

Serve Cold

A Play by Patrick M Brennan
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CHARACTERS

DOUG, male, 30s

GLEN, male, 30s

POLICE OFFICER (offstage)

The Scene : A spartan, but spotless and pleasant, apartment. The lights are off, the apartment empty. As the scene begins, the sound of a key in a lock, and the front door opens. Two young men enter: DOUG and GLEN. GLEN is carrying a full duffel bag.

DOUG:

Come on in, Glen. Be it ever so etcetera. This is my place, and welcome to it.

GLEN:

Hey, this is pretty nice! Very nice. You've done well, young jedi.

DOUG:

Well, I like it a lot. It's nice to be able to spread out a bit, to have a little room, you know. Some space which I don't have to share with anyone else.

GLEN:

It's a lot nicer than I've got. Makes me think maybe I should have taken more science classes in college.

DOUG:

You know, I'm sorry you never got to see the house. It was pretty nice. This is a step down, a little step, but a step down.

GLEN:

Yeah, that was a nice house. Well, it doesn't look like the divorce set you back so far.

DOUG:

No, not as far as money goes. I've got enough money.

DOUG turns away sourly.

GLEN:

Hey, Doug, I'm sorry. I didn't mean to bring up a sore point.

DOUG:

No, it's OK. I'm OK. No, money's not a problem. I've been, um, seeing a therapist.

GLEN:

You mean seeing a therapist, or *seeing* a therapist?

DOUG:

I've been getting help. I guess I didn't take the divorce too well. And a couple of times, well, uh... never mind. Listen, do you want a beer?

GLEN:

Sure, what do you have?

DOUG:

I've got my homebrew.

GLEN:

You mean homebrew as in your own brew?

DOUG:

Yeah, I brew my own beer. You want some?

GLEN:

Yeah, sure.

DOUG:

All right, I'll just lock up here, and then I'll go get us some beer.

DOUG locks the door with his key.

GLEN:

That's a little unusual, isn't it?

DOUG:

What?

GLEN:

The lock on the door. You need a key to open it up even from the inside?

DOUG:

Oh yeah, that's just the way it was when I rented the place.

GLEN:

It doesn't bother you?

DOUG:

No, why should it?

GLEN:

Well, I don't know. I wouldn't want to have to get out of here in a hurry. Say if there was a fire. What if you can't find your keys?

DOUG:

I don't know. I guess I never thought about it too much.

GLEN:

I'm just saying, it's pretty dangerous.

DOUG:

I never lose my keys anyway. And I kind of like these locks. Makes me feel more secure.

DOUG goes to the kitchen and begins to get two bottles and two mugs.

GLEN:

Jesus, look at this. You've got the place sealed up tighter than Fort Fucking Knox. Triple-pane windows with locks? And alarmed, too.

DOUG:

Hey, like I said, this is what the place came with. Can't say I lose any sleep worrying about burglars.

GLEN:

I guess not.

DOUG:

Hey Glen. It's good to see you, man! It's been a long time.

GLEN:

Yeah! I'm glad you called. I kept, you know, meaning to get back in touch, but you know how it is.

DOUG:

Don't worry about it, Glen. I never forgot about you. I always meant to get back in touch. Anyway, we're here now. We've got a few days to catch up. Make yourself at home!

GLEN:

Yeah, OK. Hey, you haven't mentioned if you're dating anyone.

DOUG:

No. I haven't really had the opportunity. Haven't met anyone I'd like to date, not recently.

GLEN:

You're shy, that's all. You've always been shy. Even in college.

DOUG:

I don't know. It's hard to meet nice women. I hate going to bars.

GLEN:

And you spend way too much time working. What the hell do you do for that big pharmaceutical company, anyway?

DOUG brings out two bottles and two mugs, pours the beer.

DOUG:

Building a better bug, Glen, of course. Here's your beer. Cheers!

GLEN samples it tentatively, then nods with approval.

GLEN:

Say! That's pretty tasty.

