... EDGAR

...switch...what happened? VALERIE

The last time. EDGAR

No. VALERIE

Yes. EDGAR
(insistent)

I'm fuzzy. VALERIE

Exactly the point. EDGAR

The last time... VALERIE

I flipped it. EDGAR

Someone died. VALERIE

Then? EDGAR

Not dead anymore. VALERIE

And the words changed. EDGAR

Terminal terms. VALERIE

Stain stein. EDGAR

Memories mangled. VALERIE

Magic Mirror. EDGAR

Let's not curse ourselves. VALERIE

Agreed. Perhaps if *you* flip the switch. EDGAR

(They continue to stare at the control panel. No one moves)

VALERIE

It's not going to flip itself.

EDGAR

That's not its nature.

VALERIE

It needs a hand.

(VALERIE slowly moves her hand toward the switch. They both take a huge breath in and hold it. She flips the switch, and EDGAR lets out a wimpy squeak)

VALERIE (cont'd)

Oh! Did I hurt you?

(EDGAR stands up very straight and pats himself down as if looking for injury)

EDGAR

I'm...still here. Still here. (looking at VALERIE). You're still here. Still here.

(They both turn at once to stare again at the control panel. After a moment, GODWIN enters unnoticed and stands directly behind them, holding a clipboard and eating an apple. There's an unlit pin light tucked behind their ear like a pencil)

GODWIN

You flipped the switch?

(VALERIE and EDGAR dramatically startle)

VALERIE/EDGAR

Jesus Christ!... Don't sneak up on us like that...Scared the dickens out of me...

VALERIE

Let people know when you've entered a room, Godwin!

GODWIN

I can see where that would be helpful.

EDGAR

How else would we know?

GODWIN

For future reference.

(GODWIN tilts forward to look at the panel)

You flipped the switch?

VALERIE

Yes.

GODWIN

Time?

VALERIE

(looking at her wristwatch)

7:12

GODWIN

No, was it the right time?

EDGAR

It was time.

VALERIE

(notices Godwin's clipboard)

Filing a report?

GODWIN

On break. Just observing. Pretend I'm not here.

EDGAR

Perhaps next time you could assist.

GODWIN

For future reference.

EDGAR

(to VALERIE)

Now what?

VALERIE

Well...what do we know? Anything to take note of?

EDGAR

What would it look like?

VALERIE

I'm not sure it would *look...like...anything*.

(VALERIE and EDGAR turn slowly in circles, very deliberately *Looking*. GODWIN looks only at them, curiously. They take a big bite of the apple, chewing loudly)

EDGAR

How else would we know?

VALERIE

A sense of the dramatic?

EDGAR

Like?

VALERIE

A feeling.

EDGAR

The hair on my arms?

VALERIE

The back of your neck?

(EDGAR shows VALERIE his arms and then his neck. She looks closely, then shows her own arms and neck. GODWIN looks down at their own arms and mouths the word "Wow" as if their arms show a clear sense of the dramatic. They hold their arms out to EDGAR and VALERIE who do not take any notice)

VALERIE (cont'd)

Do you suppose?

EDGAR

There's been no effect?

VALERIE

We haven't found anything?

EDGAR

There nothing to be found?

VALERIE

Nothing can't exist.

It's not in its nature.

EDGAR

It can't mean to be. It has to *be* to mean.

VALERIE

The dreams that stuff is made of.

EDGAR

What if...

VALERIE

Should we

EDGAR

Increase the tension?

VALERIE/EDGAR

(They turn at once and look back at the control panel. While they stare, GODWIN drops the apple in his pocket, pulls the pin light from behind their ear and starts shining it over their arms, assessing the straightened hair. They then shine the light around the room, as if looking for anything else out of the ordinary. GODWIN stops with the pin light pointed directly at VALERIE, then EDGAR, as they speak)

We need to be vigilant.

VALERIE
(still staring at the panel)

Focused.

EDGAR

Attentive to each particle.

VALERIE

Attuned to each wave.

EDGAR

Sense the weight of collision.

VALERIE

See the sound of the split.

EDGAR

(VALERIE and EDGAR slowly approach the control panel once more. EDGAR reaches forward and hesitantly turns a dial on the panel just a bit)

VALERIE

Be intentional.

(EDGAR forces a huge spin on the dial, quickly flips the switch, and steps back. They both freeze in a stare as GODWIN turns off their pen light and puts it back behind their ear, retrieves the apple from their pocket, and once again steps behind the pair, joining them in their stare)

GODWIN

Would you like to see my neck?

(VALERIE and EDGAR dramatically startle)

VALERIE/EDGAR

Jesus Christ!...Don't sneak up on us like that...Scared me to death...

EDGAR

Let people know when you've entered a room, my good man!

VALERIE

How else would we know?

EDGAR

Announce yourself!

VALERIE

For future reference.

GODWIN

I've been here the entire time.

VALERIE

(looks down at her watch)

Its 7:05.

GODWIN

Not *the* time. *My* time. I mean, *all* the time.

VALERIE

You are time?

GODWIN
(looks at VALERIE thoughtfully)

Interesting.

VALERIE
You're daft, my good friend! Edgar, this person's completely round the bend!

(EDGAR and VALERIE become more agitated, suspicious, yet
GODWIN continues watch the two calmly, with interest)

EDGAR
(looks at GODWIN's clipboard)
Are you a spy?

GODWIN
For?

EDGAR
It's your game, buddy, you tell me!

GODWIN
I'm just observing.

VALERIE
Are you *time* or are you *intention*?

EDGAR
Are you *vibration* or are you *mass*?

(VALERIE grabs the apple out of GODWIN's hand)

VALERIE (cont'd)
Are you a thief?

GODWIN
That's my apple. (indicates the missing piece of the apple) That's my bite.

VALERIE
Thief!!!

EDGAR
We won't save you! We won't save you!

GODWIN
Save me from what? What are you both on about?

VALERIE
(waving the apple at GODWIN)

Oh! I know you! I know you!

GODWIN

Yes. You do.

VALERIE

You're... a mixed metaphor.

(There is a long pause while everyone considers the point)

GODWIN

Wow.

(EDGAR, in a panic, pulls VALERIE off to the side, whispering conspiratorially)

EDGAR

There has to be a way out.

VALERIE

Yes, of course.

EDGAR

They'll let us leave then?

VALERIE

No reason not to.

EDGAR

Slowly.

(EDGAR and VALERIE nonchalantly move toward the control panel and start to climb over it, unsuccessfully. GODWIN watches them with interest as they get stuck on all fours atop the panel)

GODWIN

Wait.

EDGAR

We will not!

VALERIE

Not again.

(VALERIE throws the apple at GODWIN, who catches it, takes a bite, and then slips it back into their pocket. GODWIN walks over to where VALERIE and EDGAR still perch atop the panel and casually helps them down. They stare at GODWIN, absently)

GODWIN

Do you know why you're still here?

EDGAR

No.

VALERIE

No.

GODWIN

(pause)

You forgot to create a door.

(VALERIE and EDGAR turn to stare once again at the control panel. GODWIN reaches around them, flips the switch, and casually exits. After a moment, VALERIE and EDGAR step back and look at each other)

EDGAR

Well, what do we know? Anything to take note of?

VALERIE

What would it look like?

EDGAR

I'm not sure it would look like anything.

(VALERIE and EDGAR turn and look at each other and then continue to stare at the control panel. LIGHTS OUT)

END OF PLAY