

# VERY NASTY INDEED

By Daniel Curzon (414-297-9220)

## CHARACTERS: (4)

DIANA RUSTIGAN, a thriller writer, a titled, handsome, patrician woman in her 40s  
COLIN RUSTIGAN, her husband, an attractive, nervous man in his 30s  
SONIA ABINGDON, Diana's pretty, ironical sister, a widow in her 30s  
GEORGE TATTERSALL, the gardener, a scruffy, feeble-minded man in his 20s

SET: The spacious study of a manor house, Oakdurham Park in Oxfordshire, with the large Oakdurham family coat of arms above the mantelpiece, plus old guns, knives, a crossbow, a poison dart gun, torture devices, etc. on and around the mantelpiece and on display throughout the room. (It could be set in the USA with appropriate small alterations.)

Upstage are a small window, a desk, and a liquor cabinet. A door, stage left, leads to the rest of the house. A door, stage right, leads to DIANA's off-stage bedroom.

## ACT I, SCENE 1 (The Present)

(We dimly see a figure under a blanket on a sofa upstage.)

(It is nearly dark. A lone shaft of light penetrates the darkness as the SL door slowly opens. There is no sound, except for an occasional creak in the beams of the manor house.)

DIANA (waking on the sofa, afraid) Colin, is that you? . . . (A sinister silence.) Colin? . . . I know it's you, dear. (More sinister silence) Come out, you can't fool me. (No reply.) Colin, this isn't funny! . . . Colin!

(The light is switched on. COLIN comes in as though he wasn't aware that DIANA was in the room and has only just now appeared.)

COLIN Oh, were you taking a nap, Diana? Sorry. (Starts to leave)

DIANA (getting up, annoyed) What do you think you were doing?

COLIN (innocent) Doing? What do you mean?

DIANA (she can't read him) The door came open.

COLIN One of the drafts in this place, I suppose.

DIANA You scared me half to death!

COLIN Half to d—? Need I point out that it's the middle of the afternoon. I can hardly be accused of sinister plots merely because I happen to come into your study.

DIANA I was taking a nap.

COLIN How unlike you, Diana. Still, I guess I should have been psychic and known that, shouldn't I have?

DIANA Sorry, I shouldn't have accused you. But you did give me a fright. I miss Alice and Sean not being in the house. Aside from their work, they were a comfort to have around.

COLIN I'm sorry I had to fire them, Diana, but they were robbing you blind. They had to go! We'll hire more servants soon. Here, let's open the curtains. (Pulls open the heavy curtains) There! . . . Is all forgiven?

DIANA All is forgiven. (Holds out her arms to him)

(COLIN gives her a kiss on the cheek.)

COLIN That's better. It's such a shame we're getting a divorce.

DIANA Sometimes I think so myself.

COLIN Should we change our minds?

DIANA I don't think so.

COLIN Quite. I don't think so either. Oh well, the more things change, the more they remain the same, or something.

DIANA Why didn't you knock? You've never come in here before like this.

COLIN I thought I saw you leave about an hour ago. I had no idea you were here.

DIANA It seems I may have to have locks put on the doors.

COLIN How's the new thriller going? Is that why you're so jumpy? Are you blocked?

DIANA Actually it's going very well. (Shows him some pages) Almost finished. Did you come in to read it? (ironic) Just couldn't wait?

COLIN I came in to steal it, darling. What else?

DIANA (angrily) What was your real purpose? Tell me!

COLIN (flustered) I came in to borrow your Tippex. I was writing a letter and made a mistake. I wish you would stop treating me like a criminal!

DIANA (suspicious) You really ought to keep some Tippex in your own quarters.

COLIN I suppose I should. Somehow I keep forgetting to buy some. What's it about this time — your novel? Not another one set in this house! (Gestures at the weapons on the mantelpiece, wall, etc.)

DIANA I hadn't realised my house was as tired as all that.

COLIN Surely your readers will begin to notice. Not the knives again? By the way, that bolt on the coat of arms may need looking after.

DIANA I thought the crossbow this time. Father loved it the best of all his collection. (Goes to it, takes it from the mantelpiece) Makes a delicious murder weapon, don't you think? Especially in a modern setting. And symbolic too.

COLIN Not old values shooting down the new — that sort of thing?

DIANA Yes. I thought —

COLIN I'm sorry to say it, Diana, but, symbolism apart, the plot's extremely tired. *Deathtrap*, wasn't it? Or was it *Sleuth*? Why not something fresh—an iron maiden with *old* spikes inside — the victim rusts to death! Or something utterly modern — curare poison on the keyboard of a word processor! Author killed as she turns out her fifth, or is it sixth, thriller?

DIANA Actually my seventh. How kind of you not to notice. A good thing I only write them for fun. Given your attitude toward my work, I'd be severely depressed if I considered them important, wouldn't I?

COLIN Oh, darling, I am sorry. I can't help teasing now, can I? Another? (Gives her another kiss on the cheek) You mustn't listen to me. What do I know about thrillers. You have your loyal fans who, I'm sure, must be dying for another Lady Diana Rustigan novel.

DIANA I hope it sells better than the last one.

COLIN Didn't that one sell?

DIANA Just goes to show how little we know about each other, how little we've talked of late, doesn't it? *The Spot on the Veil* was the absolute nadir of my career. My publisher was not pleased.

COLIN Well, get another publisher then. A gentleman.

DIANA (wistfully) There aren't any gentlemen left.

COLIN They should be grateful to have an earl's daughter writing for them. Worth mounds of publicity.

DIANA You must keep up, Colin. No one gives a hearty damn if some member of the upper class deigns to turn out clever little mind teasers which a few of the old faithful ring up and order from the quaint old bookseller down the lane. These days, even the aristocracy has to sell to the multitudes!

COLIN Not money problems again! Oh, Diana.

DIANA Always, darling. My middle name is Money Problems.

COLIN So sad when nobility sinks. Having to grub and all that. You're not thinking of renting rooms, I hope.

DIANA We don't sink quietly when we sink, and you ought to know that.

COLIN Sorry to be such a brainless little cutey — not keeping up on all your financial difficulties, but I must say it's always been a bopping bore to me. I mean, if it's *really* that serious, can't you conduct tours of the upper floors or — or — I know! Commercials for television. Lady Diana contentedly drinking a bubbly something in her bath while hordes of nobodies pass close by behind a velvet rope to gape.

DIANA You think it's a joke, but nothing strikes more terror in my heart. Or worse. Imagine my having to give up this house!

COLIN (tired of hearing it) I know — his favorite house that your marvelous father left you because he was sure you were “absolutely the only one who could keep it great in this terrible world of lowered standards and utter commonness.”

DIANA I may have to sell off some of the park lands, you shit!

COLIN Well, then you'd better write away on your little thriller, hadn't you, instead of taking naps in the middle of the afternoon? The lower classes don't take naps. That's how they get ahead.

DIANA You ought to know.

COLIN Tut! Tut! No casting aspersions now. I can't help my origins. I think I've done quite well for myself, considering.

DIANA Indeed.

COLIN I was just so charming and sexy you couldn't resist me.

DIANA Something like that. Of course that was three years ago. A great deal has changed since then.

