

ART OF MURDER

ACT ONE

Scene 1

Early evening. Autumn. Lights up. No one is on stage. After a moment, Annie enters, carrying paint supplies. She crosses to the painting area.

ANNIE.

Jack and Jill went up a hill,
To fetch a pail of water —

(She places the supplies down and re-crosses the room.)

But Jill couldn't take his crap anymore.

So she killed him.

(She exits. After a few moments, she reenters.) Jack, you suffocating son-of-a-bitch. You psychotic control freak. You're ... — *(Suddenly, the isolation tank springs open and Jack — dripping wet in swim trunks — rises from it. "Que Sera, Sera" comes lilting from the tank.)*

JACK. IS HE HERE YET?!

ANNIE. Jesus, Jack!

JACK. Is he here yet?!

ANNIE. You scared the hell out of me!

JACK. Is the little bastard here yet?!

ANNIE. No, he's not! And for God's sake, Jack, close the lid! How can you possibly listen to that damn song over and over —

JACK. It's an isolation tank, my love. Repetition dulls the senses, and this song dulls the senses even more.

ANNIE. You're insane, Jack.

JACK. I'm an artist, Annie. Never judge me. *(Jack closes the tank and begins to dress as Annie works on her canvas, which faces away from the*

audience.) The man is always annoyingly on time! Everyone else in this world is running at least five minutes behind schedule, but not our Vincent, no! Except for tonight of all nights. (*Inspecting a rather ridiculous collage.*) How I love this. It's good. It's underrated.

ANNIE. Don't touch anything, Jack.

JACK. Everything's set?

ANNIE. A hundred times, yes, Jack. (*Jack picks up a revolver and flips open the chamber.*) Jack, you just checked that!

JACK. For God's sake, Annie, how can you still be calm — and working! — at a time like this?! (*Re: Annie's painting.*) Let me see.

ANNIE. No, not till it's done.

JACK. C'mon, one look!

ANNIE. Get back in your tank, Jack. I'll give it a good kick when he gets here.

JACK. Not acceptable! I want to see!

ANNIE. No! (*He raises the gun and points it at her. A beat.*) Well, that'd be a new one.

JACK. You don't think I would?

ANNIE. No. Not me. Never. (*Kate enters and immediately screams, having seen the pointed gun. Jack, startled by her scream, nearly drops the gun.*) No, Kate, it's all right!

KATE. He has a gun! (*She screams again, causing Jack to fumble with the gun, which he winds up inadvertently pointing at Kate, who screams yet again.*)

JACK. (*Lowering the gun.*) Kate! Kate! I was just showing Mrs. Brooks my new revolver —

KATE. But you were pointing it at her —

ANNIE. Everything is fine, Kate.

KATE. Are you sure?

JACK. Yes — (*In his above remark, Jack inadvertently points the gun at Kate again. She screams again. Jack puts the gun behind his back.*)

ANNIE. What is it you want, Kate?

KATE. I just came to ask permission to leave —

ANNIE. Yes, that'll be fine.

JACK. By the way, Kate, where are you going this evening?

ANNIE. Jack, that's none of your business.

JACK. I just thought that if our loyal servant were visiting a friend, she should feel free to stay the night. After all, we won't need her till morning. Isn't that correct, Annie?

ANNIE. Yes.

JACK. So then — are you, Kate, visiting a friend?

KATE. Yes, sir.

JACK. A male friend?

ANNIE. Jack, now you're prying!

JACK. Okay, I'm prying. A male friend?

KATE. Yes, sir.

JACK. Ah. Well, feel free to spend the night with him.

KATE. Yes, sir. I mean, no sir. I mean, not like that, sir — ...

ANNIE. Kate, there's absolutely no need to explain.

KATE. Oh thank you, Mrs. Brooks, I was getting me knickers in a bit of a twist there. *(The phone rings. Kate moves to get it.)*

ANNIE. No Kate, I better take it in the other room. *(Annie exits. An awkward moment between Kate and Jack.)*

KATE. She'll be back in a moment!

JACK. What if it's her mother? They can yap for hours. *(Jack moves towards her.)*

KATE. No, not tonight. I have to go.

JACK. Now, now, I'll be quick.

KATE. I've had enough! I tell you, I've ... —

JACK. You need this job, don't you, Kate?

KATE. She'll be back! She'll be back any second! *(Annie enters. Jack quickly moves away from Kate.)* Excuse me. *(Kate runs off.)*

ANNIE. What's she in such a rush about?

JACK. Beats me.

ANNIE. That was Vincent, he's not far.

JACK. Yes! Oh just picture him, Annie — our son-of-a-bitch art dealer — bursting in the door — his pretentious designer suit, his pretentious designer bow tie, he'll compliment your looks, he'll call me his most valued client, then he'll unleash a non-stop torrent of babble and gossip! And it's all to cover up his betrayal of me! Of you! Of every artist he's ever betrayed in his life!

ANNIE. Jack —

JACK. God, how can you have self-control at a time like this! He deserves what he's getting tonight!

ANNIE. Breathe, Jack, breathe —

JACK. Annie, have you taken a look at what he's done with your career lately? Just tell me, how many paintings signed "Annie Brooks" has ol' Vincent sold recently. Ten? Twenty?

ANNIE. None.

JACK. Ah, none! He's really workin' for ya!

ANNIE. Jack, you know damn well why my name does not bring commercial success.

JACK. Because you're boring.

ANNIE. Because I'm a woman.

JACK. Boring! You never go to nightclubs, you're never in the gossip columns —

ANNIE. Women are still second-class citizens in the art world!

JACK. You can't have a career without publicity!

ANNIE. No, *you* can't have a career without publicity. Without your image, you'd be nothing — a minor talent, a hack, a ... —

(Enraged, Jack rushes toward Annie.) No, Jack, no!

JACK. *(Re: her painting.)* I need to see it! *(He throws her aside.)*

ANNIE. No, please Jack, don't say anything, don't say anything, don't —

JACK. How long have you been working on it?

ANNIE. Not long, I swear — A couple of days — ...

JACK. How long?!

ANNIE. Two weeks.

JACK. I hate it. Start over. *(He crosses away. A beat.)*

ANNIE. Damn it, no! Jack, no! This time I will not listen to you! I will not ... — *(A beat.)* Yes. Of course. You're right. Tomorrow. I will destroy it tomorrow. *(She breaks down. Kate, dressed to go out, enters. Annie quickly turns away.)*

KATE. Is there anything else expected of me this evening?

JACK. No Kate, off with you. Don't come back till morning.

KATE. Mrs. Brooks, are you okay? *(Annie nods "yes.")* Are you certain?

ANNIE. Everything is just as it should be, Kate. Good night.

KATE. Before I go, Mr. Brooks, I was just wondering if you know exactly why I am serving as your maid.

JACK. Pardon?

KATE. After all, you do remember that I've attended university. First in my family.

JACK. Yes, of course.

KATE. And you do remember what I received me degree in. I've told you several times.

JACK. Of course. Home economics.

KATE. Chemistry. But I can't work in America as a chemist without me green card. Which I don't have yet. And that is why I, a highly educated young woman, am working for a very modest salary as your maid. But soon, I will have me green card, and then, you can go screw yourself. Goodnight. *(Kate exits.)*

ANNIE. What was that all about?