

Waiting For Doggett

by Michael Olsen

Characters: SHEILA, a motelier

DAPHNE, a hired killer

Time: dusk.

Place: a shabby motel room at the Jasper's Reach Motel and Caravan Park.

Stage right is a closed door, the entrance to the room; stage left is a door to a bathroom. Downstage right is a small table with a menu standing on it. Also downstage right is an old vacuum cleaner. Across the front of the stage is a barred window, so when the characters are looking out at the audience they are looking through this window.

Lights come up on DAPHNE staring into the sunset, holding a violin case. SHEILA is scratching her arm nervously.

DAPHNE: So beautiful. The silence. The colour. That rich red colour. The red centre. I bet you could walk for a hundred miles straight out there and never meet another person.

SHEILA: It gets lonely after a while. You start talking to yourself just to hear a voice.

DAPHNE: Or you start drinking.

Pause

SHEILA: I'm sorry you know. I really am.

Daphne puts down the violin case.

DAPHNE: You've been very thorough. Let's go through it again.

Daphne grabs the vacuum cleaner, manically switching it on again and again, but nothing happens.

DAPHNE: You cut the power.

Daphne goes to the closed entrance door but finds it locked.

DAPHNE: You've locked us in.

Daphne moves downstage.

DAPHNE: Bars on the windows. Strong enough—

SHEILA: Strong enough to stand up to the Jasper's Reach Under 17s. *(Pause)* I'm sorry.

DAPHNE: Stop apologizing. You know I'm not going to kill you.

SHEILA: Do I know that?

DAPHNE: You're still alive, aren't you?

Daphne kneels down in front of the violin case. She flicks the catches open, opens the cover.

SHEILA: What are you doing?!

DAPHNE: I'd only get it out if I was going to use it. Go back to your vacuum cleaner.

Daphne pulls out a nail file and closes the case. Sheila goes through the motions of vacuuming, then stops.

SHEILA: He's safe, then.

DAPHNE: You think so?

SHEILA: Isn't he?

Pause. Daphne attacks the bolt to the lock in the door.

DAPHNE: How long has it been?

SHEILA: I don't know. Half an hour?

DAPHNE: Half a day.

SHEILA: That short?

DAPHNE: It feels like forever.

SHEILA: It feels like five minutes ago. *(Pause)* When John arrives he'll let us out.

DAPHNE: When Doggett arrives he's a dead man.

SHEILA: You won't kill him. You can't. You—

Daphne stops filing.

DAPHNE: What gave me away? When I arrived?

SHEILA: When I looked at you and I looked at that violin case I knew you weren't here to play with the Jasper's Reach Youth Orchestra. (*Pause*) Have you ever had to—you know—kill someone with your bare hands?

DAPHNE: A first time for everything.

SHEILA: John is so strong. He'll swat you like a fly.

DAPHNE: Big men never know their own strength.

SHEILA: And you know yours? Do you train? Do you workout or—

DAPHNE: What's with the twenty questions?

SHEILA: Just—curious, that's all. We don't get many of your—profession out here. (*Pause*) He might not be coming at all. I told you I warned him. On the CB.

DAPHNE: I told you I jammed the CB the moment I arrived.

SHEILA: Oh. (*Pause*) So he'll know something's up.

DAPHNE: I don't think so.

Pause. Daphne resumes filing.

SHEILA: That lock is made of hardened steel. Do you really think a nail file will make any impression at all?

DAPHNE: A bit much for a motel in the middle of nowhere.

SHEILA: I told you about the Jasper's Reach Under 17s. They trashed the place when they had their end-of-season party here.

DAPHNE: So you built a fortress.

SHEILA: Yes I suppose I did. I built it to last.

DAPHNE: Like the pyramids.

SHEILA: Exactly.

DAPHNE: A tomb.

SHEILA: John will come and let us out and you will leave.

DAPHNE: You're going to persuade me somehow to do just that?

SHEILA: Yes.

Pause

DAPHNE: I still don't know why you want to save him. You said he owes you money.

SHEILA: Easier to get money out of a live man than a dead one. (*Pause*) It's a shame you didn't bump off Glenda.

DAPHNE: Glenda?

SHEILA: John's ex. Isn't she the one paying you?

DAPHNE: Confidentiality forbids—

SHEILA: "Confidentiality forbids discussion of all contracts." You said. But does it really matter now? (*Pause*) Have you thought that it's possible, I don't mean probable, but it's possible I might be the last person you talk to? I don't want to sound morbid, but really, don't you feel the need to—connect? Unburden? Share?

DAPHNE: You think making you my confidante will make me feel better?

SHEILA: Won't it?

DAPHNE: It'll make you feel better.

SHEILA: I hadn't—

DAPHNE: Maybe this whole thing is just a ploy on your part to have a captive audience. Literally.

SHEILA: Don't you want to understand what's happening?

DAPHNE: I understand it perfectly: you wanted to save this idiot truck driver Doggett but into the bargain you've potentially sacrificed yourself—and me. Have I missed anything?

SHEILA: How you die is as important as how you live.

DAPHNE: In my book it's always best to postpone death as long as possible.

SHEILA: But now that it's here...?

