

Serial

A Comedy in One Act
by Scot Moore
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Characters:

Gary Ridgway (GRK) – mid 40's
Ted Bundy (TB) – mid to late 30's
Ed Gein (EG) – late 50's to early 60's
Jack the Ripper (JTR) – mid to late 30's
David Berkowitz (SOS) – mid to late 20's
BARISTA – slender, mid 20's, long brown hair

Setting:

A coffee shop some time in the future, in the after-life. There is a counter, two tables, a stool, and several chairs. ALL characters are dead, but shouldn't look like it.

Serial was first performed by Zealots + Mystics theatre company at the Minnesota Fringe Festival in 2007.

Original Cast:

Gary Ridgway – David Lind
Ted Bundy – Scot Moore
Ed Gein – Bill Gorman
Jack the Ripper – Theodore Anderson
David Berkowitz – David Schneider
Barista – Mariah Christensen

(At rise, Ted Bundy is leaning over the counter of the coffee shop talking to the BARISTA, a young attractive brunette with long, straight hair. She is obviously taken with him, and is making his drink while they talk.)

TB

So, when's the end of your shift?

BARISTA

Not for a few hours yet.

TB

Really. Do you have any plans?

BARISTA

I have harp lessons at sunset, but I'm free after that.

TB

Huh. Do you like late evening walks in the forest?

BARISTA

(not hearing as she's running the espresso machine) Huh?

TB

Or possibly and heavily wooded park?

BARISTA

I'll have to think about that, Ted. You're awfully cute, but I've heard about you. They tell me you're quite the lady-killer.

TB

Really? Hah! *(to himself as she turns away to get his drink)* They couldn't come up with anything better than that?

BARISTA

Here's your coffee. A triple espresso.

TB

Thank you, darling. *(He takes his espresso and sits quietly at a small table, reading a newspaper.)*

(JTR enters and walks up to the counter. He notices TED and talks to him while he's waiting for his drink. TED only half pays attention at

*first because he's concentrating on the
BARISTA)*

JTR

I'll have Earl Gray tea, with a lemon. Theodore, how are you today?

TB

I'm excellent, Jack. You see there's a new girl?

JTR

Indeed I do. She seems just your type as a matter of fact.

TB

That's just what I was thinking.

JTR

Well, I'll give you this, Theodore; you're focused.

TB

I keep my eye on the prize.

JTR

Where are the others? I thought I was normally the *fashionably late* chap.

TB

Gary and David are trying to pick up a fifth member. (*checking his watch*) They should be here any minute actually.

JTR

And who is the new recruit?

TB

(*preoccupied*) What?

JTR

(*following TED's eyes back to the BARISTA*) Indeed, she's fetching. Theodore, she's in the afterlife for an eternity, just like you.

TB

Hunh? Right. Sorry, you were saying?

JTR

The fifth member?

TB

I don't know. David said he was trying to prove a point. Said this guy was the right person for today's discussion.

JTR

David's normally pretty lively himself, I can't imagine who he'd bring that could make a point he couldn't.

(DAVID and GARY enter)

TB

David can make a point? *(JTR nearly spits his tea)* Welcome, gentlemen.

SOS

(walking instantly to the counter) Good afternoon. *(to BARISTA)* I'll have a Chi Tea.

GRK

(looking around perplexed) Where is everyone? This place is normally packed on a Monday night.

TB

It's Lent.

SOS

All the minions are out picking up Catholic meat-eaters.

TB

Aren't you supposed to know these things, Gary?

GRK

I gave up eating meat when the buzzards ate my liver. Guess I just forgot about the whole practice. *(to BARISTA)* Coffee, black.

TB

Unbelievable that there are still people doing time on a meat rap.

JTR

Why do you think us Brits converted from Catholicism?

TB

Divorce... hierarchical malfeasance... an excuse for mass executions...

JTR

Oh, posh! What you hold true in life, will be in the afterlife.

TB

That's awfully biblical for you, Jack.

GRK

That's not the exact quote.

SOS

Oh, who cares. It's true whatever it is. You're doing penance, aren't you?

GRK

Actually, I'm not Catholic. I'm... well, I was Pentacostal.