COLIN Yes, you've aged . . . (a false compliment) Quite well, considering.

DIANA I was warned not to marry a poor and younger man without name or family —

COLIN — A possible rogue?

DIANA — but then we all make mistakes in life.

COLIN On the contrary, I have both a name and a family — if not the Oakdurham one, and I'm proud of them. And, believe it or not, I was warned not to marry an

earl's daughter — yes, with a bit of money, but with far, far greater *pretensions* of noble blood lines, blood lines stretching back to the dawn of time, or was it to the afternoon of time? Just what did your ancestors do, Diana, to earn their title? Go on a crusade and kill heathens? Sack monasteries? Or was it for helping to confiscate lands from peasants? Remind me of your glorious origins, won't you?

DIANA Funny, you think nothing of living off my family's ill-gotten goods. If you're so committed to 'peasants' as you say, why don't you give back the settlement I made on you before we were married, as I've asked you to countless times, and go back to being what you yourself obviously were — a rapacious little *parvenu*!

COLIN Wouldn't think of it. I earned what I have — every pound. Don't force me to be common — your favorite word — and spell out how I earned it. But you signed the pre-nuptial agreement — for our marriage and for after our marriage — and I'm not giving up so much as a farthing. You'll just have to write it off as a folly of your youth.

DIANA I've committed no folly. You won't keep getting my money, you scoundrel!

COLIN Only a scoundrel? Not a shit? Want to wager I *won't* keep it? Want to test it in court?

DIANA Don't you have any shame about what you are?

COLIN Don't you have any sense — common or otherwise — about what people need in order to live and what they'll do to get money or keep it? And they won't bother being 'clever' about it, like in your little books. They'll marry whom they have to in order to get it and simply bludgeon anyone who tries to take it away from them. Diana, you've been rich too long! Your park lands! You don't have a clue about desperation.

DIANA Thank you for reminding me again how much I want this divorce. For a moment earlier I'd almost gone dotty. I thought perhaps I'd detected a remnant of the love you vowed, you protested so vehemently. Wasn't that you saying all those breathy things three years ago? Even as late as two years ago? Perhaps I'm wrong. It was some impostor who resembles you. No! No doubt it's my fading memory in my fading years. You bastard!

COLIN Don't work yourself up, Diana. You'll put stress on your weak heart. We wouldn't want you to keel over and die, would we?

DIANA If you think my heart is that delicate, you've got another think coming. I'll outlive you by forty years, you crude little conniver! (Takes a book from her desk and throws it at him) How dare you!

COLIN (picking up the book) One of yours? . . . Yes, I see it is. Now it truly is pathetic when an author has to throw her books in order to get people to pay attention to them.

DIANA (throws the bottle of Tippex) Here's what you said you came for. Now get out.

COLIN (not picking up the bottle of Tippex) I always enjoy the rages of the aristocracy — so refined, so elegant. Are you positive you're your father's daughter? Perhaps your mother entertained the scullery boy from time to time? Genes will tell!

DIANA You're just trying to get me to . . . (Catches breath)

COLIN What's wrong?

DIANA (holding her chest) I think you truly are trying to kill me.

COLIN Don't be preposterous. You couldn't possibly believe real people act like they do in your shallow, silly novels.

DIANA I wouldn't put anything shallow or silly past you, Colin, my love.

COLIN You might be surprised at how deep I can be, Diana. And I don't just mean in the biblical sense.

DIANA What can I expect next? Rumbings in the attic? The gaslight flickering? Well, there's modern lighting in this house. My father saw to that.

COLIN I must protest this denigration of my character. I do not wish your death! And do you know why?

DIANA Because your financial settlement dries up if I'm gone.

COLIN Unless I hurry and inherit your property if you die while I'm *still* your husband!

DIANA Precisely.

COLIN Dear, dear Diana, why don't you get out of this study for a while, get away from your book. Breathe the mind-clearing air of the outdoors. Your imagination has become downright fetid.

DIANA And why don't you move out of the house entirely? Why do you continue to remain?

COLIN You think it's so I can stay around and say "Boo" when you're not looking and leave you gasping on the floor? (imitating her dying) "It . . . was . . . Colin who . . . did it!" I've told you I'm staying here until the divorce is final because I don't have anywhere else to go. It's as simple as that, ducky.

DIANA Live somewhere on the money I settled on you. Haven't you heard of *paying*?

COLIN But that uses it *up*, my darling. And, whatever you may imagine, the amount settled isn't nearly as much as you seem to think it is. You're like some *grande dame* of yesteryear (Lady Gutrot) who imagines she can still throw a tuppence at the footman and he should grovel in gratitude for at least a year afterwards.

DIANA So you need more money?

COLIN You finally apprehend!

DIANA Odd, do you know that the amount which goes to you annually would be just enough to pay the expenses here as well as keep the park lands from being developed? Can't I appeal to your better nature?

COLIN You're not getting it back, Diana. That's all there is to it. I see it's time for me to leave you to your work, such as it is. Call me if you need coaching on the way gigolos of the lower orders are supposed to speak. (Starts to exit)

DIANA You forgot something.

COLIN (irritated) What?

DIANA The Tippex. (Points it out on the floor) You like blotting things out, don't you?

COLIN (not touching it) No, thank you. I'll get my own. Do you understand me, darling — I'll get my own! (Exits)

DIANA (calling) Stay out of my study!

SONIA (entering) Thank you very much! (Turns and goes right back out)

DIANA I didn't mean you, Sonia. Come back! . . . Sonia!

SONIA (re-entering) Positive?

DIANA I was speaking to my almost ex-husband.

SONIA (closing the door) Yes, I saw him leaving.

DIANA (indicating that COLIN may be hiding behind the closed door) Did you? Well, good riddance to *bad rubbish* is what I say.

SONIA (understanding that COLIN is probably eavesdropping) What's Colin done to my poor big sister now?

DIANA For one thing, he keeps telling me I'm getting old.

SONIA The cad! Nonsense. You look wonderful, for a woman your age.

DIANA Will you stop! Or I'll begin to think you're in league with Colin to wear me down. . . . (suddenly afraid) You're *not*, are you?

SONIA (coolly) You know I can't stand the man, never have.

DIANA So I always thought. But I don't know what I think anymore — except that I don't trust him.

SONIA (moving closer to the door, listening for COLIN) Oh? I thought your divorce was proceeding in the most civilised way.

(Gestures silently to DIANA about whether they are talking for COLIN's benefit when he may not in fact be there now.)

DIANA He may be trying to kill me.

SONIA Kill you! Oh, Diana, you can't be serious.

DIANA I am serious.

SONIA For your money?

DIANA For the rags off my back. For the mulch in the potting shed. There's nothing too trivial he wouldn't do it for.

SONIA I think you're being semi-hysterical.

DIANA He's always creeping around. Lurking.

SONIA I've never seen him do any such thing.

(The sound of a creak of a floorboard outside the door.)

DIANA Perhaps you haven't been in the right place at the right time.

SONIA (being deliberately crude) Why don't you just kick his bleeding arse out of here? As they say somewhere.

DIANA How could I do that?

SONIA Get an injunction. . . . Hire thugs.

