

The Beginners Guide to Murdering Your Husband
or
Ten Easy Steps to Becoming a Widow

unwisely written by

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Synopsis

This play is presented as though it is an instructional video that the audience are watching being filmed. Maddy will present a variety of methods for disposing of an unwanted husband, aided by Jim, her real life husband, and her faithful employees. But is she really trying to get rid of her husband? Is the video just a ruse to lull him into a false sense of security? The parallels with their real life relationship give Jim plenty to worry about but, as the play reaches its its climax, we realise that nothing is what it seems. Criss-cross indeed!

Characters

Maddy, a business woman – F 35 – 45

Jim, her husband – M 35 – 45

John, an employee – M 20 – 40

Kerry, an employee – F 20 – 40

Julie, an employee – F 20 - 40

Production Notes

There are some very quick changes throughout this play and a suggestion of the appropriate clothing is probably more practicable than full costume changes. Sets should be kept simple. Music may keep the audience entertained between scenes. As the play progresses the scenes portrayed for the video become more and more representative of Maddy and Jim's relationship and the audience should become aware of the fact that they are watching a murder mystery.

ACT I

Scene One

The lights come up to reveal MADDY, a smartly dressed business lady. To the side of the stage is MADDY's office. This is the office of a modern and successful business. MADDY is sitting at a desk in her office typing on a laptop computer. She stops typing and addresses the audience as if she was speaking to camera.

MADDY: Hello there. Welcome to “The Beginners Guide to Murdering Your Husband”. How do you like the title? It's rather good isn't it? The video is, of course, intended for women, but I wouldn't be at all surprised to find a few men taking a peek at it as well. After all, lots of men have a crafty look at women's magazines in the dentist's waiting room and are then found lurking around the moisturisers in Boots before you can say mid life crisis, but I should point out that results cannot be guaranteed.

Now ladies, whether you have downloaded this film from our website, or bought a DVD in a store, I'm sure you are going to find our little instructional video very useful and you'll have a dead husband in no time at all. Oh, before I go on I must say that our lawyers have asked us to point out that murdering your husband is, strictly speaking, illegal. Well it is in the United Kingdom anyway, if you reside in another country it is probably worth your while checking on what the local regulations are. They do vary from country to country, or even state to state in America, I am led to believe. But, well, it is a bit like illegally downloading music from the internet isn't it? I mean, we all know we shouldn't do it, but we do it anyway and the police hardly have the resources to go round locking up everyone do they? But please remember that the authorities do sometimes like to make an example of someone, so the use of the techniques that I am about to teach you must be considered to be at your own risk.

Right, sorry about that, had to get the legal stuff out of the way. You will have noticed that the subtitle of this film is 'Ten Easy Steps to Becoming a Widow'. Don't worry, there is nothing terribly

complicated, it isn't like a recipe; first do this and then do that; we are simply going to show you a number of alternative methods to achieving your desire to be a widow. Some describe the act of doing away with your unwanted partner; others describe how to deal with the technicalities of, er, getting away with it. All you have to do is decide which method suits you the best.

Enough of me talking. I think it is time to introduce to you the actors that are going to demonstrate our methods to you. First of all Jim, would you like to introduce yourself?

JIM appears. He is about the same age as MADDY and is dressed casually.

JIM: Hello.

MADDY: Jim is my husband in real life. Don't worry, I don't really want to kill him, ha ha. Ahem, and here are Kerry, Julie and John (*The three of them enter and wave.*). We'll be seeing more of them later on. So, pour yourself a glass of wine, sit back, relax and enjoy learning how to murder your husband.

MADDY exits and the others create a simple scene to represent a living room that is being decorated. Furniture, including a sofa, is covered with sheets. A step ladder is placed next to a wall that has recently been painted except for a section near the top. JIM addresses the audience.

JIM: Method One. "The DIY accident."

JIM slides under the sheet covering the sofa so that just his arms and upper body are exposed. He opens a newspaper and starts to read. MADDY enters wearing a boiler suit and holding a paint roller.

MADDY: Don't put yourself out, will you?

JIM: Hmm?

MADDY: I mean, don't offer to help or anything.

JIM: I wasn't planning to.

MADDY: No, that is obvious.

JIM: It is you that insisted that the room needed decorating. I thought it was perfectly all right as it was.

MADDY: All right? We haven't decorated this room since we moved in!

JIM: And?

MADDY: And it needed doing. I want it nice before Mother comes to visit.

JIM: Oh Christ, yes. Your mother. That is what this is all about.

MADDY: And just what is that supposed to mean?

JIM: Why do we have to go to all this effort just because you mother deigns to visit us?

MADDY: We are not going to any effort.

JIM: Does she re-decorate because we are going to visit her?

MADDY: She doesn't need to: she doesn't live in a pigsty. And what do you mean 'deigns to visit us'? I hope you are not suggesting that you will not be absolutely delighted to see her.

JIM: Of course not dear. It is always a pleasure to see your mother. I only wish we had the room so that she could move in permanently. She is so like you, it would be like having double the pleasure every day. By the way, you've missed a bit.

MADDY: I know. I was wondering if you could do the top bit for me.

JIM: Me?

MADDY: I can't reach.

JIM: That's what the ladders are for.

MADDY: But it would be easier for you.

JIM: How do make that out?

MADDY: You are taller than me.

JIM: But I'd still need the ladder. I'd just be on a lower rung, that's all. I don't see how that makes it any easier.

MADDY: Oh go on Jim.

JIM: I can't, and you know I can't. Are you trying to humiliate me?

MADDY: You know I wouldn't do that.

JIM: I get vertigo standing on a kerb stone. You'd never get me up a ladder, not after that accident at work.

MADDY: (*Unconvincingly*) Oh yes, I'd forgotten.

JIM: Well I haven't. I've still got the bruises.

MADDY: So, you get dizzy if you go up a ladder do you?

JIM: Finally, it has sunk in.

MADDY: So no one would be the least bit surprised if you fell off one.

JIM: Eh?

MADDY: Oh nothing.

JIM: If you had asked earlier on I might have done a bit, but I can't do the top bit.

MADDY: No dear. That's quite all right.

JIM: Yes?

MADDY: Yes what?

JIM: 'That's quite all right, but.' There is usually a but.

MADDY: No. No buts. Except this one.

MADDY wiggles her bottom at him.

JIM: Do you mind? I've not long eaten.

MADDY: Is there room under that sheet for two?

JIM: Er. Well. Yes. I suppose.

MADDY: Hutch up then.

MADDY slides under the sheet next to JIM and plays with his chest seductively.

JIM: What are you doing?

MADDY: What does it look like?

JIM: Are you feeling OK?

MADDY: Just marvellous Jim. How about a bit of fun?

JIM: Here?

MADDY: Why not?

JIM: We have a perfectly functioning bedroom upstairs.

MADDY: Is that an invitation?

JIM: What's got into you?

MADDY: You. In a minute, hopefully. Come on this is exciting.

JIM: How do you make that out?

MADDY: Do you want to know what I've got under this boiler suit?

JIM: I dread to think.

MADDY: Nothing at all.

JIM: That is what I feared.

MADDY: I could be out of it in a jiffy.

JIM: Yes, they're very functional like that.

MADDY: Then I could help you out of your clothes.

JIM: I think I'll stay as I am, thanks.

MADDY: And we could paint in the nude.

JIM: Not a very practical suggestion if you don't mind me saying so.

MADDY: We could get all covered in paint and then have a bath together like in that film Shirley Valentine.

JIM: It would never work. We only have a standard size bath, no room for the two of us.

MADDY: Don't you - desire me?

JIM: Yes dear, you're lovely but not right at this minute.

MADDY: Fine, I just wondered that's all.

She gets out from under the sheet and picks up her roller.

JIM: I suppose you're not talking to me now.

MADDY: No dear, my apologies, I don't know what came over me.

JIM: Oh, er, well, that's all right.

MADDY: There's a time and a place for that sort of thing and this isn't it, right?

JIM: Well, yes.

MADDY: So I'll just get on and finish this and I'll clear up.

JIM: Good. Yes. Good idea.

MADDY: Oh, just one thing. I do so want you and my mother to get along. I'll tell you what I'm going to do. I'm going to tell her that you did all this! In honour of her visit.

JIM: What?

MADDY: I'll tell her that you insisted on making it nice before she arrived.

JIM: Are you sure? That's very nice of you.

MADDY: It will make her see you in a new light. And maybe then you will be friends.

JIM: Well, OK. If you say so.

MADDY: Perhaps you ought to do a little bit though. Just so that there is some truth in it.

JIM: Oh, I get it. You are still trying to get me up that ladder.

MADDY: No, no. Just go over a bit I've done that's all.

JIM: Well, if it makes you feel better.

MADDY: Yes, come on.

JIM emerges from under the sheet and approaches MADDY. She hands him the roller.

MADDY: There you are, just do that bit there. No! Hold on. I'll go and fetch my camera, then my mother will know how hard you've been working. Don't move!

MADDY exits. JIM stands motionless facing the wall, the roller in his hand. MADDY returns with a large frying pan and whacks JIM around the back of the head. He collapses to the ground.

JIM: Jesus!

MADDY: Shut up, you're dead.

JIM: You might have warned me.

MADDY: The look of surprise on your face is important for the video.

JIM: Well, you didn't have to do it that hard.

MADDY lays the ladder on its side and arranges JIM so that he looks as though he has fallen off it.

JIM: Just tell me where you want me to be and I'll move myself. Stop prodding me.

MADDY: For a dead man you don't half complain a lot. There, that'll do.

MADDY removes the boiler suit to reveal that she is not, in fact, naked underneath but is wearing her business suit. She returns to her seat behind the desk.

MADDY: So there you have the first lesson. "The DIY accident." It is so easy to accomplish. Our little demonstration here was just to give you an idea of how you might go about it. As with all the methods, you must use your imagination to come up with your own plan.

JIM: Can I get up now?

MADDY: So many things can go wrong when doing work around the house. A fatal mix of water and electricity is always a good one.

JIM: I'm getting cramp.

MADDY: Just hold on a minute will you. I'm doing a piece to camera.

JIM: Well, get on with it. This is really uncomfortable.