DOUG:

Yeah, I'm pleased with it. Came out better than the last batch.

GLEN:

So you brew it yourself, then? And bottle it?

DOUG:

From start to finish. This is all my own work.

GLEN:

Well, that's pretty impressive.

DOUG:

Brewing beer's actually pretty simple.

GLEN:

Well sure, you're a biochemist.

DOUG:

No, it's really simple. You boil up your mash into what they call a wort. You cool it down and you put it into an airtight container, like this five gallon carboy. Just before you seal it, you throw in some yeast.

GLEN:

What does yeast have to do with it?

DOUG:

Yeast is what makes it all go! You see, the yeast feed on the malted barley in the wort. Their waste products are alcohol and carbon dioxide.

GLEN:

So what you're telling me is that the alcohol in my beer is yeast piss?

DOUG:

Yeah, I guess so. And then you wait. I call it Malthus In a Jar.

GLEN:

Malthus? What's a Malthus?

DOUG:

Malthus is a who, not a what. He was an 18th century British economist. He wrote that populations have a natural tendency to grow faster than the means of subsistence, leading inexorably to famine and war.

GLEN:

I get it.

DOUG:

So in here, the yeast feeds on the barley, producing alcohol and carbon dioxide. The CO2 blows off through a vent in the carboy, but the alcohol stays behind. Then the food is exhausted, and alcohol is poisonous to the yeast. It literally chokes to death in its own waste product. Cool, huh?

GLEN:

Hey Doug, whatever you say.

DOUG:

Hey listen. Do you remember Cindy Bonet?

GLEN:

Oh, God. How could I possibly forget her? Say, nice segue there, Doug! "Speaking of yeast..." No, I can't ever forget her. She certainly was a grade-A Sexpot.

DOUG:

That's true. Certainly was.

GLEN:

And I'll never forget how damn good she looked naked.

DOUG:

Yeah.

GLEN:

She's the only girl we ever both dated, huh? Course, you got to her first. Freshman year.

DOUG:

Yeah, I guess so. Glen, did you know she was my first girlfriend ever?

GLEN:

I didn't know that!

DOUG:

Maybe you forgot. You know, it's funny. I would never even have spoken to her, but she had a crush on me. Can you imagine that? She -- had a crush on me!

GLEN:

Wow. That's pretty serious, Doug.

DOUG:

But she broke up with me after a couple of months, and she never told me why.

GLEN:

Wow. I guess I don't remember any of that, it was a long long time ago. (*A beat.*) Don't look at me, man. We didn't get it on for like a year after that.

DOUG:

You remember her parents' beach house?

GLEN:

Oh, yeah. Are you kidding? We spent a couple of wild fucking weekends there, man. (*GLEN feels pain inside.*) Jesus, Doug, I don't feel so good. Maybe you didn't sanitize your equipment as well as you thought you did.

DOUG:

Relax, Glen. There's no known bacterium which can survive in an alcohol solution.

GLEN:

Oh, OK. I'm glad to hear that.

DOUG:

No, what you're feeling is the poison that I put into yours.

GLEN:

The *what*?

GLEN is beginning to feel very impaired.

DOUG:

My therapist says that it's immature to lay the blame for my life on you, but what the fuck does she know, right?

GLEN:

Right now I'm siding with her, okay? Listen, Doug: are you just busting on me here? Because you're really scaring me.

DOUG:

No, I'm on the level. When the poison reaches its peak level you'll start vomiting. In the end, you'll die like my yeast, in your own filth. I'm not sure exactly how long you've got.

GLEN:

Jesus, what the fuck is this all about?

DOUG:

Glen, you stole Cindy Bonet from me. I didn't figure it out until just last year. You slipped and you told me some things about her that you should never have known.

GLEN:

What the hell are you talking about?

DOUG:

Her parents' beach house? They sold it. They moved out about a week before Cindy left me.

GLEN:

That was in fucking *college*, man! You wanna kill me for fucking your old girlfriend? Hey, where's the phone?