DIANA Of course if he had an ounce of . . .

SONIA Well, he doesn't. Don't waste your tears on the man. You can carry gentility too far. Then you have to act.

DIANA (weakly) I can't . . . I can't, that's all.

SONIA You're just overwrought because of the divorce and your new book. You need something pretty in this room. Not all these horrors! (gesturing at the weapons, etc.) I've got an idea! (Picks up the telephone, dials) Hello, George, this is Lady Sonia. Would you bring some flowers — lots of flowers — around to Lady Diana's study? . . . Anything, as long as they're pretty . . . Good. (Hangs up) George is coming 'round.

DIANA He hasn't ever made advances to you, by any chance, has he?

SONIA The gardener? That scruffy man? Advances to me? What can you be thinking, Diana!

DIANA I meant Colin.

SONIA Even if he weren't still your husband, Colin is most definitely not my idea of sex.

DIANA What is your idea of sex? Why is it you haven't remarried since Edwin died? How long has it been now?



SONIA Only a year and a half. Not that it's any of your business really, who I marry or who I don't. I made one good match.

DIANA Forgive me, Sonia. I'm overwrought. I'm just curious, that's all. Ever since you came back home to live, you've shown not the slightest interest in anything except the gardens. No men. No man.

SONIA I'm afraid men don't interest me very much anymore.

DIANA Women? . . . A woman?

SONIA (tongue in cheek) It's occasionally crossed my mind.

DIANA I wish I could say that. But, if anything, I think I'm getting worse about men. When Colin was here a few minutes ago, even while I was thoroughly loathing him, I was also thoroughly lusting after him. I hate to admit it.

SONIA Why, he isn't worthy to make your bed, let alone sleep in it.

DIANA Ah, Sonia, you are so perfect! You always say exactly what I want to hear, just when I want to hear it.

SONIA I say what I think, and only what I think.

DIANA Come on, *no one* does that. By the way, why did you come into my study just now?

SONIA Because I wanted to see you.

DIANA To borrow the Tippex?

SONIA What?

DIANA Nothing. A poor joke, but mine own. (She picks up the bottle of Tippex)

SONIA I want to talk to you. I've decided that trees bore me. What's this about Colin threatening you? (She touches a torture device) Is he violent? Did he throw this at you?

DIANA No.

SONIA Would he use something like this? (Picks up a knife)

DIANA (upset) Sonia, leave that alone. You're making me nervous.

SONIA Sorry. . . . Father was not a healthy-minded person, would you say? (Gestures at the weapons, etc.)

DIANA Don't start on father.

SONIA Didn't intend to! I suspect he and I were too much alike. That's why we didn't get along. (lifting another weapon)

DIANA All of his interest in death and murder was theoretical. He was a — a philosopher.

SONIA The earl? A philosopher? Oh, please! He was not normal!

DIANA He didn't have to commit real crimes because . . .

SONIA He committed them in his head?

DIANA That's too simple, but something like that.

SONIA And what about Colin? Are his crimes confined to his head?

DIANA Colin thinks he can creep around and . . .

SONIA Because of your heart? Honestly, I always thought that was only a story you put out so you wouldn't have to do things you didn't want to do. Since we were girls.

DIANA I'm afraid it's true. In fact, the doctor says it's worse. I had an examination a few days ago. I didn't mention it to anyone.

SONIA Oh, Diana, how terrible for you. (Goes to her, touches DIANA's hand) Is there anything I can do?

DIANA I'm afraid not. . . . Only Colin mustn't know. Promise me you won't —

SONIA I wouldn't dream of telling him. I barely speak to the man as it is. Thank god, we have all these rooms so I can avoid him.

DIANA Sonia, I couldn't let on when Colin was here, but I truly am afraid of what he might try to do to me. It wouldn't look like murder probably, and he'd inherit everything. I haven't changed my will yet.

SONIA You haven't? Why not?

DIANA Because I kept hoping we might reconcile, Colin and I.

SONIA You never struck me as such an unbridled optimist, Diana. If I were you, I'd change my will.

DIANA I'll leave everything to you. This house. You'll keep it inviolable.

SONIA You know I hate this house. I'll sell it in a minute.

DIANA You wouldn't!

SONIA I tell you I would! Don't leave it to me. It's too sinister. Too many ill winds blowing through it.

DIANA It's our roots. . . . Apparently there's nobody I can rely on.

(DIANA, near the door, throws it open, meaning to discover her husband eavesdropping.)

SONIA Is he there?

GEORGE (suddenly entering with flowers, in his slow-witted way) Thank you ever so much for saving me from having to knock, milady. My hands are ever so full, is my hands.

(GEORGE, soiled, crosses with the flowers.)

DIANA Wasn't my husband outside the door just now?

GEORGE No, milady, I didn't see hide nor hair of him.

DIANA (to SONIA) Maybe he went away when he heard you telephone for George. I'm sure he was there until a few minutes ago.

SONIA He could have seen George coming with the flowers from the window in the hallway.

GEORGE Where would you like these, milady? On your desk? Near the sofa? On the — ?

DIANA (rattled) Anywhere.

GEORGE Should I get a vase? I didn't bring no vase. I should have brought a vase, I should have!

SONIA I'm having a thought! (She takes the flowers from GEORGE and arranges them in an opening of a torture device) Now who said flowers couldn't brighten a room — even this gloomy room? . . . Diana?

DIANA (weakly) They're lovely.

GEORGE Will that be all, milady?

DIANA Yes, George.

GEORGE My pleasure, my pleasure, Lady Diana. I'll be getting back to my work in the potting shed now, if that's all right with you, if that's all right!

DIANA Yes, that's fine.

GEORGE (leaving awkwardly) Nice day we're having! (Exits)

SONIA What a foul creature.

DIANA Excuse me, Sonia. I don't feel well. I'm going outside for some air.

SONIA Do you want me to come with you?

DIANA No, I'll be fine.

SONIA You look pale.

DIANA I'll be fine.

SONIA It isn't your heart, is it?

DIANA Enjoy the flowers. (Exits)

(SONIA moves as though she might follow DIANA but realizes she isn't wanted. Instead, she looks at the flowers in the torture device.)

SONIA (touching the flowers) Charming. Yes, a *frisson* of charm.

(COLIN enters, somewhat surreptitiously.)

COLIN I saw her leave. Where's she going? I'm not sure I like it.

SONIA Just for a breath of air. Is the gardener gone as well?

COLIN Yes. I saw him loping back toward the rear of the house.

SONIA Well, I think she's getting scared at last.

COLIN Shhh! Let me close the door.

SONIA We should leave it open this time. How do we know Diana won't be listening in on us, the way you were just listening in.

COLIN (at window) She's outside now. I can see her. But we still mustn't take too many chances.

SONIA That makes it more exciting. We should take as many chances in life as we can. Most people don't. To keep from being bored. I'm surprised Diana hasn't been bored, not scared, to death by now!

COLIN What if she had caught me just now?

SONIA That's why I called the gardener. I knew she was going to open the door and try to surprise you. That way you knew someone would be coming and get out of the way — or at least make up a clever excuse for being there.

COLIN You're perverse. You actually like danger, don't you?