(The rest clutch their drinks a little closer and slide partially away from Gary)

JTR

Well... as amusing as Gary's spiritual misfortune may be I don't think we're here to discuss the philosophical ramifications of pre-mortal encumbrances.

SOS

What's that?

TB

He said you're full of shit, David.

SOS

I'm pretty sure he didn't say that.

TB

Then pay better attention next time.

SOS

Pretty boy.

(GARY sits)

TB

So, is everyone here? *(notices no fifth person)* Where's your special new member, David?

(ED GEIN enters, crosses to counter)

SOS

Well, I was trying to get Richard Ramirez to show up, but he said he was visiting his wife.

TB

I'll be damned. We may be in luck, gentlemen. I believe *that* is Ed Gein. Isn't that strange?

GRK

Still not as strange as running into your own victims. I was rolling stones up a hill last week and had to push against two of the first three hookers I killed... Just bizarre.

SOS

(*Crossing to EG*) Hey, Eddie! Yeah, you, come over here.

EG

So, what are you all doing here?

TB

We're having our weekly debate. What are *you* doing here?

EG

Mother sent me for coffee beans. I wanted warm milk. Please don't tell mother.

TB

Don't worry, we won't.

JTR

May I call you Edward? (*EG nods his approval*) Well, Edward, this is something of a summit. We get together on Monday nights to discuss the state of serial killing, methods of apprehension... that sort of thing. It's usually a nice healthy row. We're... required to meet until we solve a couple things.

EG

Oh.

JTR

Gentlemen, what are we starting with this week?

GRK

I think we'll try a different tack this week and discuss the justification for violent crime.

SOS

What do you mean?

GRK

As in, some of our crimes are justified, and (*indicating SOS*) others aren't.

(*ED shakes his head and goes back to the counter to wait for his beverage*)

JTR

I think I know how you feel Gary.

GRK

You do?

JTR

Justification means “serving a purpose,” correct? *(nods, shrugs from others)* Well, I was also performing a public service.

SOS

Exactly. Anyone who walks around at night in a dark alley when there’s a serial killer on the loose is asking for trouble.

TB

You’re saying that if you knew *you* were on the loose that you’d stay in for the night?

SOS

If I knew there was some crazy son-of-a-bitch out there with a .44 revolver I’d think twice... well... No, I’d still go out and shoot people. If I shot me in the process, then I deserved it.

(the rest pause to reflect on DAVID’s ridiculousness)

GRK

You’re telling me you get pleasure from killing random people?

SOS

You don’t?

GRK

I think it’s horrible to kill randomly.

SOS

Oh my god. Society begs to be punished every minute of every day. The only true way to do that is to make an example of a few random people. *You* of all people should know that.

GRK

That’s not right. I don’t believe that society as a whole should be punished for the wrongs of a few people. As Jack said, I was doing a public service.

SOS

Public service? Oh, come on! A public service would have been to screw those hookers, pay them for it, and keep them off welfare. Besides, they're just a product of the society they're from. Why treat the symptoms, Gary?

GRK:

Don't wax philosophical about who the more deserving victims are with me. I was listening to God to help me choose my victims, your victims were chosen by your neighbor's dog!

TB

Okay, there's your first problem. You're calling them victims. The very word suggests that they were human... equal, or in one way or another not deserving of being... put down. You're both cold blooded killers. Obviously you thought of your victims as something less than yourselves. Am I right?

GRK & SOS

What's your point? What do you mean?

TB

Well, you're both clearly convinced that you are superior in some way to the people you kill. David, you believe that society is sick and that you've been appointed to make examples.

SOS

That's precisely what I'm talking about!

(ED sits back down on stool)

TB:

And, Gary, you think the motivating factor in choosing who dies rests in the target themselves, correct?

GRK

I just don't see the point in punishing an innocent bystander for the crimes of the guilty.

JTR

How eloquent.

TB

Well, if we're discussing the validity of the crime, then I believe there's an angle of it that hasn't been mentioned yet. Yes, there are people who are a scourge on society and should be eliminated from its ranks. And society itself needs to have examples set to keep it in line. However, I could never kill any one of you.

GRK

Why's that?

