

OWEN AND GEORGE PLAY CHESS

A short dark comedy

John Shanahan

CHARACTERS

Owen O'Reilly, between 65 and 70. Cardigan over a button-down shirt. Well-worn jeans.

George Sheffly, 70 or older, in a sweatshirt and slacks.

SETTING

A table in a park. Owen sits R, George sits L. On the table is a chessboard. The game is in progress; Owen has already captured three of George's pieces.

It is Owen's turn to move. George, distracted, watches half-heartedly. Owen moves a piece. George considers the board, then:

GEORGE

I could kill you right now.

Owen looks surprised. He checks the board.

OWEN

No you couldn't! You're not even close to putting me in check.

GEORGE

I meant I could really kill you. Take your life. Right now.

OWEN

Oh, could you?

GEORGE

Damn right I could.

OWEN

Right now?

GEORGE

Right now. Crush you like a bug.

OWEN (*flatly*)

Oh. (*He looks at the board*) It's your move.

George looks over the board for a moment. He moves a piece.

GEORGE

Yessir, I could kill you if I felt like it.

OWEN

Well, I'm glad you don't feel like it.

GEORGE

Not right now I don't. (*Pause*) But I could.

OWEN

You're trying to distract me because I'm winning again. It won't work. (*He moves a piece*)

GEORGE

I'm not trying to distract you, I'm thinking about killing you!

OWEN

Hunh. It's your move. (*Pause*) So when did this all start, you wanting to kill me?

GEORGE

Oh, I just realized it today. Not that long ago.

OWEN

Was it something I did?

GEORGE

It's not like that.

OWEN

I'm glad.

GEORGE

I don't need to be provoked. (*He moves a piece.*) It could happen any moment, though!

OWEN

I appreciate the warning.

GEORGE

You couldn't stop me.

OWEN

No?

GEORGE

Not even if you tried.

OWEN

Maybe I'm stronger than you. *(He moves a piece)*

GEORGE

It's not a question of strength. Anyone knows that.

OWEN

I don't.

GEORGE

It's about instinct. *(He moves a piece.)* Killer instinct.

OWEN

And I don't have that?

GEORGE

No.

OWEN

But you do.

GEORGE

Oh, yes.

Owen moves a piece.

OWEN

Check.

GEORGE

Oh.

A pause as George looks at his predicament.

OWEN

I'd try to stop you, though.

GEORGE (*head down*)

Of course you would. (*Looking up briefly*) But it wouldn't help.

OWEN

Because of your killer instinct.

GEORGE

Right.

OWEN

Seems an unfair advantage.

GEORGE

Doesn't it, though?

OWEN

But I'd have to try.

GEORGE

Yes. (*He sighs.*) Got me over a barrel here.

OWEN

You'll figure it out. It's early yet.

Long pause

OWEN

Have you thought about how to do it?

GEORGE

Get out of check?

OWEN

No. To kill me.

GEORGE

Well, the idea only came to me just a while ago.

OWEN

Even so...

GEORGE

Now you're trying to distract me.

OWEN

No, not all at all. I'm just curious, that's all.

George leans back.

GEORGE

Now that you mention it, no. I suppose I should, though.

OWEN

Don't rush on my account.

GEORGE

Does seem a little rash to announce that I could kill you without knowing how I'd go about it, doesn't it?

OWEN

Not so much. Maybe it'll be a crime of passion.

GEORGE

No, I don't like the sound of that.