MADDY: Though one must always make sure that one takes the necessary safety precautions to ensure that one does not become the victim oneself, if you see what I mean.

JIM: Sod this.

JIM gets up and leaves.

MADDY: Jim! Jim! Oh well, that leads us nicely on to the next method. Jim!

JIM: (Off) Yes dear.

MADDY: Get the placard.

Scene Two

MADDY exits. KERRY, JULIE and JOHN come on and remove the living room scene. They bring on a counter and a few effects to indicate that this is now a police station. They exit and JIM comes with a placard that reads 'He Just Disappeared' and shows this to the audience. He exits. MADDY enters wearing a coat. She rings a bell on the counter and waits. As soon as he is ready JOHN

appears behind the counter dressed as a policeman.

JOHN: Yes madam. How can I help you?

MADDY: Oh, it's terrible. He's gone!

JOHN: Who has gone madam?

MADDY: My husband. He has just disappeared.

JOHN: I'm sorry to hear that, did you want to report him missing?

MADDY: I don't know what can have happened to him. He is not like this.

JOHN: Don't upset yourself. There is probably a perfectly rational explanation to all this.

MADDY: How can there be? Where can he be?

JOHN: In the vast majority of cases the missing people just turn up again.

MADDY: *(Archly)* Jim won't.

JOHN: I'm sorry?

MADDY: I mean, I pray for his safe return.

JOHN: Jim did you say?

MADDY: Yes.

JOHN: And what is his surname?

MADDY: Bennett.

JOHN: Jim Bennett. Any other names?

MADDY: His middle name is Gordon.

JOHN: Jim Gordon Bennett.

MADDY: His parents were so cruel.

JOHN: And your name?

MADDY: I'm Maddy Bennett. His wife.

JOHN: When did you last see your husband?

MADDY: On Sunday. He took the car to the car wash.

JOHN: So he is in his car.

MADDY: Damn! No. Er, he took the car to the car wash; then he returned and went out again for a walk.

JOHN: What time was this?

MADDY: About three o'clock in the afternoon.

JOHN: Do you know if anyone saw him after he went for a walk?

MADDY: Not that I know of.

JOHN: So, the last person to have seen him, apart from yourself, will have been the people at the car wash.

MADDY: Oh hell. No. Forget about the car wash.

JOHN: But it might be important.

MADDY: OK then, it was one of those automatic ones. He won't have seen anyone. In fact the car is filthy. He didn't go to a car wash.

JOHN: But you just said that he did.

MADDY: No he said he was going to the car wash, then he came back, but he hadn't been to the car wash, and then he went out again for a walk.

JOHN: Right, so he went out in the car but you don't know where he went.

MADDY: That's it, yes.

JOHN: And how was he when he went out?

MADDY: Fine, his usual self.

JOHN: He didn't seem upset, or distracted at all?

MADDY: Oh, that's a good idea, yes, he seemed depressed.

JOHN: In what way?

MADDY: What?

JOHN: What gave you the impression that he was depressed?

MADDY: He said he was going to kill himself.

JOHN: I see. That is quite significant you know.

MADDY: I'm sorry. I'd forgotten.

JOHN: You'd forgotten that he said he was going to kill himself.

MADDY: Well, what with the stress and everything.

JOHN: I see. Are there any friends or relatives he might have gone to visit?

MADDY: (*Incredulous*) You mean to help him to kill himself?

JOHN: No, just anywhere that he might have gone.

MADDY: Oh no. I don't think so. He was too depressed for that.

JOHN: Hmm. Even so we'll need a list of names and addresses from you. Now, apart from being depressed, how is his health generally?

MADDY: Well, to be honest, his health has taken a bit of a nose dive in the very recent past.

JOHN: In what way?

MADDY: (*Off hand*) He hasn't been looking too good since Sunday.

JOHN: I'm sorry.

MADDY: That's quite all right.

JOHN: No, I mean I didn't hear what you said.

MADDY: Oh, I was just saying he didn't seem very well on Sunday.

JOHN: Did he complain of anything in particular?

MADDY: Yes! He said he was having dizzy spells.

JOHN: And yet he went out in the car.

MADDY: They got better.

JOHN: I see. Did he have any long term health problems? Something he had seen his doctor about?

MADDY: Oh no. Do you know that you've started to talk about him in the past tense?

JOHN: Oh, I'm really sorry.

MADDY: That's quite all right.

JOHN: When he went for his walk, did he have any credit cards with or forms of identity, that sort of thing?

MADDY: No. Nothing.

JOHN: Are you sure?

MADDY: Quite sure. He didn't have a penny on him.

JOHN: Was it usual for him to leave the house like that?

MADDY: Well, no. But he was wearing his gardening trousers. The pockets are full of holes and he wouldn't want to lose anything.

JOHN: Why was he wearing his gardening trousers?

MADDY: He'd been gardening of course.

JOHN: After he came back in the car, but before he went for a walk?

MADDY: No. Before he went out in the car.

JOHN: So, he said he was going to the car wash but he was wearing his gardening trousers and didn't have a penny on him?

MADDY: Er, yes. That's how I knew he was lying.

JOHN: Plus, the car is filthy.

MADDY: Exactly.

JOHN: Did he say where he had been when he came back?

MADDY: He said he'd been to the car wash.

JOHN: Which you knew was a lie.

MADDY: Yes. Hey, yes, that's it. I said he was lying. We had a row and he went for a walk.

JOHN: You had a row.

MADDY: NO! No, no, we didn't have a row. I was going to say that he was lying but I didn't, and we didn't have a row, but he did go for a walk.

JOHN: Are you sure?

MADDY: Yes. Absolutely.

JOHN: Right. Do you have a recent photograph of your husband?

MADDY: Oh yes. Here. *(She passes him a photograph.)*

JOHN: Does he always look like this?

MADDY: Like what?

JOHN: Well, scared to be honest.

MADDY snatches the photograph back.

MADDY: Perhaps that one is a little too recent. Here. *(She passes him an alternative photograph.)*

JOHN: OK. We'll get this copied and circulated. Now, don't worry yourself. He has probably just holed up somewhere and will turn up in the next day or so.

MADDY: Yes, he certainly is *holed* up somewhere.

JOHN: If you could let us know immediately if he does turn up. In the meantime I'll arrange for an

officer to come and search your house.

MADDY: What!

JOHN: This is standard procedure, nothing to worry about. There might be clues there to his disappearance that you haven't noticed.

MADDY: That's what I am worried about.

JOHN: So, if you could try to leave things pretty much as they are. Don't start having a big clear out.

MADDY: Er, I might have already started.

JOHN: If you could just sign here. This gives us consent to search your home.

MADDY: No. I'd rather you didn't.

JOHN: It might hamper our investigation. You do want your husband found don't you?

MADDY: Um. Yes, of course. It's just that you'll need to give me a few days to destroy the... er I mean to, to, er, get used to the idea.

JOHN: As you wish. Now I can give you some leaflets for support organisations: The Missing Persons Bureau, The Samaritans, that sort of thing.

MADDY: Oh, I wouldn't bother.

JOHN: And you're not to fret. He is most likely to be safe and sound. In fact it wouldn't surprise me at all if you got home and found him up to his neck with things in the garden.

MADDY: Or even deeper than that perhaps. Thank you.

MADDY removes her coat whilst the others remove the counter. MADDY resumes her seat behind her desk.

MADDY: I hope our little demonstration has shown you some of the pitfalls that are easy to fall into when you report your husband missing. My recommendation is that the type of murder where you have to dispose of the body and pretend that he 'just disappeared' should only be a last resort. The most effective murder is where he dies in front of dozens of other people, all of whom will swear that you had nothing to do with it. Our next method is a perfect example. It takes a bit of forward planning but, if done properly, can be very effective. We call this 'Food Poisoning'.

Scene Three

MADDY exits and the others set a restaurant scene with a table for two centre stage. On this table is placed a sign reading 'Was it something he ate?' After a moment JIM appears dressed for a romantic meal. He sits at the table and the sign is removed. When she is ready MADDY joins him. She is, perhaps, wearing a scarf or something to distinguish her from the previous scene.

MADDY: Hello darling, I'm sorry I'm late.

JIM: Oh, not by much, I was just about to order some wine. Shall I ask for the wine list?

MADDY: Oh you choose darling. You know so much about these things.

JIM: Thank you. I will. Er, excuse me.

KERRY appears dressed as a waitress.

KERRY: Yes Sir?

JIM: Can I see the wine list

KERRY: Certainly Sir.

She picks up the wine list that was on the table all the time and gives it to JIM. He studies it after

due deliberation.

JIM: I think we'll have the Vin de la Maison.

KERRY: Thank you Sir (*She exits.*)

MADDY: Is that a good one?

JIM: Oh yes. We had that when we went out on my birthday. I expect it's from the same vineyard.

MADDY: It must be satisfying to be so knowledgeable about the finer things in life.

JIM: Oh well, I just pick things up as I go along.

JULIE appears dressed as a waitress.

JULIE: Are you ready to order Sir?

JIM: Oh. I'm sorry; we've been too busy chatting. Can you give us a few minutes?

JULIE: Certainly Sir.

She exits. JIM hands MADDY a copy of the menu.

MADDY: Thank you dear. I'm not sure I want a starter. I'm not that hungry.

JIM: Oh, but it is a special occasion darling. Not everyone can boast they have been married as long as we have.

MADDY: No dear.

JIM: But don't have one if you don't want one.

MADDY: Did you want one?

JIM: Well I was going to ask about the soup of the day.

MADDY: Oh, go on then. I'll have the same.

JIM: Are you sure?

MADDY: Yes.

JIM: You said you didn't fancy a starter.

MADDY: But I can't leave you to eat on your own.

JIM: So you are just eating to please me.

MADDY: Yes, well, no.

JIM: Which is it?

MADDY: I don't want to have an argument.

JIM: We're not having an argument. We are deciding whether to have a starter.

MADDY: Well it sounds like an argument to me.

JIM: Well, you should know.

MADDY: And what does that mean?

JIM: You've started enough.

MADDY: Well, I didn't start this one. Look, I'm trying to be nice here.

JIM: By making me feel guilty about having a starter?

MADDY: I'm not making you feel guilty.

JIM: Yes you are. How can you say that you are not? You don't know whether I feel guilty or not.

