

JACK. Beats me.

ANNIE. Jack, have you been making passes at her?

JACK. Now darling, if I did, don't you think Kate — a young woman who seems to worship you — don't you think she would tell you? *(Annie nods her head "yes.")* And has she said anything? *(Annie shakes her head "no.")* So give me a little credit then.

ANNIE. There's a monster, Jack, a monster in all of us. I don't care how decent a person is, somewhere, maybe very deep inside, there's a monster.

JACK. What're you talking about?

ANNIE. Most of us keep the monster buried, that's how we stay civilized. But every once in a while, that monster needs to come out and do what it must.

JACK. Annie — come here.

ANNIE. No.

JACK. Come here. *(She does.)* Give me a kiss. *(A beat.)* Give me a kiss. *(Instead, she slaps him, hard. He barely reacts. Another beat.)* Give me a kiss. *(She bends over, and places her lips on his. The kiss is, at first, slight, but it quickly evolves into a hard, passionate moment, interrupted when the doorbell rings.)* Yes! He has finally arrived! Welcome to the night of your life! *(Jack rushes toward the door, stopping just before he is about to open it.)* Annie? You do know how much I love you.

ANNIE. Open the door, Jack. *(Jack lets in Vincent.)*

VINCENT. Oh, I am so sorry I'm late, but the most dreadful thing happened this week and thank God I'm among friends, I am famished! Oh Annie, dear, as always you're looking so frightfully young and beautiful and to think you haven't had any work done yet! And my God, do you realize there's a coffin in the middle of your room?! Oh Jack, my most valued client — you big handsome hunk of commercial talent you. Oops, I said a bad word — "commercial"! You're not commercial! You're an artist of great integrity who just happens to make a shitload of money. Oh, I am so glad we're finally getting a chance to break bread and chat and I'm famished and what's wrong? How come I'm the only one talking?

JACK. When aren't you the only one talking, Vincent?

VINCENT. Okay, but usually you interrupt and berate me. *(Re: isolation tank.)* Is someone buried in there?

JACK. It's an isolation tank, Vincent. *Vanity Fair* is coming to photograph me in it.

VINCENT. Fabulous, Jack! An eccentric artist — Ka-ching!

ANNIE. So the most dreadful thing happened, Vincent?

VINCENT. It did?

ANNIE. You said, when you walked in —

VINCENT. Oh yes, dreadful! Haven't you heard?

ANNIE. We live in the woods, we never hear anything.

JACK. Annie, before our guest burdens us with his problems, how 'bout a scotch for Vincent and Jack? (*Annie pours both men a scotch.*)

VINCENT. "For Vincent and Jack." Oh, do not tell me you're beginning to refer to yourself in the third person.

JACK. I'm an artist, Vincent, never judge me.

VINCENT. Of course, Jack, you're a great, great artist and beyond all judgment! Besides, I never judge, I just sell. Now Jack, remember I showed you some work by that young post-modernist I was so excited about, Nicole Erickson?

JACK. How could I forget? You seemed more excited by her work than mine.

VINCENT. Well, she's dead.

ANNIE. I'm sorry, Vincent. How did she — ?

VINCENT. Suicide. Two days ago. I've been on the phone ever since.

ANNIE. And she was a kid?

VINCENT. Twenty-three.

ANNIE. Awful. I hope it wasn't over some boy —

JACK. Wasn't this the same girl with that picture in *Rolling Stone*?

ANNIE. Not the one wearing nothing but panties, with paint smeared all over her.

VINCENT. That's the one.

ANNIE. What publicity whore ever came up with that idea?

JACK. Oh, I bet the old whore's right in front of us, Annie.

VINCENT. Well, I merely suggested she show off her body to bring the proper attention to her work.

JACK. Wait. Weren't you about to debut her? You had your publicity stooges in full throttle and her big debut in your gallery all lined up —

VINCENT. Well yes, but I pulled it.

ANNIE. Why?

VINCENT. Like everything, it's complicated.

