

SERGEI DIBBS AND THE BASS OF DOOM

A Ten-Minute Play

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CHARACTERS

Sergei Dibbs	Male, late twenties, obsessed, unshaven, undone
Detective Annapolis	Male, fifties, a joker, settled comfortably into middle age
Detective Pergo	Female, forties, smart, sensuous, taking night classes

Ideally, the actor playing Sergei should be black, but need only appear to be of mixed race.

SETTING

New York City police interrogation room.

TIME

After April 2008.

“The music Jaco made on this instrument is the bass world’s Declaration of Independence.”

– Neil Stubenhaus

Police interrogation room – 5:00 a.m. Sergei Dibbs, disheveled and with a cut on his forehead, sits at a table upon which a bass guitar lies flat. To one side, Lt. Annapolis sits eating an Egg McMuffin and drinking coffee, both noisily. The morning paper is propped on one knee and he peruses it. Opposite Annapolis is the door.

DIBBS

Do you have to make so much noise when you eat?

Annapolis looks at him, amused.

ANNAPOLIS

No, I guess not.

He takes the noisiest sip of coffee yet and smacks his lips. Dibbs is disgusted, Annapolis laughs.

Come on, don't get pissed off. I'm goofin' with you. Look I'm finished.

Takes the last bite of McMuffin.

Okay, Dibbs. Uh, do you prefer to be called Dibbs or Sergei? What do your friends call you?

DIBBS

I don't have any friends.

ANNAPOLIS

How did I know you were going to say that? So what do you want *me* to call you. Sergei or Dibbs or Mr. Dibbs or what?

DIBBS

Sergei would be fine.

ANNAPOLIS

Great. So tell me again, Sergei. You call this thing the "Bass of Doom"? Is that what you call it?

DIBBS

Not this bass. This bass is nothing. It's a cheap piece of crap made in Mexico. The neck is so fat it ... it ...

ANNAPOLIS

Wait, I heard one. What was it? Oh. He's so fat ... oh, yeah ... he's so fat, when he bent over he got busted for two hundred pounds of crack.

Dibbs is nonplussed. Annapolis laughs himself out.

ANNAPOLIS (cont'd)

So. Not the Bass of Doom.

DIBBS

No.

ANNAPOLIS

But you stole this bass, which isn't the Bass of Doom.

DIBBS

I didn't steal it.

ANNAPOLIS

(Not hearing.) I don't get it. This is not the Bass of Doom, which belonged to some big important musician ...

DIBBS

Jaco Pastorius.

ANNAPOLIS

Yeah, this Pastorini guy, and you didn't find it, but you stole this bass anyway. Even though it wasn't the Bass of Doom, which you were looking for.

DIBBS

I didn't ...

ANNAPOLIS

(Sarcastic.) It's not that you're a common thief, breaking and entering and threatening the property owner with a deadly weapon.

DIBBS

It wasn't a deadly weapon. It was this bass. The guy was hysterical. I was just trying to protect myself.

Annapolis rises, picks up the bass, and raises it as if he will bean Dibbs with it.

What are you doing!

ANNAPOLIS

Deadly weapon, see? *(He sets the bass down.)* And then you were climbing out the window and fell and hit your head.

DIBBS

Yes.

ANNAPOLIS

And when you woke up the police were there. I've got to ask you ...

DIBBS

What?

ANNAPOLIS

You're full of shit.

DIBBS

What kind of question is that? That's not a question.

ANNAPOLIS

You're a petty thief.

DIBBS

(Angry now.) I am not a petty thief! That's the furthest thing from the truth! The Bass of Doom has been missing for twenty years. It is the single most important musical instrument to have existed in the last one hundred years, belonging to John Francis Anthony Pastorius III, known as Jaco the world over. He invented a way of playing -- multiple ways of playing -- that revolutionized the instrument ... no, that reinvented the instrument!

ANNAPOLIS

(Yawning.) Jazz? Is that what you said? He played jazz?

DIBBS

Yes, jazz!

ANNAPOLIS

You know, if it was just me, I'd walk away from this. We wouldn't even be in this room right now. You know why? Because jazz is boring. It's stupid. It's like they don't even know what note to play, and the ones they pick are spastic. They always pick the worst sounding notes. So I would just say to the sergeant out there, petty criminal. Lock him up for thirty days and that's that. But you had to use a deadly weapon, and so we've got to make a federal case out of it. Well, not actually a federal case, but, you know.