Only I know if I feel guilty.

MADDY: I don't care whether you have a starter or not. I'm going to the toilet. Please try to make your mind up whilst I am gone.

MADDY exits. JULIE appears.

JULIE: Have you decided yet?

JIM: Just a few more minutes please. Oh, by the way, what is the soup of the day?

JULIE: Broccoli Sir.

JIM: Eeuugh.

JULIE: But we've run out so it's chicken.

JIM: I'm sorry?

JULIE: The soup of the day is broccoli, but we've run out, so it's chicken.

JIM: Why didn't you just say the soup of the day is chicken?

JULIE: But it isn't Sir. It's broccoli.

JIM: Yes, but you haven't got any.

JULIE: No Sir. We've run out.

JIM: So, in effect, the soup of the day is chicken.

JULIE: I don't follow you Sir.

JIM: If I were to order soup of the day, what would I get?

JULIE: Chicken Sir.

JIM: So the soup of the day is chicken.

JULIE: Oh no Sir. It's broccoli.

JIM: Do you know? I don't think I'll bother with a starter.

MADDY returns.

JIM: Hello darling. Did you decide what you wanted for you main course darling?

MADDY: What? Oh, er, the chicken.

JULIE: Oh, I'm sorry Madam. We've run out of chicken.

JIM: Do you have broccoli?

JULIE: I beg your pardon Sir?

MADDY: Oh, I'll have the lamb cutlets then.

JULIE: Certainly. And for you, Sir?

JIM: Rump steak. Medium rare. With fries.

JULIE: Did you want fries or potatoes madam?

MADDY: Er, fries, no potatoes. No. Actually I think I'll have the fish. With potatoes.

JULIE: Certainly Madam.

JULIE exits.

MADDY: Why aren't you having a starter?

JIM: They didn't have what I wanted. See? Problem over. Now can we just enjoy the meal?

KERRY arrives with the wine and pours some for JIM to taste. He does so, swirling the wine around in glass, sipping it, pouring in the glassful, gargling with it before swallowing and nodding his approval. KERRY pours them both a drink and exits.

MADDY: I see you are being your usual adventurous self.

JIM: Hmm?

MADDY: Rump steak. Medium rare. With fries. I've never known you have anything else when we go out.

JIM: You can't go wrong with rump steak. They can't muck about with it too much. You don't know what you're eating with half the stuff on the menu. You'd think that they were trying to poison you.

MADDY: Ah, ahem, yes. Well I wouldn't stop you having what you want on our anniversary darling.

JIM: Sixteen years! Hasn't it flown by?

MADDY: Yes dear. We've had six happy years.

JIM: Sixteen dear.

MADDY: Six *happy* years though darling.

JIM: Oh, I see. You were making a joke.

MADDY: Nice of you to recognise it.

JIM: Well, I've always had a great sense of humour.

MADDY: Go on.

JIM: What?

MADDY: Finish your little joke.

JIM: After all, I married you didn't I?

MADDY: Thank you Jim. You are so reliable. I must have heard that a hundred times.

JIM: I've told you a million times not to exaggerate.

MADDY: And that.

JIM: Well, I'm sorry. I'm trying to be nice here. If my conversation isn't sparkling enough for you perhaps we should just go home and watch TV.

MADDY: Good idea. Do I get to chose what we watch?

JIM: What do you mean? You know that I will always let you see whatever you want.

MADDY: Oh really? You guard that control like your life depends on it.

JIM: Rubbish!

MADDY: So, tell me, where is the control at this moment?

JIM: I have no idea.

MADDY: Of course you do. It is stuffed behind the cushion on your chair. You always hide it there in case I find it when you are out.

JIM: This is just a figment of your imagination.

MADDY: So how come it is always in your possession?

JIM: I don't know. It's probably because it is me that turns it off. You go to bed before me.

MADDY: Yes, that's another thing. What exactly do you watch after I have gone to bed?

JIM: Oh, sport, documentaries, that sort of thing.

MADDY: So how come the TV is always on Channel X if I happen to turn it on in the morning?

JIM: Channel X?

MADDY: And how come all that I can here after I go to bed is grunting and groaning?

JIM: That'll be the tennis.

MADDY: Come off it Jim. I don't mind you watching your sordid little programmes late at night, but at least have the decency to be honest about it.

Unseen by JIM, JULIE has arrived to set the cutlery.

JIM: To what are you referring?

MADDY: I know what they show on Channel X

JIM: OK then. Yes, you're quite correct. I watch porn films every night. A man's got to have some pleasure and I don't care if you do know: Big Titty Bonanza; Naughty Girls in Lycra; The World's Best MILFs.

MADDY: What's a MILF?

JIM: A Mother I'd Like to F...

JULIE: Fish knife Madam?

MADDY: Thank you.

JULIE: Thank you Madam. Sir. *(She exits.)*

MADDY: You were saying darling?

JIM: You cow! You knew she was there. I'll murder you for that.

MADDY: Not if I get you first. Anyway you can watch what you like after I have gone to bed, it doesn't bother me in the slightest, but I do wish you would let me see the odd programme in the evening.

JIM: You can watch whatever you like.

MADDY: So long as it is Police, Camera, Action, or Cops with Cameras or Road Wars or anything else with car chases in it. How can you watch the same thing again and again?

JIM: I suppose you'd like to watch soap operas all night?

MADDY: Well it would be interesting to know what Ena Sharples and Minnie Caldwell are getting up to these days.

JIM: Ena. Oh, I see. Another joke. You really should be on the stage. Sweeping it.

MADDY: You're so full of wit darling.

JULIE is back with the food.

JIM: Oh, drop dead you old...

JULIE: Trout. And Rump steak for you Sir? *(She exits.)*

JIM: Ah. At least we can have a bit of peace whilst we eat.

MADDY: You're not going to eat that are you?

JIM: Yes, of course. What's wrong with it?

MADDY: Nothing but look at your hands.

JIM: My hands?

MADDY: They're filthy.

JIM: They are?

MADDY: Yes. Go and wash them. You'll get botulism.

JIM: They don't look dirty to me.

MADDY: Better to be safe darling.

JIM: Why do you care all of a sudden?

MADDY: Someone has to look after you. Just pop to the toilet.

JIM: Oh, all right. If it will make you happy.

JIM exits. MADDY takes a syringe from her handbag and injects something into JIM's rump steak. She returns the syringe to her handbag and sips her wine until JIM returns.

JIM: (*Showing her his hands*) Happy now?

MADDY: Just thinking of you darling. Let's eat before it gets cold. (*They eat.*)

JIM: Mmm. This is good actually. The steak is nice and juicy. Listen. Let's not argue any more. This should be a happy occasion, why not enjoy ourselves? We could go on somewhere from here. Go dancing perhaps?

MADDY: Dancing! You?

JIM: Why not?

MADDY: Well, you can't dance for a start.

JIM: Yes I can.

MADDY: No, you think you can when you've had a few. Don't forget that I saw you at my sister's wedding. You looked like you were having a fit.

JIM: Just because you don't know the modern styles.

MADDY: Darling, you dance like a bag of spanners in a tumble dryer.

JIM: Well, that's charming, isn't it? I'm trying to be nice.

MADDY: All right then Michael Flatley. Where do you imagine that you are going to take me dancing then? The old Palais has gone you know. It's a bingo hall now.

JIM: No, it was a bingo hall. Then it was a casino; then it was a carpet warehouse. Now it's a car park. There are other places you know.

MADDY: No I don't know, and I sincerely hope you don't know, unless you a leading a double life.

JIM: What is that supposed to mean?

MADDY: What I mean is, if you are so familiar with the nightclubs in this town, who is it that you are familiar with to become familiar with them. If you understand me.

JIM: Sorry, you lost me on the first familiar.

MADDY: Who is the other woman?

JIM: What other woman?

MADDY: The one you take to nightclubs.

JIM: There isn't one. I don't go to nightclubs.

MADDY: So how do you know so much about them?

JIM: I don't. Who said anything about nightclubs?

MADDY: You did.

JIM: No, all I said is there are places to go dancing now that the Palais De Dance has closed down.

MADDY: And what sort of places are they?

JIM: Well, nightclubs I suppose.

MADDY: Exactly!

JIM: But I've never been inside one.

MADDY: But you want to take me to one tonight to make a fool of me.

JIM: I won't be making a fool of you.

MADDY: You will if you start dancing.

JIM: Oh I give up. Have you finished (*Her dinner*)

MADDY: Yes. How was the steak?

JIM: Very nice actually. Unusual sauce, tasted a bit of lime, but nice all the same. Having a dessert?

MADDY: I might as well. As you are determined that we are going to enjoy ourselves, it would be as well to bring chocolate into the equation.

JULIE has appeared.

JULIE: Was everything OK?

JIM: Yes, fine. We'll see the dessert menu please.

As JULIE clears the things JIM poke his tongue around inside his mouth as if trying to work out what it is he can taste.

MADDY: Do stop doing that. You look like you've just come out of the dentist.

JIM: Bit of an odd after-taste.

MADDY: Well, have a sip of your wine.

JIM has stuck his tongue out and as trying to examine to tip of it.

JIM: Doth ny tung ook thunny?

MADDY: No your tongue looks fine, put it away.

JIM: Are oo thaw?

MADDY: Yes. Jim, put it away. You look like you are doing a Maori Haka.

JIM: (*Having put his tongue away he launches into the All Blacks Haka, complete with arm movements and staring eyes.*) ka mate, ka mate, ka ora, ka ora, ka mate ka mate, ka ora ka..

JULIE is back.

JULIE: I beg your pardon sir?

JIM: Er, Ki-ora. Have you got any Ki-ora. Or any type of orange juice?

JULIE: We have freshly squeezed orange juice sir. Would you like me to bring you a glass?

JIM: Oh, on second thoughts no. We'll just take the dessert menus thank you.

JULIE hands them the menus and hovers.

JIM: Now then. I think you were after something chocolatey, weren't you darling?

MADDY has been staring at him with blank amazement.

JIM: How about profiteroles? Eh?

MADDY: Profiteroles.

JIM: Yes? Profiteroles?

MADDY: Profiteroles.