DAPHNE: "If it be now, 'tis not to come; if it be not to come, it will be now; if it be not now, yet it will come."

SHEILA: Who said that?

DAPHNE: A dead man.

SHEILA: So?

DAPHNE: The prospect of death does not make me want to exchange intimacies with a virtual stranger.

SHEILA: But we're not, are we?

DAPHNE: I met you yesterday at 4:10pm. I think that makes us "virtual strangers."

Pause

SHEILA: Is "Daphne" your real name?

DAPHNE: I know "Sheila" is your real name. No-one would want it if they had a choice.

SHEILA: It's the name my mother gave me!

DAPHNE: And it fits this outback milieu perfectly.

SHEILA: "Daphne" doesn't seem to fit with a killer.

DAPHNE: So it's perfect, too.

Pause

SHEILA: Who are you? You're not your job. No-one is.

DAPHNE: No, but—

SHEILA: You must be somebody. What's your favourite colour?

DAPHNE: I don't have one.

SHEILA: Music?

DAPHNE: I don't listen to it.

SHEILA: You don't listen to music?

DAPHNE: I just said.

SHEILA: That is weird. What about movies?

DAPHNE: I don't go to the movies. I don't watch TV or DVDs.

SHEILA: What do you do when you're not working?

DAPHNE: I'm always working. There's always something to do, something to sharpen, a drug to mix, a plane to catch. It never stops. The only thing more limitless than the universe is the desire for death in the human heart.

SHEILA: That is sick.

DAPHNE: That is real. It's something you haven't admitted in yourself.

SHEILA: There's nothing to admit!

DAPHNE: Whatever.

Pause

SHEILA: You know if it comes down to it I will outlast you.

DAPHNE: How do you know that?

SHEILA: If I need to I will drink the water.

DAPHNE: What water? Where?

SHEILA: In the toilet.

DAPHNE: Good luck with that one. (*Pause*) How can you love a man like Doggett?

SHEILA: Why do you love anyone? He's a real man—that's what I love. The difference between a man and a woman. He's hairy, loud and impatient, but also curious, tender and generous.

DAPHNE: I haven't seen any of that.

SHEILA: You've been following him? Where?

DAPHNE: Back in Darwin. He's a drinker—like you—but he likes his women young and wrapped around a pole. Gets into fights easily because of that mouth of his. (*Pause*) Whether he's alive or dead you're never going to see that money he owes you. How much was it again?

SHEILA: Twenty-seven thousand.

DAPHNE: That must have been some poker game. You were obviously playing with the wrong men.

SHEILA: It was only the two of us.

DAPHNE: What about Jim Beam and Johnnie Walker? They must have been there as well.

Pause

SHEILA: I don't know what you mean.

DAPHNE: How long has it been?

SHEILA: How long has what been?

DAPHNE: Since you had a drink. I bet you can count it down to the second.

SHEILA: Does that really matter?

DAPHNE: It does to you. I can tell. You've been scratching yourself for the last few hours.

SHEILA: You have to let him live. Please.

DAPHNE: You know I can't do that.

SHEILA: We could die here. Without food. Without water.

DAPHNE: I know.

SHEILA: The two of us. Together.

DAPHNE: Maybe. (*Snatching up the menu on the table*) Shame we can't order from the restaurant. I like crumbed—

Pause

SHEILA: What is it?

DAPHNE: You wrote this menu?

SHEILA: Of course. Every week.

DAPHNE: No I mean, this is your handwriting?

SHEILA: Yes. Why? Can't you read—

Daphne takes out a sheet of paper and compares it to the menu.

DAPHNE: Oh shit.

SHEILA: What is it?

DAPHNE: (*holding up the paper*) This is the confirmation letter you sent me.

SHEILA: What?

DAPHNE: The letter confirming you wanted a hit on one John Doggett.

SHEILA: Me?

DAPHNE: You have no idea do you?

SHEILA: What are you talking about? This is insane!

DAPHNE: Absolutely. Don't worry I've seen it before.

SHEILA: Seen what? What are you talking about? What—

DAPHNE: You love him but you hate him as well. You adore him but you also loathe him. Consciously you think killing is bad but subconsciously you want the crows to pick at his bones.

SHEILA: I did not send that letter!

Sheila snatches the letter from Daphne, reads it. She looks at Daphne, looks at the letter, looks back at Daphne. She crumples to the floor.

SHEILA: I've killed him!

DAPHNE: Not yet I haven't.

SHEILA: How can you joke about something like that?

DAPHNE: I never joke. Especially about work.

SHEILA: OK. I must have—it was—

DAPHNE: A black out? You did it when you were drunk? The writing's not great but it's still legible.

SHEILA: I can't believe it. I hate violence. Really I do.

DAPHNE: You obviously hate him more.

SHEILA: Please. Please! I love him. I love him. He—

DAPHNE: I'm here to do a job. The job you want me to do. OK? All we have to do is get out of here and—

We hear the roar of a truck engine and lights sweep across the room.

SHEILA: He's here!

Sheila rushes to the window and stares into the night.

SHEILA: He's parking in the truck bay.

DAPHNE: That's a big rig.

SHEILA: He's so far away!

DAPHNE: He's getting down.

SHEILA: (*calling out*) John! John! Look out! Stay away!