DIBBS

I can't talk to you.

ANNAPOLIS

You can't talk to me? You have to talk to me.

DIBBS

You're a Neanderthal.

ANNAPOLIS

And you're a homo ... sapiens, that is. (*Laughs uproariously.*)

DIBBS

Try to imagine this, okay? Try to imagine if the only way people knew how to play the piano was to beat on the lid.

ANNAPOLIS

What?

DIBBS

If the piano was up there on the stage and somebody came out in a tuxedo with tails, sat down on the bench and started pounding out some very interesting rhythms on the lid of the piano.

ANNAPOLIS

I'd say the guy's a dope.

DIBBS

Right. And then one day, some guy comes up and says, Hey listen, everybody, you can open the lid and play these keys. And you can use these pedals underneath.

ANNAPOLIS

Yeah?

DIBBS

That's what Jaco did for the bass.

ANNAPOLIS

Oh? (*Kind of gets it.*) Oh. Really?

DIBBS

(*Amped.*) Whole worlds opened up. Melodies on the bass, in the high registers, the use of harmonics and false harmonics, vocal phrasings. Funk lines like machine gun fire. Slow, deep melodies of such pathos. He played everything from Bach to Bacharach on the bass and made it all beautiful. And that's why I need to find the bass and restore it to its rightful owner.

ANNAPOLIS

And who would that be?

DIBBS

Everyone. Humanity.

ANNAPOLIS

(Thinks about it.) Nah. I think you're just a petty thief. And not too bright.

DIBBS

Oh, *I'm* not too bright.

Annapolis picks up the bass again and holds it threateningly.

ANNAPOLIS

Yeah, Mr. oh, I'm gonna protect myself with this bass guitar.

The door opens and Lt. Pergo enters carrying a clipboard. She is sensuous, confident, personable, yet professional.

PERGO

Annapolis, are you about to strike the suspect with that bass guitar?

ANNAPOLIS

No, no, you got it all wrong.

DIBBS

Aha! See? I wasn't going to hit that guy with the bass. It just looked that way!

PERGO

Put the bass down.

ANNAPOLIS

Yes, sir. That is, ma'am. *(Puts the bass down.)* Took you long enough, Pergo. Wha'd you find out?

PERGO

Plenty. *(Consulting clipboard.)* There was a Jaco Pastorius. Jazz musician, whose bass guitar, called the "Bass of Doom," was stolen from Central Park in 1986. Pastorius died not long after -- in an unrelated incident -- from injuries sustained in a beating he received from a nightclub bouncer.

DIBBS

I told you.

ANNAPOLIS

I'll be damned.

PERGO

I've also talked with the homeowner and the D.A. (*To Dibbs.*) You're walking.

ANNAPOLIS

What?!

DIBBS

Really? I can go?

PERGO

We'll talk about the conditions.

ANNAPOLIS

That's B.S., Pergo. Burglary and aggravated assault with a deadly ...

PERGO

You can go, Annapolis.

ANNAPOLIS

What do you mean?

PERGO

I'll finish up.

ANNAPOLIS

We're working this case together.

PERGO

No, I'm working it alone now. The desk sergeant needs you. There's a Jamaican cabbie downstairs who was robbed at knifepoint. (*Standoff.*) He's waiting.

ANNAPOLIS

Yeah, yeah. (*Grabs his paper and coat and grumbles on the way to the door.*) Guy can't get a break. Decorated female veteran, makes First Detective ...

PERGO

What's that, Annapolis?

ANNAPOLIS

Nothing ... ma'am. I got a pot-head cabbie waiting for me.

He exits.

DIBBS

So, conditions.

PERGO

Psychological counseling.

DIBBS

What? I'm just a guy looking for a bass guitar. I'm no psycho.

PERGO

I did some digging, Sergei. Your name, Sergei Dibbs, it's unusual. Russian and ... European? So I poked around. If I'm not mistaken, your father was one Oscar Dibbs. Am I right? (*Dibbs nods, suspicious.*) Oscar Dibbs, jazz bassist. Not unsuccessful, but mostly a session man. Right? Toured with Miles Davis in the seventies for a few months.