(BARISTA brings EG's warm milk over to him)

SOS

Because none of us are twenty-two year old brunettes with great tits? *(they all stare at BARISTA)*

BARISTA

(noticing the stares) Refills? (all decline, she returns to the counter)

TB

No, because I consider you equals. For someone to be a *victim* they have to be equal to the person who killed them, and therefore not deserving of being killed. A *victim* is a *human* innocent. To use that word suggests there's a level existence. I couldn't kill someone I respected.

GRK

They do training like that in the military.

SOS

What do you mean?

TB

And not just the military. For example, during World War II, the government distributed mass propaganda so that people wouldn't feel so bad about killing our enemies. The Japs, the Krauts... And, in the military they do that so a soldier's conscience doesn't get to him.

SOS

(giggles) Conscience... heh!

JTR

It's called dehumanization.

TB

You can't kill without it. The biggest difference between us and the military on that score is that we were born with that attribute. They have to learn it.

SOS

Makes sense.

GRK

That's a good point.

JTR

You and Gary appear to agree on something. Isn't that pleasant, David?

SOS

Huh? Oh, I didn't realize you were talking to me. I've been called "Son of Sam" for so long that I forgot what it's like to hear my own name.

GRK

Are you talking about the media or the voices in your head?

SOS

Oh, the voices are gone now.

JTR

Oh, mercy. There's something else you Americans are pathetically dependent on is blaming your problems on your brain. Voices, hah! Testosterone is the only true motivator of violence. If there's any voice calling to you it's the one that keeps you from hopping unashamedly out of bed in the morning and saying, "Hello, mother." The thing all serial killers have in common is a penis.

EG

Can you not use that word, please?

SOS

What? Penis?

JTR

(whispering) I believe Edward is referring to the word, *mother*.

SOS

(whispering very loudly) I can't hear you, you limey prick.

JTR

Have some respect for your elders, David. Since you seem to crave media attention, you should know that without Edward the world wouldn't have such classic films as Psycho, Silence of the Lambs, The Texas Chainsaw Massacre and dozens of other serial killer studies. He's one of the first terror media darlings... *(cooly)* After myself of course.

SOS

Sappy crap. It's all artsy-fartsy crap.

TB

Well, not everyone can be the subject of a phoned-in Spike Lee joint. What was that crap called?

SOS
Summer of Sam, thank you.

JTR
Hm, priceless.

SOS
What would you know about it?

TB
Old Jack here has had more movies made about him than you have.

JTR
I was a particular fan of the Johnny Depp, Robbie Coltrane version. Although they had me played by that old sod Ian Holm.

SOS
Oh, that crap?

TB
What's the matter with it?

SOS
They blamed the Masons for Christ's sake! Ooooooh! Anytime we can't figure something out we just blame a secret society, or some stupid conspiracy theory.

GRK
Why not blame it on a secret society? Don't get me wrong, I love the man's work, but isn't "Jack the Ripper" itself a fictitious name?

JTR
That's all a matter of perspective, I suppose.

SOS
At any rate, I think it's crap.

TB
Do you think everything's crap?

SOS
That movie was inaccurate and misleading.

JTR
Was it?

TB

Let's not start discussing who did what, okay? It's not what we're here to discuss.

JTR

Indeed. Let's get back on track, shall we? What's the next subject, Gary?

GRK

The next item on the agenda this week is quality versus quantity.

TB

Ah, yes. Since we seem to be discussing penis size anyway...

SOS

You're not supposed to say that word around Eddie here.

GRK

You're a baffoon sometimes, Berkie.

SOS

I told you not to call me that!

TB

So, when was it that you two started spending so much time together?

SOS

Ever since Gacy and Dahmer decided to start their own little clique with Albert Fish and that Pedro Lopez... whoever. They've got their child-killer concern, so we figured we'd put together the socially conscious concern.

JTR

Pedro? A Spaniard?

TB

Peruvian, technically. Claims he's responsible for three hundred fifty kids, mostly girls.

JTR

Oh, there you Americans are with your numbers again... So, what were you saying Theodore?

TB

Thank you. I think that with the addition of Ed, here, we now have among us the most notorious serial killers of all time. Maybe not all of us in numbers, but certainly in name recognition and historical impact, so lets discuss which is more important.