JIM: Yes, my wife will have profiteroles. Just coffee for me. Did you want coffee darling?

MADDY: Profiteroles.

JIM: Just the one coffee thank you.

JULIE: Thank you sir. *(She exits.)*

JIM: Is everything OK darling? You seem a little distracted.

MADDY: Yes. Yes, I'm fine. How very odd. Yes, er, profiteroles will be fine.

JIM: Good job I ordered them then. Are you sure you didn't want coffee?

MADDY: Coffee?

JIM: I asked you if you wanted coffee.

MADDY: Did you?

JIM: Yes.

MADDY: Did I?

JIM: No.

MADDY: Right. OK. Jim. Did you just do the All Blacks Haka just now?

JIM: Um. Possibly. I came over a bit funny to be honest. I think I got away with it though. I covered myself quite cleverly.

MADDY: Fine. So long as no one noticed. So, how's your tongue now?

JIM: Strange it feels like it is getting tighter.

MADDY: Your tongue is getting tighter?

JIM: Yes.

MADDY: Well it makes sense I suppose.

JIM: About dancing. I don't think I'm up to it to be honest. I think I'd prefer an early night.

MADDY: Go home you mean?

JIM: Yes. Well, you didn't want to go dancing, did you?

MADDY: No, but I'd like to go somewhere, er, public.

JIM: Public?

MADDY: I mean, I don't think I want to go home just yet, You're right. It's our anniversary. Let's make a night of it. Perhaps we could have cocktails or something.

JULIE serves MADDY's dessert and JIM's coffee then exits.

JIM: Well. I suppose we could go through to the lounge. I've never known you have cocktails.

MADDY: It is our anniversary.

JIM: Well OK. If the lady wants cocktails, then she shall have cocktails.

MADDY: Thank you.

JIM: And you can have some too. *(MADDY laughs.)* That's better, nice to see you appreciating my humour.

MADDY: I'm glad that it is ending like this.

JIM: What?

MADDY: On good terms I mean.

JIM: What is ending?

MADDY: The evening of course.

JIM: Oh. The evening. Of course. I wondered what you meant. 'Ending'. It sounded so final. How's the profiteroles?

MADDY: Fine. How's the coffee.

JIM: It's good. I hope it doesn't keep me awake.

MADDY: Oh, I don't think it will do that.

JIM: It's not been a bad marriage has it? We've had our ups and downs, but who doesn't. I don't regret anything. Do you darling?

MADDY: Not a thing.

JIM: It makes me so happy to hear that.

MADDY: Good. I'm glad that you're happy.

JIM: Oh, Waitress!

JULIE appears.

JULIE: Yes Sir?

JIM: We're going to have cocktails in the lounge. Do you think you could transfer our bill through to there and we'll pay all together.

JULIE: Certainly Sir. Was everything all right with your meal?

JIM: Yes, very nice thank you.

JULIE: Thank you Sir, Madam,

JULIE exits.

JIM: Are you finished.

MADDY: Yes. Thank you.

JIM: Shall we go through to the lounge then?

MADDY: You go. I'll be there in a moment.

Both stand. JIM exits and MADDY returns to behind her desk.

MADDY: Now, I'm sure you are all itching to know what it was that I injected into Jim's meat whilst he was in the loo.

JIM: *(Off)* What!

MADDY: Well, it was botox. Yes, the stuff that you can get pumped into your face to get your wrinkles to disappear. Except I was using it to make my husband disappear. It is highly poisonous and, if swallowed, can cause botulism.

JIM is heard violently retching off stage.

MADDY: Getting hold of it is relatively simple. Just book yourself in for a facial and find a way to distract the staff whilst you slip a few vials into your handbag.

More retching.

MADDY: Botulism is, of course, food poisoning, so you have to make sure that you eat out so that the blame falls on the restaurant. I feel a bit bad about that, they'll probably get closed down, but it is not like I was ever going to go there again, was it?

JIM: *(Off)* Call an ambulance.

MADDY: *(Shouting)* Oh, stop fussing Jim. It was only a small amount. You'd need gallons to kill you but the suckers buying this don't know that do they.

KERRY rushes from JIM's side of the stage to the other, scowling at MADDY as she passes.

JIM: *(Off)* Are you sure?

MADDY: Of course. You don't think I'd really kill you do you? Not while we're filming anyway.

KERRY rushes back with a mop and bucket muttering something along the lines of 'evil bitch' under her breath. JIM enters wiping his mouth with a small towel. As they pass each other they exchange a glance. A sympathetic look from KERRY; a grateful smile from JIM.

JIM: Couldn't you have just injected it with water? Or gravy?

MADDY: We have to go for realism Jim. The scenes have to be believable.

JIM: Why? If we had a scene where you shoot me would you put real bullets in the gun? *(Silence)* I wish I hadn't asked. *(He exits.)*

MADDY: So there we are: "Food Poisoning". Very effective if done correctly but it does depend on your getting hold of the right poison. It's no good just feeding your husband weed killer or rat poison, any good doctor will spot them a mile off. But, on the other hand, if you are on good terms with a doctor, well, anything will do. And that leads us nicely into the next demonstration: "Bribing the doctor!"

Scene Four

JIM appears looking extremely unhappy. He is carrying a sign that reads 'Natural Causes'. He slams this on to the table and exits. JOHN, JULIE and KERRY recreate the living room scene with the sofa centre. Finally they remove the table and sign. When ready, MADDY appears dressed in a sexy dressing gown. She has a magazine and sits on the sofa to read this for a few moments until the doorbell rings. She exits to answer and returns with JOHN who is carrying a doctor's bag.

MADDY: I'm so grateful to you for coming Dr Bingham.

JOHN: Well, you really should have called an ambulance. As I explained on the telephone, there are certain procedures...

MADDY: Oh, we don't need to bother with that. You can declare him dead can't you?

JOHN: Well, yes. But...

MADDY: Then, that will do. I don't need an army of paramedics trampling through the house. Let's just get the job done.

JOHN: Right. Um, I'll go and see him and then I think I'd better have a look at you.

MADDY: Well, don't think I'm objecting, but why?

JOHN: I think you must be suffering from shock.

MADDY: What makes you say that?

JOHN: Well, your reactions. You are behaving as if nothing has happened. I don't think it has sunk in yet. Don't worry, it's quite normal.

MADDY: I know perfectly well what has happened Dr Bingham. Or can I call you John?

JOHN: Oh, er, well. You can call me John if you like; if it makes you more comfortable with the

situation.

MADDY: Oh, I'm very comfortable with the situation John. Very comfortable indeed. And please call me Maddy.

JOHN: Yes. Indeed. So. I'll just go through. Um, through here is it?

MADDY: There's no hurry John. He's not going anywhere.

JOHN: Yes, Perhaps you *are* the one in need of my more urgent attention.

MADDY: Oh I think so. I think you had better have a look at me. Don't you? *(She exposes a bit of cleavage.)*

JOHN: The best thing would be for you to sit down and just let it all sink in.

MADDY: That's pretty much what I had in mind. *(She pushes him down onto the sofa and sprawls next to him.)* But I can't do it on my own, John.

JOHN: Er. Th The thing is, um, I have some other calls to make and so I should really, er, do what I need to do and be on my way. Is there anyone you could ask to come and be with you?

MADDY: But I have you John.

JOHN: Yes. As I said, I do need to be going and...

MADDY: Oh come on John. Show me some of your *(pause)* bedside manner.

JOHN: I'm sorry Mrs...

MADDY: Maddy.

JOHN: This is quite inappropriate. I really must insist that...

MADDY: But John! I think I'm having palpitations. Feel my heart.

JOHN tentatively puts his hand on MADDY's chest. She grabs it and puts it inside her dressing gown.

MADDY: How does it feel John?

JOHN: Perhaps a little fast.

MADDY: Does it feel pert John?

JOHN: Pert?

MADDY: You're in the wrong place. *(adjusting)* Here, how about now?

JOHN: *(Quickly withdrawing his hand)* I'm sorry, I know that you have had a great shock and that must explain your behaviour but you should understand that I really need to be on my way...

JOHN begins to stand, but MADDY suddenly starts to wail.

MADDY: Why? Why has he been taken, my poor Jim, so young, with me in my prime?

JOHN: Perhaps if you rang the police, they could send someone to be with you, I mean...

MADDY: The police! No. No, not the police. I'll be all right. I'm sorry. What must you think of me?

JOHN: Oh, that's OK. Don't worry about it. I see all sorts of things you know. Now if I could just...

MADDY: I know what I need. A nice cup of tea.

JOHN: Well, you could do a lot worse.

MADDY: You'll have one John?

JOHN: Um. Well, as I said I, er, well, OK then. Yes, that would be lovely.

MADDY: Or something stronger?

JOHN: It's probably not a good idea to...

MADDY: Brandy! That's what I need. *(She stands.)*

JOHN: Well, maybe a small one. For you, I mean. I won't. Driving you know. Anyway, I'll just go through and... *(He stands.)*

MADDY: Oh, I'm sorry, I didn't think. I can make you a cup of tea. *(She is pouring herself a brandy.)*

JOHN: No really I'm fine.

MADDY: It's no bother. It'll have to be a bag of course.

JOHN: No. As I said I need to be going really so...

MADDY: But you wouldn't leave me drinking on my own would you?

JOHN: Oh, now please don't start...

MADDY is back at JOHN's side, brandy glass in hand.

MADDY: Sorry John, it is just that I feel, I feel...

MADDY faints. In the process she falls against JOHN and they both collapse onto the sofa. As they do the contents of the brandy glass are emptied into JOHN's crotch. They come to rest on the sofa with JOHN in the sitting position and MADDY with her head in his crotch. KERRY appears with a camera and takes a photo. JOHN has not noticed her, but did notice the flash.

JOHN: What was that?

MADDY: *(Apparently coming round.)* Hmm?

JOHN: There was a flash of light.

MADDY: What happened?

JOHN: You fainted. Have you eaten anything?

MADDY: Why are your trousers wet?

JOHN: You spilt your brandy. Don't worry. Look, I'm going to give the hospital a call. I really think you should have someone come round to look after you.

MADDY: You can't call the hospital wearing wet trousers.

JOHN: It really doesn't matter.