DOUG:

Oh, sorry. Bit of an accident trimming the hedges today. Clipped the wires outside. Listen, Glen: it's not just Cindy. After it took me that long to figure you out about Cindy, how long do you think it took me to figure out Karen Schiller? Or Sue Lewinsky? Or Kirsten Gold?

GLEN:

Hey, Doug, hey. Hey, no. No. No, Doug. I had nothing to do with any of them. No.

GLEN moves to the door, but it is locked. DOUG dangles his keys, taunting GLEN.

DOUG:

It took me a while, I had to do some real research. Some of them I tracked down and asked. Some of them, I had to make them tell me. But I figured it all out.

GLEN:

Take me to the fuckin' emergency room, man! Now!

DOUG:

You could have stopped. You should have stopped. But Glen, my wife? My fucking wife?

GLEN grabs a bottle, breaks it over a table or chair, whatever. He wields the broken bottle.

GLEN:

Hey man, emergency room RIGHT NOW! Or I'll kill you! Ah, fuck it.

GLEN lunges at DOUG; they struggle, with great noise. GLEN is bigger but he is starting to feel faint. Even so, GLEN pierces DOUG with the bottle. Both fall to the floor, exhausted.

DOUG:

Oh shit! I'm bleeding pretty badly here. My wife, Glen, my wife.

GLEN:

Fuck you and give me the keys.

GLEN starts to roll DOUG, searching for the keys.

DOUG:

You're so sick. You're pathetic. You've got this pathological need to be with anyone I've ... You can't leave a man alone with his wife?

GLEN:

Hey, Doug, I'll tell you something. I've fucked every woman you've ever had. That's right. And I'm glad! Because I'm better than you! You always thought you were smarter, but I'm better. All right? I'm fucking better than you. And now we're both dead men. So there. Serves you right. God damn murderer.

Flashing lights on the window shades; the police are arriving. DOUG is laughing now.

GLEN:
What the fuck are you laughing about?

DOUG:
Glen, do you remember why I always beat you at chess in college?

GLEN:
No, not really. Who cares anyway?

DOUG:
It's because I was always thinking about three moves ahead of you. And you were never thinking ahead more than the next move.

GLEN:
So what?

DOUG:
So I called the police a few minutes ago. I told them a man was in my house, trying to kill me.

GLEN:
Jesus! What a devious mother – but wait – you're trying to kill me! How do you figure you'll beat that rap?

DOUG:
I never intended to. You're supposed to kill me. Don't you get it, stupid? I want to die. But before I do, I want to tell you the rest of it.

GLEN:
What rest of it? I can't follow it already.

DOUG:
You know Glen, I could have put a simple toxin in your beer. But I didn't.

GLEN:
Whattya mean?

DOUG:
I put a virus in there, dude.

GLEN:
So what? That's better?

DOUG:

So the virus won't kill you right away. Actually, it doesn't kill you at all. It's just instructing your cells to manufacture the poison that will kill you.

GLEN:

So I'll find a doctor who'll cure me, get rid of this virus!

DOUG:

Nobody's ever seen this virus before. It's one of my own. You can forget about being cured.

GLEN:

How long will it take?

Furious knocking at the door.

OFFSTAGE VOICE:

Police! Open up in there!

DOUG:

What I told you before? About how you die? That's still true. It'll just take longer than I implied.

GLEN:

How long?

DOUG:

About ten years.

GLEN:

Ten *years*?

DOUG:

Ten years is a long time on the inside, I've heard. Ten years, no woman, then you're dead.

GLEN:

No...

DOUG:

Hey Glen, better finish your beer. You're not getting another one anytime soon.

BLACKOUT

PERFORMANCE HISTORY

Serve Cold (v1.2) was first performed on April 20 and 22nd, 2000, as part of Worcester Polytechnic Institute's New Voices 18 festival.

Director : Marybeth Miskovic
Assistant Director : Justin Cole

Doug : Mike Tuxbury
Glen : Jeff Brownson
Officer : Chris Barratt