SONIA Even if Diana had caught you, it would only have served to make her more frightened and thus —

COLIN Let's not rush this. She won't be frightened of me — only the unknown. We've got to build this up carefully, until she finally . . .

SONIA I say the sooner the better. She's very frightened already. Couldn't you hear it in her voice?

COLIN We don't want her getting nothing more than a good fright — just *half* to death.

Then, God forbid, moving away from here. We want her scared *all* to death.

SONIA How you talk. Come over and kiss me, you brute!

COLIN (worried) Sonia! We don't want her walking in on us!

SONIA Why not? That'll shock her twice as much as any of you sneaking around in the dark or you creaking floorboards and —

(COLIN comes over and kisses SONIA passionately. But he's also nervous and keeps looking around.)

SONIA Are you going to make love to me or are you not?

COLIN But Diana —

SONIA Don't be so nervous! At least *act* like you know what you're doing.

COLIN (angrily) I know exactly what I'm doing!

SONIA Stop sweating then. . . . Here. (She wipes sweat from his brow) Are you all water?

COLIN Are you sure she doesn't suspect us?

SONIA As we've planned, she's beginning to suspect everything. But she doesn't really suspect *us*.

COLIN God, I wish this were over, and we were off in the Hebrides or somewhere, making love in the heather.

SONIA It won't be long, darling.

COLIN I haven't even been with you . . . once. Only a few kisses.

SONIA We value more what we *can't* get, don't you think? And, believe me, my sweet, it'll be worth the wait. (teasingly) But I'm an old-fashioned girl. I insist on being married first.

COLIN Oh, darling! (Comes closer, hungry for her, embracing her against his will.)

SONIA (embracing him briefly, then breaking away) Don't you think I was clever just now, the way I planted ideas in Diana's mind about you?

COLIN How you were on *her* side against me!

SONIA And how you'd even use torture devices on her!

COLIN About how much you loathed me, when in fact . . .

SONIA I love you.

COLIN (nervously) You don't think Diana has this room bugged, do you? (Searches through the flowers, then handles some of the other weapons, torture devices, looking for listening equipment.)

SONIA She isn't mechanical, new-fangled. She loves old things, the old ways. That's her downfall.

COLIN You mean like her thrillers? Her characters are always trying to play clever games to outwit each other.

SONIA She wouldn't resort to anything cheap to win. She won't even hunt — with a gun, that is, — because she thinks it doesn't give the fox a fair chance.

COLIN What does she expect? To strangle it with her bare hands?

SONIA She's tough, for all the heart problems. When we were girls, I once saw her shoot her horse when it went lame and threw her.

COLIN She shot it herself?

SONIA Right through the forehead. She was only ten. I must have been four. Said she didn't want to see it suffer.

COLIN She never mentioned this to me.

SONIA But then she wouldn't, would she? Diana is a very secretive person.

COLIN Well, I'm not. That's why all this plotting and planning and sneaking around is getting on my nerves.

SONIA (sarcastic) Yes, you're much too sensitive a murderer, darling.

COLIN I do a good job of pretending to be brittle with Diana, but deep down within I'm not that way.

SONIA I know.

COLIN I think it shows inherent breeding.

SONIA (cuttingly) Do you?

COLIN Well, do you want me to be totally cold-blooded?

SONIA I just don't want you getting weak-kneed over this! We've just started.

COLIN I'm not weak-kneed. Only . . .

SONIA Only what?

COLIN I don't know if I should tell you.

SONIA What? (No answer) What, Colin?

COLIN Do you know why I work so hard to remain cool and in control? To be unrattled? . . .

SONIA . . . Yes?

COLIN Because I have an aneurysm. If things get too stressful or I exert myself too much, as I have too often . . . (Points to his brain)

SONIA (She laughs) *You* could die? I don't believe you. You just want sympathy.

COLIN That's the real reason I want to keep Diana's money. I couldn't work if I wanted to. And a medical disability doesn't come close to providing what I'm used to.

SONIA Does Diana know this?

COLIN About the aneurysm — I think I told her once, in a moment of candor, after we'd made love. But I don't think she believed me. She just thinks I'm lazy.

SONIA Well, I hope she's forgotten it. She could use it against you, if she ever got the upper hand. You can't trust her, anymore than she can trust us.

COLIN She won't *get* the upper hand. I'll keep her on pins and needles. (gesturing) Or poison darts and crossbows.

SONIA How is it that you tell Diana secrets about yourself that you didn't tell me till just now?

COLIN I tell you things. In fact, I tell you too much.

SONIA Nonsense! . . . Now what are you planning next for her?

COLIN I'm sure I gave her a good start today when I crept in during her nap.

SONIA She was certainly afraid when she thought you were outside the door just now. I made sure of that. One more nail in her little coffin.

COLIN What if I hid inside one of these torture devices and made it fall over? While she's writing?

SONIA You could get hurt yourself.

COLIN I'm more worried she might come over, look inside, and merely find me in an awkward posture.

SONIA And laugh instead of die?

COLIN Exactly . . . Can one die from laughing too hard? Has anyone ever tried that on someone? An interesting speculation. I wonder if *I* could die that way?

SONIA Maybe you should hide behind a device, rather than inside it.

COLIN (amused) It isn't easy being a murderer, is it? So much to think about.

SONIA You could hide in the bathtub and rise up behind her, your eyes bulging.

COLIN *Diabolique*. Mistress and husband scare weak-hearted wife to death.

SONIA Is it?

COLIN You must keep up, Sonia. Diana knows all these old tricks. What we need is something foolproof.

SONIA Well, if she thought you were dead, and then you weren't, wouldn't that . . . ?

COLIN She needs to see me die in front of her eyes — and then if she saw me again, leaping out of her wardrobe or whatever, she'd be done for. What we need is the perfect "whatever."

SONIA Do bore me with the dreary details! I say let's just *do* it! You can get carried away with all this planning.

COLIN We've got to get what it'll take clearly in mind. I need your help.

SONIA I hate this fumbling around. I thought men were supposed to be decisive!

(GEORGE enters, catching them unawares.)

GEORGE Excuse me, milady! I didn't know as anyone was here, I didn't.

SONIA (coldly) What do you want?

GEORGE I left my trowel here by mistake, when I brought in the flowers, I did.

(GEORGE hurries over to where he placed the flowers and looks around for the trowel, which is on the floor, out of sight.)

Here it is! (Picks it up) I'm sorry, milady.

COLIN You should be more careful, Tattersall.

GEORGE You're right there, sir. I guess my hands were full, and I did come running as soon as I was called, sir. I'm very sorry, sir. I'm very sorry.

COLIN Oh, never mind.

SONIA Did I thank you for bringing the flowers, George?

GEORGE It's just part of my job, milady. No trouble. It weren't no trouble.

SONIA Did Lady Diana send you in here, by any chance?



GEORGE No, milady. I just remembered where I must've left me implement. See!  
(Holds up the trowel) I'll be off now, I'll be! (Exits)

COLIN (after checking to make sure GEORGE is gone) Do you think he was eavesdropping on us?