MADDY: I feel terrible. Here I'll put them in the tumble dryer. *(She tries to undo them.)*

JOHN: No really don't bother.

There is a struggle. JOHN manages to stand but MADDY has hold of his trouser waistband. Their positions are now MADDY sitting on the sofa with JOHN standing facing her. MADDY's legs are either side of JOHN's. They struggle on until MADDY finally manages to pull JOHN's trousers and, if the actor is willing, underpants down to his knees. She then pulls him forward and slides down herself lifting her legs in the air so that they are crotch to crotch. JULIE appears and takes a number of photos from different angles as JOHN desperately tries to release himself.

JULIE: That'll do.

JULIE exits. MADDY pushes JOHN away and stands to adjust her dress. JOHN pulls up his trousers and collapses on the sofa in exhaustion.

MADDY: There's no time for lounging about Dr Bingham. You have a death certificate to sign. *(He is somewhat dazed.)* Are they in your bag? Just write 'natural causes' and you can be on your way.

JOHN: What?

MADDY: I can send you copies of the photos if you like. Digital cameras are so handy aren't they? So easy to download pictures and send them to friends, wives, the General Medical Council, that sort of thing. There's no need for you to see the body is there? He's a bit of a state to be honest, you should see his tongue. Bright blue it is! Still, If what I've read is right it will return to its normal colour in a couple of days, before the undertakers get here. And with a medical certificate that says that he died of natural causes, there is no need for anyone to think anything different is there?

JOHN: You'll never get away with this.

MADDY: Oh, I think I will Dr Bingham. Unless you want to throw your career away. You don't do you? No, I didn't think so. Well, come along, you were desperate to get away ten minutes ago.

MADDY slips on???? before sitting behind her desk. JOHN exits.

MADDY: Well, there you are. "Bribing the doctor." It is a risky business, the doctor could have been a woman, and you have to involve someone else to take the photographs. Finding a way to dispose of the body is better in most circumstances. This is nearly the end of part one but we just have time to show you a very quick and simple way to become a widow. This is one of my favourites!

Scene Five

MADDY exits. JOHN, KERRY and JULIE clear the scene. Towards the back of a bare stage a large yellow sign is placed with the words 'DANGER. CLIFF EDGE' and the exclamation mark inside a triangle that is standard on danger signs. MADDY and JIM appear. He is fully kitted out in hiking gear, she is casually dressed.

JIM: Well, will you just look at that! *(He goes to the cliff edge.)* What a view!

MADDY: *(To audience)* It is almost too easy isn't it? It is almost rude not to. Oh well, sorry about the short scene but I can't let a chance like this go begging.

MADDY starts to take a run at JIM. At that moment JOHN and JULIE enter. JIM is carrying a set of binoculars.

JOHN: Whoa there! Be careful. You don't want to go running about on cliff tops, far too dangerous.

MADDY: Damn!

JULIE: Oh John! Don't be such a fusspot. I'm sure you wouldn't have gone anywhere near the edge would you?

MADDY: No, of course not.

JULIE: I'm Julie by the way. This is my husband John.

MADDY: Delighted to meet you.

JOHN: Likewise. I didn't catch your name.

MADDY: Maddy. And he's Jim.

JIM: What's that? Oh hello. Didn't know we had company, I'm just admiring the view.

JOHN: It is spectacular isn't it? Here. Would you like to borrow these?

JOHN gives JIM his binoculars and the two of them stand at the cliff edge staring out. MADDY takes a Mars bar from her pocket and sits crossed legged to eat it. JULIE crouches beside her. She tries very hard to get a conversation out of MADDY.

JULIE: Getting a bit of energy? Good idea. I usually carry Kendal Mint Cake. I've got some on me now as a matter of fact. Would you like some? Oh no, you've got your Mars bar of course. I suppose that is just as good. I don't know why I buy Kendal Mint Cake. I don't really like it to be honest. I

think I'll get myself a Mars bar next time I'm stocking up on provisions. Throw away the Kendal Mint Cake. Unless you'd like it. Would you like it?

MADDY has finished her Mars bar and lies flat on the ground. All we can see of her is the soles of her boots. JULIE assesses the situation and eventually lies down next to her. The men have come away from the cliff edge and are standing upstage.

JIM: Remarkable bit of kit that.

JOHN: They are rather good aren't they? I mean they are eight by forty two of course but the apparent field of vision is a full seven feet.

JIM: Remarkable.

JOHN: Yes, and the eye relief is 20mm so you get the all the advantages of the 5.25mm exit pupil, even if you wear glasses. They are waterproof, submersible to a depth of one metre, and they have an anti fog system so they won't mist up in chilly weather

JIM: What prism system do they employ?

JOHN: Oh, well they are roof type. Er, BAK4 I think. I'll have to check.

JIM takes out the instructions which he unfolds to a piece of paper about A3 size. The men are holding it front of their faces as KERRY enters, also in walking gear. She trips over the feet of the women.

KERRY: Oh Christ!

JULIE: *(Sitting up quickly)* Oh, sorry.

KERRY: No, my fault, I wasn't looking.

JULIE: Well, you don't expect people to be lying prone on a cliff top do you? *(She stands.)* I'm Julie.

KERRY: Hi. Kerry. Are we at the summit do you know?

JULIE: I don't know. John, are we at the summit?

JOHN: *(From behind the paper)* It's not a mountain you know.

KERRY: Well, are we at the highest point?

JOHN: Huh? *(He lowers the paper and sees KERRY for the first time.)* Oh, sorry. Um, yes I think so. Wouldn't you say so Jim

JIM: I'm not really sure.

KERRY: I hope so. It will be another one if it is.

JULIE: Another one?

KERRY: I'm doing the highest point in every county and unitary authority. It's a kind of challenge I've set for myself. I'm only doing England but I'm over half way already.

JULIE: Fancy.

KERRY: Yes. *(She takes out a pocket book.)* I started in Hull. The highest point in Hull is eleven metres.

JOHN: Eleven!

KERRY: Yes. Then I went to Blackpool. The highest point there is Warbeck Reservoir at thirty metres.

JULIE: I'd have thought the tower was higher than that.

KERRY: *(Giggling)* Buildings don't count. Next it was York. Stock Hill. Forty four metres.

JOHN: Excuse me for saying this. But these places don't sound terribly high.

KERRY: No, well. I'm doing it in reverse order you see. Building myself up to Scarfell Pike at nine hundred and seventy eight metres. We're over two hundred and fifty metres here.

JIM: *(Who has taken out an Ordnance Survey map)* Do you know? I don't think this is the highest point. Look. *(All, except MADDY who is still prone on the ground, disappear behind the map.)* We're here, you see. *(The map is lowered and all gaze around before the map is raised again)* But according to the map, the highest point is here. *(Again the map is lowered and they all look in the same direction. JIM folds the map.)* Close but no cigar.

KERRY: Not, yet, but I'll be there in a jiffy.

JULIE: I'll come with you. I wouldn't want to miss such an historic(al) moment.

KERRY: Sure.

JIM: Why don't we all go?

All exit except MADDY.

MADDY: *(Still prone)* Bugger. Bugger, bugger, buggery bugger. *(She sits up.)* Well, I suppose that is a lesson in taking your chances when they present themselves. I'll get the little bas... um, that concludes the first part of this programme. In part two we'll have lots more examples of methods to do away with *(shouting toward the direction that JIM exited)* UNWANTED BAGGAGE, so if it hasn't worked for you so far, I mean, if you haven't found the method that appeals to you, then I'm sure there will be something for you in part two. There had bloody better be. There had bloody well better be!

Curtain.

Act II
Scene One

MADDY's desk and chair are removed. The stage is set to represent a hotel bar. On one side are a table and two chairs, on the other, the bar counter at which sits KERRY. Toward the back of the stage is a large plant in a pot. KERRY is our assassin, posing as a prostitute. She is provocatively dressed but not overly tarty. JOHN is behind the bar polishing glasses. JULIE is centre stage. She addresses the audience.

JULIE: Hello and welcome to part two of your programme. Maddy is, er, having a lie down at the moment so we'll just press on with the next demonstration. This one is 'Assassination'. Thank you.

JULIE exits. JIM enters and approaches the bar.

JIM: Hello John. How are you this evening?

JOHN: Ah, Mr...

JIM: Bennett.

JOHN: Mr Bennett, of course. We haven't seen you in a while.

JIM: No, well I've been trying out some new territories, but I'm back on my old stomping ground now.

JOHN: The usual is it, er...

JIM: Gin and tonic. Yes please John. (*JOHN sees to the drink.*) There's no doubt, you see life when you are on the road. I've had quite a few adventures, I can tell you.

JOHN: Do you have to?

JIM: Sorry?

JOHN: Do you have two ice cubes, or just the one.

JIM: Um, just the one please. Everything to the customer's liking, eh? You are very customer focused.

JOHN: I aim to please.

JIM: One time I got stuck in a snow drift, had to go and knock on the door of a farmhouse and ask if they had a room for the night.

JOHN: This sounds like one of your stories sir.

JIM: Don't interrupt. You'll spoil it.

JOHN: Your G and T sir.

JIM: Oh. Thank you. Charge it to my room please. One Eight Five. So I said to this farmer, 'Can you put me up for the night?' and he said, 'Well, I only have the one spare bed but it's OK, so long as you don't mind sharing it with a little red head.' and I said, 'No problem, I'll be a perfect gentleman.' to which he replied, 'Yes, so is the little red head.'

JOHN: Very good sir.

JIM: I expect you get told jokes all the time in your job. I bet you've heard them all.

JOHN: I do get to hear a few, but that is OK because it's all material for me. I'm building my act you see.

JIM: Your act?

JOHN: I do a bit of stand-up comedy. Would you like to hear some?

JIM: After dinner perhaps John. *(He drains his glass.)* I'll have the same again please. *(JOHN sees to the drink.)* Oh, but it's good to be back on my old patch. See the old familiar faces.

JIM turns and notices KERRY.

KERRY: Good evening.

JIM: Hello.

KERRY: Warm isn't it?

JIM: Yes, very pleasant.

KERRY: A girl can get quite a thirst.

JIM doesn't take the bait.

KERRY: In this heat. Is it business?

JIM: I beg your pardon?