DIBBS

What does this have to do with anything?

PERGO

I like you Dibbs. You're cute. And I believe your story. That's what I told the D.A. And that's why I think you're going to need therapy.

DIBBS

Uh, okay. Sure, if you think that's what I need. Sure, I'm happy to get, you know, some help.

PERGO

(*Sits close to him.*) Let's start now. Why wait? Tell me about your mother.

DIBBS

What?

PERGO

Your mother.

DIBBS

Is this a police question?

PERGO

I'll tell you what I know. Your mom came out of a catalog, didn't she? A mail-order bride from Moscow.

DIBBS

I don't need to get into this. Where did you get this information? It's private.

PERGO

We're the police, Sergei. The government. So what happened? They didn't get along?

DIBBS

They ... fought.

PERGO

And they divorced because ... she didn't really know he was African-American before she got here, did she? She was expecting somebody ... whiter.

DIBBS

What the hell is this? Who are you to ...?

PERGO

Just work with me, Dibbs. If you talk, you walk. Otherwise. The choice is yours. *(Pause.)*
Your mother. She's living now in Ohio.

DIBBS

(Bitter.) Ohio. Who the hell lives in Ohio.

PERGO

Your mom, apparently, with her white husband and white kids. And you find that disgusting. You feel abandoned and rejected.

DIBBS

A mail-order son.

PERGO

Good, good. In 1982, it turns out, Oscar Dibbs -- your dad -- met and formed a friendship with one Jaco Pastorius.

DIBBS

He called Jaco ... *(Pause.)*

PERGO

What?

DIBBS

The messiah.

PERGO

Wow, that's something. Do you see your dad much?

DIBBS

No.

PERGO

I knew it! I'm thinking that Jaco's bass, the Bass of Doom, is a symbol to you. Isn't it? (*Dibbs stares at her, confused.*) I listened to his music.

DIBBS

You did?

PERGO

Online. And you know what I think gets to you? It's that ... growl. That mournful, lonely sound of his. It's the same mournful howl inside your soul, isn't it? See, I think there's a transference happening. You want that bass, because Jaco is the one who understands you, who knows your pain, who gives you sympathy, and ... love. Isn't that right?

DIBBS

(*On the verge of tears.*) It's just a fucking bass. Look, I don't have to tell you this. This is not police business. (*Stands.*) I want a lawyer!

PERGO

Okay, okay, take it easy. I'll level with you. I'm taking night classes in psychology. I love profiling. I want to work for the FBI eventually. So when I started doing your background check, it was like a treasure chest!

DIBBS

This is sick! You have no right whatsoever. I want an attorney.

PERGO

Sergei, calm down. You're going to need a real therapist. (*Pause.*) They found it.

DIBBS

Found what?

She pulls a magazine from her clipboard and opens it.

PERGO

The April 2008 issue of *Bass Player* magazine reports that the Bass of Doom was found. I'm surprised you didn't know. Don't you read the news?

DIBBS

No.

PERGO

No internet? (*Dibbs shakes his head.*) It's all right here. It was found, and verified by the world's leading bass guitarists.

DIBBS

(*Sits, studies the magazine.*) That's not it. That's not the Bass of Doom. It was a ...

PERGO

Denial. That's the first stage. Oh, this is so perfect. The bass was refinished while Jaco was alive. He smashed it and it was refinished. The article talks all about it. That's the Bass of Doom. All the experts agree.

DIBBS

(*Stunned.*) But.

PERGO

What?

DIBBS

I was going to find it.

PERGO

I know. It was important to you, wasn't it? But now it's found. (*Dibbs is distraught. She pats his back.*) That's okay, it's okay. I explained it to the D.A. He understood. And the homeowner just wants you to pay for damages. I brought you something.

She pulls out a small electronic device.

I downloaded this. I thought you might like to hear it.

She presses a button. A small, tinny sound comes from the device: a recording of "Portrait of Tracy" by Jaco. Dibbs leans over the bass and weeps.

That's okay, Sergei, let it out.

She pulls him into her arms. He sobs like an abandoned child. The tinny sound blossoms into high-fidelity as the tune continues.

That's it. That's it. It's all been found.

Lights fade.

End of Play