JTR

I think *quality versus quantity* is a rather crude way of putting it, don't you?

I vote quantity. GRK

Okay, why? TB

I don't know, it just is. GRK

That's a profound argument. TB

Thank you. GRK

Explain yourself, Gary. JTR

GRK
What other explanation is there? The question itself is ridiculous. You can only be a serial killer if you've killed multiple people, right? Therefore, it's obviously numbers that matter most.

That's stupid. SOS

TB
Look at Ed, he only killed two people and dug the rest up, right Ed?

EG
I think I have to go home to mom now.

TB
No, seriously, you're what everyone thinks of when they think of a twisted mind. You actually help to prove my point. There's a strong correlation between quality and quantity. The nature of your crimes account for a significant number of crimes of less artistic killers. (*to the others*) The officers that searched Ed's home were scarred for life. Doesn't that count for a great deal?

SOS:
Provided the officers can count.

JTR
To hell with the police. They've got to *earn* my tax dollars, thank you.

SOS

Then quality's... better... (*he has confused himself*)

GRK

Pretty easy to argue when you don't have the numbers to match up.

JTR

Gentlemen please.

TB

Relax, Gary. We see your point, but you have to realize that if it weren't for people like Jack, Ed, and myself you wouldn't have been as motivated and inventive as you were.

GRK

Were?

SOS

You do realize you're dead, right?

GRK

The impact lives on, though. Even TV specials they do on Bundy refer to me at some point.

SOS

Yeah, because he helped them catch you, dumb ass! Ex post facto doesn't count.

JTR

Children! Children, please. This is getting us nowhere. Gary, you've established your position, it's time to let someone else voice his opinion.

SOS

I say finesse has a lot to do with it. Look at that BTK guy. He got away with it for like thirty years...

TB

Twenty-six.

SOS

...in his own home town. That's tough.

GRK

O please, he called *himself* Bind Torture Kill.

JTR

Indeed. Anyone here who *hasn't* bound, tortured, and killed someone, raise your hand... (*ED puts his hand up*) Edward, put your hand down!

(The BARISTA smiles while NOT raising her hand, still keeping to herself. TED notices, but says nothing to inform the others)

EG

Mother's going to be awful sore if I'm not home by seven-thirty.

TB

Ew, that's right. You're both on the same plane of existence now, she can punish you again.

SOS

How's that goin' for you Eddie?

EG

Mmmghnnh.

JTR

Leave him alone David. And Edward, you have to understand a bit of our confusion at your circumstance. Not every boy's best friend is his mother.

GRK

Yeah, for some of us it's our knives.

JTR

I like the way you think, Gary. I feel like we should talk more. Are you free tomorrow?

GRK

Let me check my schedule... *(pulling a palm-pilot out of his pocket)* ...flogging at nine, burning over hot coals at eleven thirty...

TB

Moving right along.

EG

I'm going home.

SOS

What, did you leave the lights on or something? That's what you get for having flammable lamp-shades.

(a stunned moment of silence, until they realize that no one's actually offended)

EG

No, it's just that mother will complain if I burn the roast.

TB

Ed, can we get a vote on quality or quantity before you leave?

EG

Do I have to?

JTR

Yes, Edward.

EG

Okay... You're both right. Now I have to get my turkey-baster back from Jeffrey before the roast gets dry. I never should've borrowed it to him. *(as he exits, the BARISTA hands him the bag of coffee beans)*

JTR

Borrowed? I've never heard that word used that way before. It must be an American thing.

TB

No, it's a Wisconsin thing. Go figure.

GRK

Dahmer was from Wisconsin, too, wasn't he?

SOS

That state's kinda fucked up, ain't it?

TB

Gein, Dahmer, McCarthy... the list goes on.

GRK

Well, Gein was no help.

TB

At the least he counts as one vote on each side.

SOS

Okay, this is taking too long. We don't need a dissertation from everyone here. Let's see a show of hands. Everyone who thinks it's quality, raise your hand. *(Jack and David raise their hands)* Well, nevermind. That leaves us with a draw. Dammit, Gein is now completely useless... on top of being a cheese-head.

TB

(to the BARISTA) Do you have any thoughts on this?

BARISTA

(*head still down in book*) Not today.