SONIA No. Don't be ridiculous. (mocking GEORGE) "Just left me implement!" (She taps her head, meaning GEORGE is feeble-minded)

COLIN Do you just keep him on out of charity?

SONIA Loved one, the upper classes don't simply step on the faces of the lower classes. I know it's hard to believe, but sometimes we're even generous.

COLIN Maybe you like all that scraping and bowing, but it turns my stomach. And I don't like him coming in here like that.

SONIA If he *were* eavesdropping, would he have come in? Be sensible.

COLIN I did it to Diana! Maybe she told him to see what he could see. Maybe he's telling her right now. (He rushes to look out the window)

SONIA Well?

COLIN She's still walking in the gardens. He didn't say anything to her . . . At least not now.

SONIA Where's your control, Colin?

COLIN (irritated) I'm trying to stay in control! That's why I'm doing this! This isn't some society masquerade ball. There are consequences here. Consequences!

SONIA (tongue in cheek) You're so virile when you're angry, Colin. I can't tell you what it does to me.

COLIN So what do you think we should do?

SONIA I think you should decide.

COLIN (fingering the weapons, etc, then suddenly) All right, I have.

SONIA Yes? . . . What?

COLIN These have given me an idea.

SONIA Good!

COLIN What is she most afraid of?

SONIA Losing this house.

COLIN No, her beauty. Her fading beauty.

SONIA Yes, it does bother her. She's always been a handsome woman.

COLIN Well, what if she had what she thought was acid thrown in her face? Wouldn't that terrify her to death?

SONIA Acid? Really?

COLIN I've got it all laid out in my head now. . . . Yes, now I see how to do it. Let's get out of here and I'll tell you what it is. I don't want even the slightest possibility of anyone overhearing what I have in mind. Come! (at the door) Come with me!

SONIA Are you sure?

COLIN This will be foolproof — if you've got the guts and the courage and the nerve to play it out just the way I know it will work. *Do* you, my love? *Do* you?

SONIA (following him to the door) To the death . . . To the death!

(She kisses him.)

BLACKOUT

ACT I, SCENE 2  
(The Same. The Next Night)

(DIANA is at her desk at her typewriter, dressed in night clothes.)

(After a few moments there is a knock.)

DIANA Yes?

COLIN It's me.

DIANA I'm working.

COLIN I want to show you something.

DIANA (annoyed, gets up) Just a minute. (She puts on a robe.)

COLIN Diana?

DIANA I'm coming. (Opens the door.)

COLIN I'm sorry to disturb you. Were you writing?

DIANA Yes, I finally had an inspiration.

COLIN You've been in here for hours.

DIANA Have I? What should you care? It gives you the run of my house.

COLIN At least I'm not sneaking around. See?

DIANA What do you want? Will it take long? I'm tired.

COLIN Not still angry with me, are you?

DIANA Shouldn't I be?

COLIN (coming in to the room) I got something today that I thought you might like — in a shop in Oxford. I've had my eye on it for some time. Something to add to your father's gruesome collection of paraphernalia. (He shows a velvet bag)

DIANA Do you think by bringing me gifts we'll be reconciled? As though I'm some pet of yours that only needs the right toy to forget everything else you've done to it? As though you have one tenth the taste my father had!

COLIN Now, now, Diana, I knew I shouldn't have interrupted you when you're writing. You're always so irritable. I do apologise for cutting off any flow of creativity I may have occasioned, but this really is quite wonderful. (From the velvet bag he takes an ecclesiastical sprinkler, an aspergillum, that is resting inside a metal bucket)

DIANA What is it?

COLIN What does it look like?

DIANA Something from a Catholic church.

COLIN It is.

DIANA Exactly what?

COLIN It was expensive, though I don't think the owner knew what he had.

DIANA All right, you've made me curious. Now what is it for?

COLIN It's an aspergillum. You know, what a Catholic priest uses to sprinkle holy water.

(He lifts the aspergillum a little bit to show her, but not enough to spill anything inside.)

DIANA What does that have to do with my father's collection? He wasn't religious.

COLIN Well, you see it looks like a device one would use for a blessing, but in actuality it was made for a sadist, some medieval baron or other. Twelfth century, I think.

DIANA A sadist?

COLIN He had this specially made so it could hold corrosive liquids. . . . Acids . . . Of all kinds.

DIANA Acids?

COLIN Apparently the man enjoyed sprinkling acid on the skin of his subjects. There are stories about him torturing people — Black Masses and that sort of thing, only he used a kind of black baptism.

DIANA Black baptism?

COLIN I don't know what they used in those days. Was carbolic acid around then?

DIANA I don't think so. Nor battery fluid!

COLIN You mustn't mock, Diana. Perhaps they weren't as advanced in the searing, disfiguring liquids that modern-day chemicals can inflict, but I'm sure they did their best.

DIANA I don't like your gift. Are you leaving now?

COLIN (pointing to the walls, etc.) It's no worse than any of these. No worse than any of the horrible deaths you've concocted for your books.

DIANA Those were not real. (referring to the weapons, etc.) These are not real either.

COLIN Just flirtations with horror? Good to see you know the difference between illusion and reality, Diana.

DIANA Why are you holding it so carefully?

COLIN (Holds it very carefully) Because it's full.

DIANA Of what?

COLIN Why, acid, of course.

DIANA Colin, this isn't amusing.

COLIN I thought it was time you had something genuine in your collection, something that can cause real pain — like the real pain our divorce is causing me. Leaving me with so little money. How do you expect me to live on that pittance, after what I'm used to?

DIANA Work!

COLIN *You* don't work! And, besides, I'm not well.

DIANA You're a liar.

COLIN No, it's true. That's why I have to do what I'm going to do.

DIANA Put that down.

COLIN Don't you want to try it out?

DIANA You wouldn't!

COLIN OH! (He sucks his finger) Oh, my god, that hurts and burns. And it was just a tiny, tiny drop. I must be more careful.

DIANA I think it's time you left. Take your present with you. I don't want it.

COLIN No? You're going to get it anyway, darling. (He holds up the aspergillum as if to sprinkle her with acid) You always loved to cast aspersions on me. Now let's see how it feels for me to cast aspersions on you.

DIANA Colin!

COLIN Yes?

DIANA Do you know what you're doing?

COLIN I know. I'm playing for real this time. (Raises the acid.)

DIANA (seeing that he's serious) Help! . . . Help!

COLIN There's no one around. The gardener is watching the telly in his room in the coach house. I checked. And your sister took her car and went to the cinema. I know because she asked me if I'd seen the movie. I told her it was wonderful.

(He is moving closer to her with the aspergillum.)

DIANA Colin, you're just trying to frighten me.

COLIN It's gone beyond that. Now I just want you dead.

DIANA If they find me with acid burns, they'll know it was murder. They'll arrest you immediately. You're the most likely suspect.

COLIN They won't find you! I'll bury your body somewhere where they'll never find it. Everyone will be reminded of how unhappy you'd been since the failure of your last novel, of your financial worries, the land you had to sell —

DIANA Wait! You don't have to do this! About your settlement —

COLIN I've gone too far, Diana. I may not be as intelligent as you, dear, but I do know that much. Come here, Diana, and accept your blessing.

(DIANA screams and backs away from him.)