JACK. We're old friends, Vincent. Un-complicate it for us.

VINCENT. Well — I recently took another look at her work and I realized she, well, wasn't quite ready for so much public attention just yet.

JACK. I see.

VINCENT. What do you see?

JACK. You promised her everything she ever wanted, then you snatched it all away. Darling, she did kill herself over a boy. Unfortunately, the boy was Vincent.

VINCENT. Now that's damn unfair, Jack! She was a troubled young woman.

JACK. But I have a hunch, yes — I bet after this troubled young woman so tragically took her own life, I bet all of a sudden — her debut was back on.

ANNIE. Vincent, you didn't —

VINCENT. I'm a man of business, and as this very expensive house can attest to, a damn good one. I cannot deny that her death, as tragic as it is, is also, well — never mind.

ANNIE. No, tell us.

VINCENT. A terrific career move.

ANNIE. Oh for Christ's sake, Vincent!

VINCENT. Young, beautiful, a suicide — you must admit that moves you up the celebrity food chain awfully fast.

ANNIE. But to go ahead and exploit that —

VINCENT. I don't make the rules, Annie.

JACK. All right, old friend, it's time you and I had our little talk!

VINCENT. Our little talk?

JACK. Yes, but not drinking this. Annie, where's the good scotch?

ANNIE. Down in the cellar.

VINCENT. That's what I'm here for? A little talk? You had me drive two-and-a-half hours to talk?

JACK. Yes! I'll get the scotch.

VINCENT. Why couldn't we have talked in the city? Or on the phone?

JACK. Because I said here!

VINCENT. Well what about what I say?

JACK. Irrelevant!

VINCENT. Jack. I will not be treated this way!

JACK. How much money did I make for you last year?

VINCENT. All right, hurry back.

JACK. Vincent, did you ever think, well — wouldn't it be great if Jack had taken the Nicole Erickson route?

VINCENT. Meaning?

JACK. Killed myself. I'd be a dead artist. They're the most profitable, are they not? *(Jack exits.)*

VINCENT. I have a theory about artists — how big an asshole

they can be depends on how talented they are. If they are only moderately talented, they can only be moderate assholes. Now Jack's talent is colossal, which is lucky, because he's a colossal ... — Sorry, Annie.

ANNIE. Vincent, I need you to do me a favor. It's a rather large one and ... well ... — *(Suddenly, Annie begins to cry. She turns away from Vincent.)*

VINCENT. Annie?

ANNIE. It's over between Jack and me — I can't anymore. Vincent, he's just — ...

VINCENT. There, there, Annie. I know Jack must be a difficult to live with ...

ANNIE. Difficult? Vincent, haven't you noticed — my husband is psychotic!

VINCENT. Annie, I'm afraid Jack was right about one thing — he is a great artist, so we can't judge him as we judge others.

ANNIE. I've tried to leave him, Vincent —

VINCENT. No —

ANNIE. I couldn't go through with it. We're just too — connected. In ways you can't imagine.

VINCENT. Of course, you are, sweetheart. Have you tried a marriage counselor?

ANNIE. Jack refuses to go into therapy of any kind. He says an artist should never have life made rational to him.

VINCENT. Well stop fretting right now, because I know the perfect solution to your marital woes.

ANNIE. You do?

VINCENT. Have a baby. Yes, that's what all my straight friends do when their marriage is in trouble.

ANNIE. I've tried that already.

VINCENT. You did?

ANNIE. A couple of years ago, I got pregnant. Jack didn't want it.

VINCENT. I didn't know —

ANNIE. There's lots you don't know, Vincent.

JACK'S VOICE. *(Over an intercom.)* Annie! Where?!

ANNIE. For God's sake! *(She pushes a button on the intercom.)* Behind the wine rack, Jack! *(She releases the button.)* Imbecile. *(To Vincent.)* He put in an intercom so he could bellow at me from any room in the house.

VINCENT. He is a winner, isn't he?

ANNIE. He's a monster, Vincent. And the trouble with monsters