TB

See, I'm not so sure quantity is better. I feel a little... wishy-washy.

JTR

Wishy what?

SOS

How could you be? You're obviously about numbers! You killed more people than anyone else here.

GRK

Excuse me? I don't think so.

SOS

Do you know how many of Ted's they never found, Gary?

GRK

Oh, give me a break. I work my ass off for years to be trumped by some hypothetical unknown number?! Assholes.

JTR

I'm interested to hear how you feel Theodore. I just assumed that you were completely about numbers.

TB

Well, while Ed only killed a couple of people, he did it in such a fashion so as to never be forgotten. And, I have to admit there's not one murder of mine that stands out as much as any of yours, Jack.

JTR

I did have a remarkable flare, didn't I. So did Ed.

SOS

So? He didn't want anyone to see it. I mean, if he had skinned the bodies, then put them back into... circulation so people could find them, *that* would be flare. But, no. He kept it all at home where no one was supposed to find it.

TB

So what? He was shy. Either way, it was still quite a show.

JTR

Perhaps he was too nice to kill people on his own, so he dug up supplementary victims so as to complete his art.

TB

I can't tell you how much I hate that word.

SOS

Penis? *(a collective head-shake from the rest)* Mother?

JTR

Victim!

SOS

Oh.

GRK

Anyway. So, you're saying that were he less shy he would have killed more people?

JTR

Or younger. He certainly was the oldest of us all.

SOS

What did you mean when you said he only killed two people.

TB

Some bar maid and his mother. And there's some debate about him possibly having killed his brother, too.

JTR

You are quite the little researcher, aren't you Theodore.

TB

What have you been doing with your time? You've been here longer than the rest of us, why aren't you studying?

JTR

While you Yanks are out comparing your penises us Brits are putting ours to better use.

SOS & GRK

(while TED shakes his head) Such as?

JTR

Shagging your women. Really, you need to start focusing on the right things. You have some wonderfully... what's the phrase I'm looking for here... "corn-fed" ladies in the states.

TB

That's all you've been doing for a hundred and thirty years?

JTR

What else am I to do with my time? I'm just glad you (*indicating TED and GARY*) boys send them down here young. I don't enjoy reading as much as you, Theodore.

TB

I can respect that.

SOS

Can we get back to the point here? The guy killed his mother?

GRK

Either that or she carved herself up.

SOS

That would explain why she's mad at him.

GRK

The fact that she lets him cook for her is somewhat disturbing for me.

TB

No, what's disturbing is that he lent his turkey-baster to Jeff Dahmer.

SOS

Why do you have to do that? Now I'm not going to be able to eat for a week.

TB

Sorry, I've been thinking about it ever since he said it.

GRK

Okay, if we're talking about numbers, then why aren't we talking to people like Dahmer and Gacy?

TB

Because they're sick in the head. They killed little kids and ate people, Gary.

SOS

Yeah, even I can't see how killing kids is an appropriate activity.

GRK

Then again, some of those guys did kill an awful lot of people...

JTR

Well, I'd assume it's also because they never intended their crimes to be discovered. They stashed their victims where they simply couldn't be found.

SOS

So quality serial killing is an exhibitionist thing, like I said. So, then why not Richard Speck, Charlie Whitman...

GRK, TB, & JTR

Mass murderers.

SOS

(pouting) Oh, right. What was I thinking?

TB

(sees that BARISTA is starting to pack up) I think we just have to call it a draw for now. I hate to cut this short but I have to be leaving.

SOS

Where are you going?

TB

I have a date.

GRK

A DATE?!

JTR

Good for you old chap. Same time next Monday, gentlemen?

TB

Sounds great.

SOS

Well, I guess I can get back to the film festival. There's two film-school student productions about me this year. 'Course I'll never see a dime of it.

(DAVID exits)

GRK

I suppose I should get back to my torture.

JTR

It surprises me that you're so dutiful about it.

GRK

Yeah, baptism's a bitch.

JTR

Let's walk together. Do you mind if we talk over torture?

Not at all.

GRK

So, you like knives, Gary?

JTR

(GRK & JTR exit. TB walks up to the counter and starts flirting with the BARISTA. She grabs her coat and they leave. BLACKOUT)

CURTAIN