(He's close enough to throw the acid in her face, when SONIA rushes into the room.)

SONIA Stop!

(COLIN stops, turns to SONIA.)

COLIN What are you doing here? You went to the cinema!

SONIA I changed my mind. Anything that *you'd* find wonderful I knew I would despise. What's going on, Diana?

DIANA He's trying to burn me!

SONIA What?

COLIN (to SONIA) It's a pity you had to stick your nose into this. Now I'll have to kill you both.

SONIA You haven't got the guts! You whining little nobody!

COLIN You two are inordinately proud of the accident of your birth. It's time you got taken down a peg or two. It's time you felt the rage of those that you — oh, so mistakenly — think are beneath you!

(Moves toward SONIA.)

DIANA Look out, Sonia! He means it.

COLIN Neither of yours will be a *noble* death, I assure you of that. And, moreover, whatever you may think of me, what I am about to do is not *common*!

DIANA Sonia, run! Get away!

SONIA He wouldn't dare!

(Before SONIA can move away, COLIN comes up to her and splashes the contents of the aspergillum in her face. She screams and puts her hands to her face, covering her eyes, moving upstage. She pulls her hands away, and we see her face covered with horrible burns, her eyes blinded. She moans.)

DIANA Oh, my god!

(SONIA cries out, writhes, and falls to the floor, unconscious.)

COLIN (going to look at her) She should have minded her own business, the bitch. (He comes toward DIANA with the aspergillum raised) Now let's see what effect it has on *you*, my darling wife.

(DIANA sees him rear back as if to splash her face. She gasps and clutches her chest, sinks to her knees, a look of terrified pain on her face, and then falls to the ground, behind the sofa.)

COLIN (coming over to look at DIANA's body) For once in my life, I did something right. She's dead. And not a mark on her.

SONIA (getting up) Well, *my* face is a mess.

COLIN Want some water? (Sprinkles some of the contents of the aspergillum onto his hand.) You got the kind of horror make-up that comes right off, didn't you?

SONIA I got the very best at the supply store. (wiping the make-up burns off her face and hands) The clerk assured me it would look like real burns for the play I was putting on. He even demonstrated. (Shows how she put the burn patches inside her palms and then brought them to her face a few minutes earlier.)

COLIN We both did admirably, considering we didn't get to practice very much.

SONIA Your sprinkler-there was brilliant.

COLIN You put your hands on your face just the right way. The make-up was stunning. And your screams were . . . Words fail me.

SONIA You had no idea I was so talented?

COLIN You certainly convinced Diana. (Gestures toward the body.)

SONIA Let me cover her up. (Grabs a blanket from the sofa and puts it over the body behind the sofa.)

COLIN Unnerved?

SONIA She was my sister, after all. I'm not a monster.

COLIN Really? Sometimes you could fool me.

SONIA What are we going to do with her body?

COLIN Leave it there. When the police and the coroner come, we want it to look like she died of a heart attack. Which she did.

SONIA Shall I call them?

COLIN (looking at the body) Give it a few minutes. Don't want to mess this up this late in the game, do we?

SONIA Whatever you say. You're in charge. (Starts kissing him.)

COLIN You bet I am! (He grabs her.)

SONIA (surrendering to his passion) Oh, Colin! Colin! I want you now!

COLIN Now?

SONIA Yes, here!

COLIN Yes! (Fumbles at her clothing.) Right here. Right now!

(He pulls her to the sofa, gets on top of her, is sex-hungry.)

SONIA (giving in) Oh, my man! Oh! Oh! Yes! Yes!

(Suddenly the hand of DIANA appears on the back of the sofa. COLIN doesn't notice. Very pale, like a spectre, DIANA rises from behind the sofa, draped in the blanket. She stands so that COLIN cannot see her. He continues to fondle SONIA.)

(Without saying anything, DIANA moves the length of the sofa, away from COLIN. He slowly becomes half aware that *somebody* is there. His head comes up from SONIA's bosom.)

COLIN Who's there? . . . George? (He looks toward the doorway) Tattersall?

(DIANA reaches over the sofa and grabs COLIN's neck and squeezes with both hands. SONIA has her arms around him so that he can't move very much. COLIN can feel the claw-like hands on the back of his neck, but he can't see whom they belong to.)

COLIN (struggling, but unable to get free) Let me go! (Struggles)

SONIA What is it, Colin? What is it?

COLIN (Unable to turn his head) It's . . . it's . . .

(COLIN sees SONIA look up and see the figure that is holding his neck. SONIA screams a blood-curdling scream.)



SONIA Oh, my god. It's Diana!

(COLIN yells in fear.)

(He finally manages to turn his head and sees that it *is* DIANA — looking like a corpse returned to life.)

COLIN Diana? (He begins to tremble, his throat catching. He is short of breath. He gags at the Sight.) . . . Diana?

(SONIA looks terrified too.)

SONIA She's dead, Colin! She's dead!

(DIANA raises her hand toward him and blood starts to run down the front of her robe.)

COLIN Oh, god! Her heart has burst!

(DIANA bleeds as she stands pointing at him.)

(COLIN becomes so frightened he can no longer make any sounds. He begins to gag and choke more and can't get any air into his lungs. He falls to the floor after a struggle to breathe. He finally chokes to death on his own vomit — brought on by fear and horror.)

(His body collapses on top of SONIA's.)

SONIA (after a few moments, taking herself out from beneath COLIN's limp body)  
Well, *that* went pretty well.

DIANA (removing the blanket) Though not quite what we expected. He didn't die from the aneurysm, did he?

SONIA No, he choked on his own . . . hubris.

DIANA I should have known. Colin was a man with an inordinate amount of vomit in him.

SONIA Is he dead?

DIANA (checking the body on the sofa) Very. (Drops the blanket on him.)

SONIA He should have planned your death better. The fool.

DIANA Indeed. (Begins wiping pale make-up from her face.)

SONIA Alas, his mind was clouded because of sex. I suppose I shouldn't have led him on.

DIANA (about the make-up) Is this coming off?

SONIA It's fine.

DIANA Colin tried hard, but his was a mind nonetheless given to clichés. It could only take

him as far as that old business, of scaring the wife to death. Should have known that the wife in this case would know how to scare *him* to death — though it was his gorge rising, so to speak, that actually turned the trick, poor fellow. In any case, he should have realised he couldn't outwit the upper class, the putrid little oaf!

(She takes the aspergillum and sprinkles some water on COLIN's body.)

*Dominos vobiscum !*

SONIA (taking the aspergillum) . . . *Et cum spiritu tuo!* Is that right?

(The two sisters look at each other, pleased with their handiwork.)

DIANA (Removes her bloody robe) Good, I didn't get any red on my nightgown. The lining worked. Now comes the hardest part.

SONIA (stuffing the robe into a plastic bag which she takes from under a seat of the sofa) I know, but you must do it.

DIANA Did he get anything on you?

SONIA A little. I'll incinerate my clothes when I incinerate your robe. Give it to me.  
(DIANA hands her the robe) Be sure to get some of his DNA bits on you.

DIANA (disgusted sound) Uh!

SONIA We've come this far! You can't weaken now. (looking around) Good, there's none of the fake blood around. Do you see any?

