

MARSHA BIANCA

Let's Murder Marsha

ACT ONE

Curtain rises on the living room of the GILMORE apartment in Manhattan [see Set Design]. It is late afternoon on a Monday in mid-October. The first thing we see is MARSHA GILMORE's rump; she is seated on footstool, leaning forward into—and mostly hidden by—the gap beneath the seat-cushion of the wingback chair, searching for something. She straightens to a more decorous sitting position and lets the cushion fall back into place, and we see that she is an attractive and well groomed woman in her middle thirties. She looks left and right, frowning, then stands, goes to sofa, drops to a sitting position on the coffeetable, and proceeds to search—in vain—under each of its two seat-cushions. She stands, slams the cushions back into place, and speaks.

MARSHA. Damn. (*looks about uncertainly, then moves to desk, and is systematically searching inside drawer after drawer as BIANCA, the GILMORES' maid, a young lady barely more than 20 years of age, enters from kitchen and pauses just inside upstage archway*)

BIANCA. Did you call, Mrs. Gilmore?

MARSHA. (*glances to ascertain identity of speaker, then resumes her search before replying*) No. I said "damn".

BIANCA. (*politely*) Damn what?

MARSHA. (*slams final drawer, moves toward tall cabinet that serves as a coat closet*) Damn book. (*opens cab-*

LET'S MURDER MARSHA

inet, in which we see normal closet paraphernalia—top-coats, jackets, etc.—and rummages)

BIANCA. Damn what book?

MARSHA. *(still rummaging)* *The Creeping Slasher*. It's being true to its title. *(will give up on closet, shut doors)* Not the slasher part, the creeping part. I can't figure where it's got to—*(crosses past BIANCA and will go behind bar)*—and it's driving me beserk.

BIANCA. The plot or the disappearance?

MARSHA. *Both!* *(vanishes from view as she searches behind bar)* And it was due back at the library yesterday! Bad enough not finding the book or learning the identity of the killer—*(will rise into view again, bookless, as she finishes)*—without getting fined ten cents a day besides! *(moves from behind bar to spot midway between bar and wingback chair, and stands there uncertainly)*

BIANCA. *(frowns)* The library wasn't open yesterday.

MARSHA. It wasn't? Why not?

BIANCA. It's never open on Sunday.

MARSHA. *(had taken two steps toward fireplace, but now stops and faces her)* Sunday? Yesterday was Sunday? But that means—

BIANCA. Means what, mum?

MARSHA. Today must be Monday. And it can't be.

BIANCA. I don't see why not, mum. Monday has a way of following Sunday.

MARSHA. But Bianca—it's impossible. Firstly, if it's Monday, then the damn book is at least *two* days overdue, and I'm just not that slow a reader; but secondly, if it's Monday, Mister Gilmore would be at his office, and I've called him there twice today and he's not!

BIANCA. Perhaps he stepped out.

MARSHA. Bianca, Mister Gilmore is a broker. Mon-

days are busy days for him. No one on Wall Street steps out on a Monday.

BIANCA. Nevertheless, mum—

MARSHA. Oh, all right, all right, have it your way. Monday it is! (*looks left and right, frowns shakes head*) I don't suppose you've seen *The Creeping Slasher* lying about?

BIANCA. Sorry, mum, no. Where did you see it last?

MARSHA. (*points at wingback chair*) I always read right there, before the fire. October tends to be chilly. It's cozier that way.

BIANCA. (*moves from archway, will move down to fireplace via route that takes her below wingback chair*) It is rather chilly, now that you mention it. I'll just start up the fire.

MARSHA. (*sighs*) For all the good it will do.

BIANCA. Mum?

MARSHA. Well, I mean, what's the point in having a cozy chair before the fire and no *Creeping Slasher*?

BIANCA. (*at fireplace, now, going about starting it up*) That's true enough. Still—if you *do* find it, the fire will be cozy and ready for you.

MARSHA. (*fondly*) Oh, Bianca. You *are* a treasure!

BIANCA. (*demurely*) Mum . . . if I might ask a question—? (*sees from MARSHA's shift to an interested curiosity that this is permissible, and so continues*) Why do you always *hide* your mystery thrillers?

MARSHA. I'm not sure I follow you, Bianca.

BIANCA. (*busy finishing off the fire-starting*) Well—you *do* read *everything* by Anton Dupré—I'm surprised you don't simply have them all on a nice bookshelf in your room.

MARSHA. All? But Bianca, how could I? Think of the library fines!

BIANCA. I mean, *buy* them, mum. If you enjoy them so much—(*The fire is now glowing, and she straightens from her work and moves toward MARSHA.*)—I should think you'd want to own them.

MARSHA. Oh, I would, I truly would. But be reasonable, Bianca: If I bought them all, I'd soon run out of hiding-places. There are only so many chair-cushions and drawers.

BIANCA. But why hide them in the first place?

MARSHA. Oh! Oh, now I see! Well, it's very simple. Mister Gilmore doesn't approve of mystery novels. He says they rot the mind. He thinks people should read nothing but the classics, like *War and Peace*. I tried that once. Everybody is named Ivan Ivanovitch, or some such impossible name. Never again. I couldn't keep the characters straight. Now *there's* a book could *really* rot one's mind!

BIANCA. I see. Yes, I quite understand now. But mum—if you *must* hide your thrillers, why not have just *one* hiding-place? You know, a special spot where the book will always be when you want it.

MARSHA. Because I never know where I'll *be* when Tobias pops up. I have to ditch the book in the quickest place that's handy.

BIANCA. Well, then—try to remember—where were you the *last* time he popped up and you had to ditch *The Creeping Slasher*?

MARSHA. I wish I knew. Tobias pops up everywhere in this apartment. Still, why shouldn't he? I mean, it *is* his *home*, after all. Which reminds me—(*frowns, looks at wristwatch*) Shouldn't he *be* here by now? It's nearly six o'clock.

BIANCA. He *is* a bit later than usual, mum. Perhaps he stopped off to buy you a birthday present?

MARSHA. A what? Birthday present? Oh, dear, is it