KERRY: Is it business? *(She pouts.)*

JIM: Um...

KERRY: That brings you to town.

JIM: Oh. Yes. I've a meeting with a client in the morning.

KERRY: Yes. I meet most of my clients in the evening.

JIM: Er, quite.

JOHN gives JIM the drink.

JIM: Thank you. I had better make two my limit.

KERRY: Oh, that's very kind. I'll have a G and T too.

JIM: Oh, I didn't...

KERRY: Hmm?

JIM: Oh, that's all right. Another gin and tonic please.

JOHN sees to it.

KERRY: So. Do you travel in ladies underwear?

JIM: Ladies underwear?

KERRY: What is it you are selling. I assume you are selling something if you are seeing a client in the morning.

JIM: Ah, yes. Pasta sauce actually. My meeting is with a supermarket buyer.

KERRY: I see.

JIM: The finest authentic Italian flavours. Made in Accrington.

KERRY: Sounds lovely.

JIM: It's a living.

JOHN gives KERRY her drink.

KERRY: Shall we go and sit down?

JIM: Well, I'm not really...I mean... I am just waiting for my table then I'll be going through to eat.

KERRY: Oh come on, I won't bite. Let's say we are both off duty at the moment.

They go to sit at the table. Jim is uncomfortable but is at a loss as to how to get himself out of this situation.

KERRY: I'm Kerry.

JIM: Pleased to meet you. Er, I'm, er, Brian.

KERRY: *(With surprise)* Brian! Well, nice to meet you, Brian.

JIM: Listen, I think it's only fair to tell you...

KERRY: Yes?

JIM: You see, I'm not really looking for... I mean, I don't want...

KERRY: Don't worry. Buying me a drink doesn't commit you to anything.

JIM: It's just that I've never, you know, with a, um...

KERRY: Hooker?

JIM: Well, yes.

KERRY: You surprise me.

JIM: Why should that surprise you? What are you insinuating?

KERRY: Oh, don't get angry. Sorry, I just meant being on the road and all that.

JIM: Yes, well. I suppose you would know.

KERRY: Yes.

JIM: I suppose a few of my colleagues, well, the stories they tell.

KERRY: Salesmen are our best customers.

JIM: But, it isn't something that I would, I mean, I don't want you to lose any business by talking to me when you could be, er, looking for clients.

KERRY: Look around Jim. There's only you and me in the bar.

JIM: Did you just call me Jim?

KERRY: Sorry, Brian I mean.

JIM: Why did you call me Jim?

KERRY: I don't know. Maybe you look like a Jim.

JIM: I look like a Jim? Do I? Well, you were right anyway.

KERRY: Sorry?

JIM: I am Jim. That's my name, not Brian.

KERRY: Oh. Why did you say your name was Brian?

JIM: I don't know. I guess I just wanted to be anonymous.

KERRY: Why would you want to be anonymous?

JIM: I don't really know.

KERRY: In case you decided to have a bit of business after all?

JIM: No. No I, I don't know.

KERRY: Are you always like this?

JIM: What?

KERRY: Nervous.

JIM: Not really. I don't think so.

KERRY: Am I making you nervous?

JIM: A bit.

KERRY: Why?

JIM: It's just an unusual situation for me. I don't know, I suppose I'm out of my comfort zone. I mean, I've never spoken to a, er...

KERRY: Hooker.

JIM: Hooker before.

KERRY: Don't worry about it. As I said, I won't bite.

JIM: Most of the women I speak to are buyers.

KERRY: As opposed to sellers. Well, sell me something then. Sell me some pasta sauce.

JIM: Oh, I couldn't. I mean, I need to have the samples with me.

KERRY: Are the samples in your room?

JIM: Um. Yes.

KERRY: Well then.

JIM: Well then what?

KERRY: Lead the way.

JIM: Lead the way?

KERRY: That's what I said.

JIM: You want to come to my room?

KERRY: Yes.

JIM: Why do you want to come up to my room?

KERRY: To see your *(pause)* product.

JIM: Oh God.

KERRY: I like you Jim. You're a nice man.

JIM: Look, I really don't think...

KERRY: Don't you find me attractive?

JIM: Yes, of course I do, but...

KERRY: This one will be free Jim.

JIM: You are joking, of course.

KERRY: Why should I be joking?

JIM: What would you want with me?

KERRY: I like you.

JIM: Do you sleep with every man that you like?

KERRY: No, but they are not all like you.

JIM: It's out of the question. You've only just met me. You don't know anything about me. I

shouldn't have bought you that drink. Excuse me.

KERRY: Oh don't go Jim.

JIM: I made it clear that I wasn't interested.

KERRY: Jim, please. I'm sorry. I didn't mean it

JIM: It sounded like you meant it.

KERRY: I was just joking. I went too far.

JIM: You were joking?

KERRY: Yes. I'm sorry.

JIM: I didn't find it very funny.

KERRY: No. I'm really sorry.

JIM: I tell you that I'm nervous and don't speak much with women and you start coming on to me. Funny sense of humour, you have.

KERRY: Bad taste! Sorry.

JIM: OK. Forgiven, but I think I really should be going anyway.

KERRY: No Jim. Stay with me. Talk with me a while longer.

JIM: Why?

KERRY: I've upset you, I'm sorry. Let me buy you a drink.

JIM: I'm all right thanks.

KERRY: But stay a while please.

JIM: Why? What does either of us have to gain from me staying to talk to you.

KERRY: I don't like to fall out with people. Stay and talk a while.

JIM: All right. A few minutes. My table won't be ready yet anyway.

KERRY: Thank you.

JIM: I still don't understand why you are so desperate to talk to me.

KERRY: You're an interesting man. I'd like to get to know you.

JIM: But you'll never see me again. After tonight.

KERRY: No. But I can enjoy talking to you for now.

JIM: If you like. I don't see what is so fascinating.

KERRY: I don't meet many shy men in my game.

JIM: I never said that I was shy.

KERRY: Well, nervous-around-women men then.

JIM: I've not much experience I suppose. I got married young. Never looked at another woman.

KERRY: Really?

JIM: Yes. I've not needed to. I have a wonderful wife.

KERRY: (*Shocked*) Really?

JIM: Oh yes. I'd do anything for her. I miss her terribly when I'm on the road. I'm looking for something else. An office job so that I can go home every night.

KERRY: Have you told her that?

JIM: No. I want it to be a surprise. I sense that she is a bit fed up with me being away all the time. You know, a bit of tension when I say that I'm off on another trip.

KERRY: I see.

JIM: I don't know why I'm telling you all this. I must sound like a right sad case.

KERRY: No. You sound lovely. You're a lovely man Jim.

JIM: Thank you.

KERRY: Your wife doesn't know how lucky she is.

JIM: Oh, I don't know about that. It would be nice to get off the road though. Start doing things together in the week instead of just at the weekends.

KERRY: Do you do a lot of things together?

JIM: Well, we like to try things out you know. We tried rambling a few weeks back but we only went out once. She wasn't so keen after that.

KERRY: That's a shame.

JIM: It's OK. I wasn't that keen myself to be honest. I only went along with it to please her. Anyway, I still don't really know what your intention was when you started talking to me, but I think my table should be ready by now so, er, nice to have met you, er...

KERRY: Kerry. And you, Jim. What are you doing after dinner?

JIM: Up to my room as usual I suppose. Alone.

KERRY: Of course. Well have a nice evening. Goodbye Jim. Nice to have met you.

JIM: Er, yes. Good evening.

JIM exits. KERRY takes out her mobile telephone and calls a number. After a while she speaks.

KERRY: Maddy? Maddy, listen it's Kerry. *(Pause)* No I haven't done it already. I'm not going to do it. *(Pause)* Because I have no intention of going through with it. *(Pause)* I am a professional. *(Pause)* You won't get a better assassin for the money you're paying. *(Pause)* Because you lied to me. He's a lovely man. He's not sleeping around at all. He turned me down flat. *(Pause)* What do you mean ugly? *(Pause)* Well, never mind, I'm not going to through with it and that is final. He said some lovely things, do you know he wants to come off the road so he can come home to you every night. Does that sound like a philanderer to you? *(Pause)* Well, it's what he said. *(Pause)* He said he goes up to his room every night after dinner. *(Pause)* Watch TV I suppose. *(Pause)* I have no idea if he watches porn channels, he never said. *(Pause)* Maddy, I really don't want to know. *(Pause)* Well, I don't know why he isn't interested in you any more and I don't think that is true anyway. He thinks the world of you, he said so. *(Pause)* Well, you'll have to find someone else because I'm not doing it. I'm going now. Forget you ever contacted me.

KERRY puts away her mobile and is about to leave when JIM returns.

JIM: Bloody restaurant didn't have my booking.

KERRY: Does it matter?

JIM: Yes, they're full. Nothing until after nine. I can't wait until then, I'm starving. I'll have room service instead.

KERRY: They do bar meals here.

JIM: Do they?

KERRY: Yes. We could eat together.

JIM: You never give up do you?

KERRY: Just a bite to eat Jim. I'll pay.

JIM: You'll pay!

KERRY: Yes.

JIM: You seem to have your profession all arse about face.

KERRY: I'm not a hooker Jim.

JIM: You're not?

KERRY: No.

JIM: So what was all that about?

KERRY: Sit down and I'll tell you.

He does so.

JIM: I'm very confused.

KERRY: It's a long story Jim. And you're not going to like it. But it is important you hear me out.

JIM: And then do I get to eat?

KERRY: If you still have an appetite.

JIM: I wouldn't worry about that.

KERRY: The first thing you need to know is that I am being paid by your wife.

JIM: To do what?

KERRY: To kill you.

JIM: That's a joke, right?

KERRY: No.

JIM: Why?

KERRY: Because she wants you dead. I don't know.

JIM: You didn't ask?

KERRY: The less you know the better in my profession.

JIM: Your profession?

KERRY: Er..

JIM: What is your profession?

KERRY: Well, actually I'm a dental receptionist, but I'm trying to earn a bit on the side as an assassin.

JIM: I see. Is it going well?

KERRY: Too early to say.

JIM: Oh?

KERRY: Yes, you're my first client.

JIM: Isn't my wife your client?

KERRY: I suppose so.