DIANA (looking) No.

SONIA Give me the tube. (Holds out the plastic bag.)

(DIANA tries to remove the tube through which the fake blood ran in order to hand it to SONIA.)

DIANA (having a bit of trouble removing the tube) It doesn't want to come off. (Gets it off with SONIA's help) There! Don't forget to burn all the make-up. (Gets the pale make-up from behind the sofa, where she had hidden it to be able to apply it after her faked heart attack) Here! All this isn't good for my heart, even if I know what's coming beforehand.

SONIA Come on, come on!

DIANA Can't I just wipe some of his . . .

SONIA No! It's got to look like he died while in the middle of connubial bliss.

DIANA I know, but . . .

SONIA Hurry!

(SONIA lifts the blanket from COLIN's body, motions for DIANA to get underneath it.)

DIANA (to SONIA) You've got to help! (Starts to get under COLIN's body.)

SONIA I'm helping! (She partially lifts COLIN's body so that DIANA can slide under.) I'll undo his zipper — the cad! (Does so.)

DIANA (under the body, wincing) How's this?

SONIA Not bad. It's funny.

DIANA Let me up now.

SONIA One more thing I just thought of.

DIANA What now?

SONIA You've got to kiss him.

DIANA Kiss him? Never!

SONIA They'll believe you were really making love when he died if they can smell him on your mouth.

DIANA Sonia!

SONIA They might test you. Don't back out now! Do it! . . . Do it, Diana!

DIANA (after hesitating, she grabs COLIN's body and kisses his lips) *There!*

SONIA That's more like it. . . . Did you enjoy that, Diana? Was it *sexy*?

DIANA It was terrible.

SONIA I'm sorry, but you've got to leave his various smells on you until the police come.

DIANA (escaping from beneath the body) Well, call them! Call them! God, what I have to do just to get my own money back!

SONIA Just let me catch my breath. (Takes a breath, then, holding the plastic bag, she proceeds to the telephone, dials) . . . This is Lady Sonia Abingdon. . . . Yes, that's right. At Oakdurham Park. I'm afraid I've just made a very sad discovery . . . (Looks at DIANA, who is about to wipe her mouth, waves at her not to wipe it.) Yes, it's my sister's husband. . . . The poor man has choked to death. . . . Yes, can you come over? . . . That will be fine. (Hangs up) They're coming.

DIANA Good. I can't wait to get this off me.

SONIA (Holds up the plastic bag) Now all we have to do is burn this!

(The lights have begun to fade.)

I'll throw it in the incinerator. (Starts to leave) Are you holding up, Diana?

DIANA . . . Yes, I'm holding up. (Touches her chest)

SONIA I thought you would. (Smiles)

GEORGE (entering) Oh, am I intruding, am I? Lady Diana? Lady Sonia? Am I intruding?

DIANA What do you want, George?

GEORGE (suddenly self-confident, not feeble-minded at all) Just want to offer my congratulations, ladies, on your recent success. (Gestures at COLIN's body.) However, I'm afraid you overlooked one little detail in your foolproof scheme . . . *me!* (Big smile.)

(DIANA and SONIA look at each other, worried.)

BLACKOUT

END OF ACT I

INTERMISSION

ACT II, SCENE 1  
(The Same)

(A week later. Someone is lying on the sofa under a blanket; it is daytime.)

(DIANA enters, carrying an urn, doesn't notice the person on the sofa, goes to the mantelpiece, places the urn on it, stands back to admire it.)

DIANA (to the urn) Rest in peace, my darling! (The person on the sofa stirs. DIANA jumps.) Sonia?

SONIA (waking, yawning) Oh, you're back.

DIANA You startled me.

SONIA Sorry.

DIANA How can you sleep on that, after . . . ?

SONIA Quite well, thank you.

DIANA You're hard.

SONIA How did the cremation go? Did Colin burn with a hard, gem-like flame?

DIANA You should have come.

SONIA No, thank you. I've given up funerals.

DIANA It could have looked suspicious. But I think everything is settled now.

SONIA Told you it would be. Cremation is so tidy.

DIANA The coroner was there. He told me how much he commiserated with my loss. . . . I waited for the ashes. See? (Picks up the urn.)

SONIA Are they still warm? You are morbid, Diana. (to the urn) Hello, Colin!

DIANA Look who's morbid. . . . By the way, what are you doing on my sofa?

SONIA This is the most comfortable room in this monstrosity. I fell asleep. I was reading your new book. (Holds up the manuscript from among the cushions.)

DIANA How complimentary to fall asleep. Was that before, during, or after you read it?

SONIA Now, now.

DIANA It irritates me that people think so little of my work, even if I don't believe in it myself! (Gets the manuscript from SONIA.)

SONIA You don't have to write books any longer.

DIANA Turns out my money from Colin's money doesn't go nearly as far as I expected.

SONIA No?

DIANA Everything costs so much these days. Haven't you noticed?

SONIA I have. . . . How much was he getting?

DIANA We'll have to cut some corners, that's all, and I'll have to finish that book, whether I want to or not. It'll keep me occupied.

SONIA Relax for a change! You can take a few days off!

DIANA I can't relax. It's not in my blood.

SONIA You're more nervous now than before we . . .

DIANA It's been getting to me, all the connivance —

SONIA Let's go on a holiday somewhere. The Hebrides would be nice.

DIANA I can't take the time.

SONIA Maybe your novel would come more easily if you were away from here. We can get a little cottage or —

DIANA I don't like working here, yet I do it. That's what backbone means. . . . Sometimes I think I can still smell Colin. (Points to the spot where he died) Still taste him. (Wipes her mouth) Why did you make me *do* that? The police didn't check! I think you enjoyed it in some perverse way.

SONIA Nonsense! You have an overactive imagination, Diana. You always have had.

DIANA What about you! You're the one who worked it out.

SONIA A problem in geometry. You needed help. I gave it. What's a sister for, if not that?

DIANA What did you do it for?

SONIA I just told you. It was merely with my left hand!

DIANA Wasn't there something else?

SONIA You wanted to keep this house. I wanted to make you happy. Family!

DIANA And nothing more? What are you getting out of it since you hate the house so much?

SONIA Diana!

DIANA You'd think you'd want to arrange it so we'd *have* to move away from here.

SONIA What are you driving at?

DIANA . . . I think it's time we aired some things between us. Important things.

SONIA What 'things'?

DIANA Do you think I'm indebted to you now?

SONIA You were always indebted to me.

DIANA No, let's be honest, Sonia. Because of Colin, do you think I owe you something, something I didn't owe you before?

SONIA What are you hinting?

DIANA You've been coming into my study all this past week. Sleeping on the sofa. Once I woke up and found you sleeping on my bed. (Indicates offstage.)

SONIA I've been lonely, that's all.

DIANA *Is* that all?

SONIA I thought you needed comforting after your recent ordeal.

DIANA There's something else, something you're not telling me. Something I've sensed.

SONIA You sure you want to say this, dear?

DIANA I've always preferred directness.

SONIA In some things I've always preferred indirectness. Who's to say who's wiser?

DIANA I've been holding back. But —

SONIA — Why don't you hold back longer?