JIM: Well, you must have an interesting CV. Dental Receptionist and Assassin. Don't really go

together do they?

KERRY: Oh, I don't know. Both involve listening to a lot of screaming.

JIM: Good point. So why are you telling me?

KERRY: I don't think I can go through with it.

JIM: You don't think so?

KERRY: No.

JIM: Well, let me know when you've made your mind up, won't you?

KERRY: You see, the one thing your wife did say was that you were unfaithful. A different girl in every town, that sort of thing, but now that I've got to know you, I don't think that you are like that at all.

JIM: Well, that's something.

KERRY: I wonder why she wants you dead. Are you insured?

JIM: I guess so. I'm sorry, this is just beginning to sink in. Here I am trying to find a new job so that I can spend more time at home and she wants me dead!

KERRY: I don't think she's very nice.

JIM: No. I think plotting to murder your husband just about puts you in the 'not very nice' bracket.

KERRY: I'm sorry.

JIM: Oh, it's not your fault. I suppose you were just trying to earn a dishonest bob. What do you charge? Fifty K? One hundred?

KERRY: One hundred.

JIM: Nice money of you can get it.

KERRY: Pounds.

JIM: What?

KERRY: One hundred pounds.

JIM: A hundred quid for killing me! Is that all I'm worth?

KERRY: She beat me down. I asked for twenty thousand.

JIM: It seems to me that you are not a very skilled negotiator.

KERRY: I didn't have any references. It's hard when you are just starting out.

JIM: References! Assassins have references?

KERRY: How else would anyone know if you are any good? She said she's give me a reference if I did a good job and then I could start earning big money.

JIM: Is it my wife who said that you need references?

KERRY: Er. Yes. Actually.

JIM: Has anyone ever suggested to you that you might be just a little bit gullible?

KERRY: I'm sorry. I'm doing my best. *(She begins to get upset.)*

JIM: Look. I'm sorry, don't get upset. You were doing very well.

KERRY: Really?

JIM: Yes. I'm sure you'll make a cracking assassin.

KERRY: Do you think so?

JIM: Without a doubt. One of the best.

KERRY: Thank you.

JIM: Don't mention it. Just don't make me your first victim eh?

KERRY: Oh no, I wouldn't Jim. Not after getting to know you.

JIM: Well that's good to hear.

KERRY: How about your wife?

JIM: What?

KERRY: I could do her. On the house.

JIM: No! No, really. I don't think so.

KERRY: That's what's so nice about you Jim. No one would blame you.

JIM: I think the police might.

KERRY: If they find out. Why should they?

JIM: No. Really, I think I'd rather just get a divorce.

MADDY has arrived on the scene just in time to hear the word divorce. Her face screws up with hate. She hides herself from the others behind the pot plant and continues to listen.

KERRY: You're probably right. It is the sensible option

JIM: Well it is a bit more civilised than your method.

KERRY: To be honest, I don't think I'm really cut out for it.

JIM: No?

KERRY: No. Silly idea. It isn't me at all. I just wanted a way of making a lot of money without doing too much work. Been doing the lottery for years and that hasn't got me anywhere. Assassin was the first thing I thought of.

JIM: Thank goodness there aren't many around like you. "I didn't win the lottery, so I became an assassin". No one would be safe on the streets.

KERRY: Have you got a better idea?

JIM: You could try the other profession. The one you were supposed to be practising earlier on.

KERRY: Made a bit of a mess of that as well, didn't I? I don't think being a hooker is me either. I suppose I'll just have to remain a dental receptionist and never be rich.

JIM: Money isn't everything you know.

KERRY: No, but it helps you appreciate everything else.

JIM: I thought love was everything. How wrong I was.

KERRY: Oh, don't be like that. Try to be positive.

JIM: Be Positive! How can I? What's the point in me going home ever again?

KERRY: Maybe you can work things out.

JIM: I don't think I could look her in the face. Still I suppose it is safer than turning my back on her: who knows what she might do. How were you going to do it by the way?

KERRY: Oh, I don't think you want to know.

JIM: I do. I do.

KERRY: Gun. She gave it to me.

JIM: She gave you a gun?

KERRY: That's why I had no room to negotiate. An assassin without a weapon. Bit pathetic isn't it?

JIM: Where on earth did she get a gun?

KERRY: I don't know. ebay?

JIM: Do you have it now?

KERRY: Of course. Do you want to see it?

JIM: No. Look, just get rid of it somehow. Don't give it back to her whatever you do.

KERRY: I'm sorry Jim. Really I am.

JIM: Don't worry. I hope you've learned a lesson.

KERRY: I have. I'll never do anything like this again. I'll take the card out of the newsagent's window tomorrow.

JIM: The newsagent's...

KERRY: I'll leave you now. Let you get on with organising your dinner. You must be starving.

JIM: I think I've lost my appetite. And you don't need to go. It makes a change to have a bit of company.

KERRY: I'm a getting a bit embarrassed to be honest. You know, with the way I'm dressed, and you obviously a business man. I don't want people thinking that I am a hooker. Well, not now anyway. I feel a bit silly.

JIM: OK, if you want to go.

KERRY: No I don't want to go. It's just... Can we go somewhere a bit more private?

JIM: Well...

KERRY: Your room?

JIM: Whilst you've got a gun in your handbag?

KERRY: Don't you trust me Jim?

JIM: Yes, of course, but one can't be too careful.

KERRY: You're right. I'll get rid of it.

JIM: How?

KERRY: I'll just leave it here. I'll hide it in that pot plant.

JIM: Do you think that is a good idea?

KERRY: No one will see me. The bar man is out the back and no one else is around at the moment. I've never touched the gun without wearing gloves or holding it with a cloth so it will be fine.

JIM: Well, I don't know.

KERRY: We've got so much to talk about Jim. We could order room service and stay up there all night.

Before JIM can object any further KERRY takes the gun out of her bag and goes to hide it in the pot plant. MADDY leaps out from behind the plant and snatches the gun. KERRY screams and runs off. JIM turns to see MADDY approach him pointing the gun.

MADDY: You creep. Lucky I was here to stop you jumping into bed with that whore!

JIM: I wasn't...

MADDY: Of course you were. Well your days of philandering are over.

JIM: I don't...

MADDY: Of course you do. You have played away for the last time.

JIM: I haven't...

MADDY: Of course you have. But no more. Here, sign this. *(She thrusts a piece of paper in front of him.)*

JIM: What's this?

MADDY: Never mind. Just sign it.

JIM: I'm not signing something without reading it first. *(He does so.)* I can't stand the guilt any longer. Please tell my beautiful wife that I'm sorry. She never deserved to be married to creep like me. I hope that with me out of the way she will find a decent man. Goodbye cruel world. *(To MADDY)* You expect me to sign this?

MADDY: I don't think you're a position to argue

JIM: Or what? You'll kill me if I don't sign? What do you do if I do sign?

MADDY: Maybe I'll let you live.

JIM: In which case the suicide note is worthless. Whereas, if I don't sign it and you kill me then it's a suspicious death.

MADDY: What?

JIM: If I sign that note and you kill me, the police will think it's suicide. If I don't sign it and you kill me, the police are going to be looking for a murderer. All in all I think it is better that I don't sign.

MADDY: I'm going to kill you!

JIM: Do so and you'll be a murder suspect.

MADDY: I don't care!

MADDY throws the gun to JIM who catches it mystified. MADDY exits hurriedly leaving JIM turning the gun over in his hands. MADDY returns with a frozen leg of lamb. She swings at JIM attempting to hit him around the head. She chases him around the stage during the following dialogue.

JIM: What do you think you're doing?

MADDY: I'm murdering you, what do you think?

JIM: But I've got the gun.

MADDY: It's a fake you idiot!

JIM: A fake!

MADDY: You don't think I'd trust that trollop with a real gun do you? She'd probably shoot a waiter or something.

JIM: So how was she going to kill me?

MADDY: I was hoping that she would use her imagination.

JIM: Maddy this is ridiculous. Put the joint down.

MADDY: Ha ha, that's quite funny. In old gangster movies they used to call a gun a joint.

JIM: Yes, that's hilarious Maddy. Now stop trying to knock my head off with it. Please.

MADDY: But this is number eight.

JIM: Number eight?

MADDY: Yes. Six. Hire an assassin. Seven. Fake his suicide. Eight. Smack him around the head with a frozen leg of lamb then feed the murder weapon to the cops.

JIM: You mean we are still doing the video?

MADDY: Yes. Of course.

JIM: Well, thank goodness for that.

JIM stops running. MADDY brings the leg of lamb crashing down onto his skull. JIM collapses. JULIE appears and she and MADDY drag JIM's body off. JOHN appears smartly dressed.

JOHN: *(Addressing the audience)* Well, things are moving on at a cracking pace aren't they. Only two methods to go, but before we move on it's time for something a little bit different. You see, I'm not just an actor but I'm also a comic so, as we have bit of time whilst the others get ready for the next scene, I'd like to give you a little sample of my act. *(JOHN now adopts the persona of a terrible comedian.)*

I haven't always done this you know? No I used to work in a zoo but I got the sack for bad spelling. How did I get the sack for bad spelling, you ask. Well it is like this. I needed to get some animals so I sent an email to the supplier saying 'please send ten mongeese.' Then I thought no; the plural of mongoose isn't mongeese. So I sent another saying 'please send ten mongooses.' But I thought no, that's silly. So I sent another saying 'please send ten mongi'. But then I thought no, that isn't right either. Then I had a brain wave. I sent an email that said 'please send a mongoose.' Full stop. 'Actually, make that ten.' I was pretty pleased with myself until the next day when a truck turned up with forty of the little buggers! Ha ha.

Then I went to work on a building site. I...

MADDY has appeared. She is wearing training shoes.

MADDY: John, what are you doing?

JOHN: Oh nothing.

MADDY: You're doing your act aren't you?

JOHN: No. I'm er just introducing the next scene.

MADDY: Yes, well, I'll do that thank you. We move now to the penultimate method. "Strangers on a, um, bus".

Scene Two

JOHN, JIM and KERRY remove the hotel scene and set two chairs or a bench to represent bus seats. They exit. JULIE enters dressed smartly wearing business shoes and carrying a number of tennis rackets and a magazine. She wears a gold bracelet. MADDY and JULIE sit side by side. After a moment MADDY stretches, accidentally kicking JULIE.

MADDY: Oh, I'm sorry.

JULIE: That's quite all right.

MADDY: Aren't you Julie Selby?

JULIE nods politely.

MADDY: Sure. I saw you beat Newbold in straight sets at the tennis club the other week. What a

backhand!

JULIE smiles and opens her magazine and starts to read.

MADDY: I'm Maddy.

JULIE: How do you do.

MADDY: Sorry. I don't usually talk this much. Go ahead and read.

JULIE tries to read but is finding it difficult with MADDY staring at her.

MADDY: It must be exciting to be so important.

JULIE: I'm not important. I just play at my local club. I'm not even very good.

MADDY: Oh, you are modest. You beat Newbold didn't you? She's been the star of the club for years. I admire people who can do things. I can't do anything. I can't play tennis. I just like to go to watch. I bet you're going to the sports centre, aren't you. It's county trials today.

JULIE: You certainly know a lot about tennis.

MADDY: I wish I could come and watch you. I have to get home.

JULIE turns a page of her magazine and MADDY catches sight of her bracelet. She grasps it and reads the inscription.

MADDY: "From B to J". Bet I know who "B" is.

JULIE: (Coldly) Yes.

MADDY: Barry Micklewhite. Son of the tennis club president.

JULIE: You are certainly well informed.

MADDY: I listen to the gossip. A lot of it is rubbish but if enough people are saying it then there must be some truth, don't you think. Ask me anything and I'll have the answer. Like who would like to marry who if she could get a divorce.

JULIE: Perhaps you listen to too much gossip.

MADDY: I'm sorry. I'm talking too much. I meet someone I like and I just can't stop talking.

JULIE: It's OK. I guess I'm a bit jumpy.

MADDY: You have every right to be. So, when is the wedding?

JULIE: What?

MADDY: The wedding. You and Barry.

JULIE: There isn't going to be one, unless they have legalised bigamy.

MADDY: Husband won't give you a divorce? How long will you have to wait? Two years? Five?

JULIE returns to her magazine.

MADDY: Can I come to the wedding? I could help you organise it. I could choose the hymns. I'll have him, him, him and him. Eh Julie. That's funny isn't it? Him, him, him and him.

JULIE smiles wanly.

MADDY: This is wonderful having your company all the way into town.

JULIE: Actually I'm getting off at Broadway.

MADDY: Why would anyone want to get off at Broadway? Bit of a dump isn't it? The police dogs go round in pairs.

JULIE: It's where I live.

MADDY: I thought you lived... Oh, I see. You mean where your husband lives. Going to have a little chat about divorce? I suppose he was the boy next door. Childhood sweethearts, before you moved up in the world?

JULIE: Something like that.

MADDY: You try to make something of your life but people drag you back don't they? Some people will always be in the gutter won't they Julie? It's like my husband. He's the top salesman at his firm. Earns a fortune in bonuses but he won't spend it. Anything I want I have to buy myself. Why should I have to work when he has got so much in the bank? He won't give me a thing. He hates me.

JULIE: Sounds bad.

MADDY: And I hate him.

JULIE: Well what are you going to do about it?

MADDY: Before or after I kill him?

JULIE: *(Not taking her seriously)* Before of course.

MADDY: I have a theory that you should try to do everything before you die. Did you ever drive a car a one hundred and fifty miles an hour blindfolded?

JULIE: Not lately.

MADDY: I did. I flew a jet plane too. Zoom! And I'm going to book a seat on the first passenger rocket to the moon.

JULIE: It sounds like you are trying to prove something.

MADDY: I'm not like you Julie. I'm not successful. Marrying the club president's son is a smart move.

JULIE: The fact the Barry is the son of the president has nothing to do with anything.

MADDY: Take it easy. I'm your friend remember.

JULIE: Yes. Sure.

MADDY: What did you say his name was? Your husband.

JULIE: Sam.

MADDY: That's it Sam Selby. Have you played around a lot?

JULIE: What?

MADDY: I mean in tournaments.

JULIE: That isn't what you meant and I really don't think that it is any of your business.

MADDY: He could make a lot of trouble for you in the divorce court.

JULIE: Can we change the subject?

MADDY: OK. Would you like to hear about my ideas for murdering my husband?

JULIE: You've been reading too many of these. *(indicating her magazine)*

MADDY: Do you want to hear about the broken light socket in the bathroom? Or the carbon monoxide in the garage? There are so many ways to do it I have hardly scratched the surface.

JULIE: You mean you have already tried?

MADDY: I didn't say that.

JULIE: Call me old fashioned but I thought murder was against the law.

MADDY: But not against the laws of nature. I reckon anyone is capable of murder. Wouldn't you like to get rid of you useless husband?

JULIE: You can't murder people just because they are useless!

MADDY: True. Look at the government. Oh, but what's a life or two. Some people are better off dead. Take our husbands for example. It reminds me of an idea I had once. I used to drift off to sleep at night figuring it out. Let's say you want to get rid of your husband.

JULIE: Why?

MADDY: Let's say he makes life difficult for you. Makes it hard to get a fair divorce settlement. But you are afraid to kill him in case you get caught. And what would trip you up? Motive! That's why people get caught, no alibi and plenty of motive. Now here is my plan.

JULIE: I really don't have time to listen...

MADDY: It's so simple. A couple of people meet accidentally. They don't know each other. Anyone who knows them both will say that they are not friends. Each one has someone that they would like to get rid of but they are afraid to do it in case they get caught. So, they swap murders!

JULIE: Swap murders?

MADDY: Each one does the other one's murder. Simple. The one with the motive isn't there; each one murders a total stranger. You know, like you do mine and I do yours.

JULIE: This is my stop.

MADDY: For example, your husband, my husband. Criss-cross.

JULIE: (*Getting up*) What?

MADDY: We talk the same language don't we Julie?

JULIE: Yes, sure. Er, nice meeting you.

MADDY: You think my theory is OK don't you?

JULIE: What? Oh yes. It's fine. Certainly. (*She exits.*)

MADDY: Yeah. Criss-cross. Criss-cross.

The lights fade and the stage is cleared for the final scene. JIM and KERRY are left on the stage.

KERRY: Jim, can I have a word?

JIM: Yeah, what?

KERRY: Did you watch that last scene?

JIM: No, why?

KERRY: Maddy was acting a bit odd.

JIM: Well, she's no Helen Mirren.

KERRY: She seems to be becoming a bit obsessed.

JIM: She's been under a lot of stress.

KERRY: I'm a bit concerned.

JIM: Don't worry. Everything is under control. Everything's fine. Really.

Scene Three

They exit. A drum beat starts and the lighting is low. Three characters appear dressed identically and wearing masks. The clothing should make it impossible to determine the gender of each character. The three characters on stage begin to dance in time to the drums. They take themselves

very seriously but it is pretty awful. MADDY's rap begins as a voice-over. The players dance frantically between the verses.

MADDY: *(Voice-over)*

And so we come to the final scene.

I'm feeling hot, I'm feeling mean.

I hope you enjoy this little rap

And don't think that this music is... not to your taste.

So what is going on you might ask.

Why is everyone wearing a mask?

They don't really need to be all the same

Because anonymity is the name of the game.

Someone will fire a gun; someone will die,

But who did what and who knows why?

Though witnesses there are many,

Reliable ones, there just ain't any.

JIM and KERRY enter dressed exactly the same as the others. There should be a lot of movement so that the audience loses track of who is who.

And so we come to the final page

And all our players are on the stage.

Who is who, you cannot tell,

And, if you want to get away with murder, that is just as well.

You see there are many ways to kill a man.

You can hit him (on the head) with a frying pan;

Bury him (in the garden,) with the runner beans;

Or blame it on a restaurant's poor hygiene.

Get a doc to say it was natural causes;

Push him off a cliff (having checked the insurance clauses);

Or hire an assassin, though I wouldn't recommend it:

Why pay out money when you can spend it?

A great alibi behind which you can hide

Is to get him to say it was suicide.
If you can't manage that, and I doubt if you can,
Then beat the bugger to death with a (frozen) leg of lamb.

Whichever method you choose, the problem is the same;
The police will always look for someone to blame.
Even if it is a person you meet on a bus,
It is just too complicated, too much fuss.

So here is the moment you've been waiting for:
Just when you think you can't take any more.
I don't know why I didn't do this right at the start,
Pull out a gun and aim for the heart!

A gun is fired and one of the characters drops to the floor. The drum beat stops and the lights come up. The gun man removes his mask and reveals himself to be JIM. KERRY removes her mask and they kiss. The other two drag off the body.

JIM: *(To audience)* Well, that is the end of "The Beginners Guide to Murdering Your Husband". The trouble is that murder is not for beginners; it's best to leave it to someone who knows what they are doing. Whilst Maddy has been thinking up all her crackpot little schemes, I have just been waiting my time, knowing that she would slip up somewhere. I saw the script for this. I knew what she was going to do and I knew that she wouldn't have the sense to check that (her) gun was still hidden in her costume when she came out here. (She didn't realise it was missing, but I had it!) Of course this 'video' will never see the light of day. A bit like Maddy, in that respect. Good night everyone.

JIM and KERRY embrace. Unseen by them MADDY enters. She watches them for a moment then looks to the audience and smiles.

MADDY: Hi Jim. *(He swings round, shocked.)* Surprise! *(Calling off)* This way officers, this way. Mind you don't trip over Julie. That's it. *(JIM and KERRY stare at each other mortified.)* Just stay there a moment officers, I just need to finish this. *(She smiles at the audience.)* You didn't really think I'd murder my husband did you? Way too risky, I could go to prison for the rest of my life. But if you are smart about it, ladies, there is no need for you to murder anyone. There is more than one way to skin a cat, and there is more than one way to rid yourself of your husband. *(To JIM)* Nice one Jim. Murder and attempted murder with one shot. Or will they treat Julie's death as manslaughter, I wonder. Either way, I hope you two like prison food. *(To audience)* I hope you have found this programme useful. And I hope things work out as well for you as they have for me.

JOHN appears and he and MADDY embrace. She calls off as the lights fade.

MADDY: Ready when you are officers. They're waiting for you.

End