DIANA I've had the feeling — very strongly of late — that you expect something of me, now that we're 'united' because of Colin.

SONIA Have I been so obvious?

DIANA No, subtle actually. But we can't let this go on.

SONIA Why not? I haven't forced myself on you, the way your husband used to force himself on me. Did you know that? (Remembering with distaste) What I put up with to help you! . . . I *care* for you, Diana, very much.

DIANA Sonia, I can feel us headed in a direction I don't want us to go.

SONIA I wouldn't do anything you didn't want me to do.

DIANA So it is true then? My instincts are correct?

SONIA I feel affection for you? Yes, I do.

DIANA You won't be satisfied loving at a distance, will you? I know you.

SONIA I've waited all these years.

DIANA But now you want your . . .

SONIA No one will know, or even suspect.

DIANA *I'll* know! What do you take me for?

SONIA Mustn't put a label on it. It's just you and me. Two individuals.

DIANA Just lesbian incest, that's all it is!

SONIA Dear one, you aren't going to be bourgeois, I hope. After you've committed murder, you hardly need to keep up the proprieties!

DIANA It's not the proprieties. I have no such . . . feelings for you.

SONIA Well, I have them for you. As a matter of fact, I've had them forever. And now that you're older, more in the autumn years, I find you even more desirable.



DIANA Sonia —

SONIA No, listen. What do men do when your looks start to go? They reject you, that's what. What did Colin do? He made slighting remarks to your face. And what do I do? I find you even more attractive now. Is there any comparison?

DIANA I'm not that far gone, thank you! I can still have children. Some men find me very attractive — George as a matter of fact!

SONIA I'm just trying to say it's not your body I'm after. The heyday in the blood is over for both of us.

DIANA Why is it that I don't believe you? Why is it that I think you're calculating my moods, biding your time?

SONIA And then I'll pounce? How little you know me, Diana.

DIANA I'm learning more about you than I care to know. The only comfort in relatives is that they never change.

SONIA Are you really surprised? You knew before. That time I kissed you on the lips — years ago, this was. In the stable.

DIANA I knew, but only on the fringes of my mind. I thought your marriage to Edwin was happy.

SONIA It was. . . . You might say I'm 'versatile'. (Laughs)

DIANA Do you suppose I can just continue as we have been, knowing that you have such feelings for me?

SONIA You've always enjoyed them before.

DIANA That's not true! You're imposing your own feelings on me.

SONIA I could have been content to love you in my own way. But you had to go and force it out here in the open. How silly of you.

DIANA I didn't want you coming in here, loving me in "your own way," watching me dress and undress, pleasuring yourself in secret ways, all the while thinking that I wasn't even aware of what you were doing. Frankly, it gives me —

SONIA Don't bother spelling out your petty orthodoxies. I expected more of you, Diana.

DIANA I'm sure you did.

SONIA You know what I mean! How dare you gloat, as though you're going to put me in my place with your heterosexual condescending smirks!

DIANA I wasn't aware that I was condescending.

SONIA Is this what I get after what I've done for you?

DIANA I'm sure it wasn't difficult for you.

SONIA What are you implying? That I'm some ice-hearted lesbian who doesn't mind killing men?

DIANA That you seemed to take to it, that's all.

SONIA Because I can act rationally, decisively? While you're starting to ruin everything by becoming a nervous wreck!

DIANA I'm not a nervous wreck! (She accidentally spills the pages of her manuscript onto the floor.) Would you mind leaving me alone for a while? It's been a hectic time this past —

SONIA (furious) Gladly! (Goes to the door) Piss off! You emotional booby! You'd better not spoil this, Diana!

DIANA I'll be fine. Please go!

SONIA You'd just better not bloody well screw it up after what I've done for you! That's all I can say! (Exits)

(DIANA picks up the pages of the manuscript, upset, then goes to the telephone, dials hurriedly. There is no answer. She paces impatiently.)

DIANA (more and more impatient) Come on . . . Come on. . . Come on! (Finally when someone answers) Come here. . . No, *now*! (Hangs up)

(She sits at her desk, trying to straighten out the manuscript pages, but she can't. She gets up and pours herself a glass of red wine from the liquor cabinet, takes a sip.) (to the person she's waiting for) Where *are* you!

(GEORGE enters. He is now a self-confident, cleaned-up, and sexy man.)

GEORGE (in a different voice) You wanted me, Lady Diana?

DIANA (closing the door) She's gone. (Takes another sip)

GEORGE I'm thirsty.

(He takes DIANA'S drink and takes a sip, then swallows the entire drink, hands her back the empty glass.)

DIANA Another? (pouring two more glasses full)

GEORGE Why not? It's nice and sweet. (Licks his lips)

DIANA Must be from all your hard work.

GEORGE Do you begrudge the working class even what they swallow?

DIANA Here. (Hands him the glass of wine)

GEORGE Thank you. (Swallows the wine, then reaches for hers.)

DIANA Slow down.

GEORGE I'll set the pace.

(Takes her glass and drains it.)

DIANA Did you overhear any of what just happened? (pointing to the door)

GEORGE No.

DIANA I'd better check.

(Goes to the window.)

GEORGE Can you see her?

DIANA Yes, she's smoking a cigarette on the lawn.

GEORGE What happened? I saw her storm out.

DIANA I confronted her.

GEORGE The lesbian incest?

DIANA Yes.

GEORGE Did she admit it, the way you thought she would?

DIANA She seemed proud of it!

GEORGE Did you tell her about us?

DIANA That's just between us.

GEORGE Well, maybe you should have.

DIANA It would have infuriated her. We've got to keep it a secret.

GEORGE You're going to have to tell her about us when we get married.

DIANA There'll be time enough for that.

GEORGE You should have told her I'm in your bed now so much there's no room for anybody else!

DIANA Don't be vulgar.

GEORGE Why not? It seems to work. You succumbed to my vulgar charms, didn't you? It wasn't just that I had something on you I could ruin you with.

DIANA Yes, you're quite a force to reckon with.

GEORGE How does it feel to have a real man around for a change?

DIANA I'm not complaining.

GEORGE So when are you going to tell everybody we're to be married?

DIANA When I'm good and ready.

GEORGE I'm beginning to think you're never going to. I'm beginning to think you want me to stay your dumb gardener.

DIANA I do. That's what I like about you. (smiling) Your dirt.

GEORGE (embracing her) What you like about me is not for polite ears to hear, is it? (Kisses her roughly.)

DIANA You're getting too bold. (Pulls away.)

GEORGE Am I? It's been a week now. I don't call that too bold.

DIANA Has it been that long? Is familiarity breeding contempt?

GEORGE No, time is flying while you're having a good time. I'm going to make you a great husband just like I make you a great lover. Do you think Sonia suspects we're sleeping together?

DIANA      Keep your voice down. She has ears like a cat.

GEORGE     They twitch? Oh, you fine folks aren't as perceptive as you like to think. It seems that there was more to the scruffy dim-wit out in the back than the lords and ladies up here in the big house suspected, wasn't there?

DIANA      (ironic) You should have let us know earlier, George.

GEORGE     Your lot just would've made me work that much harder. Every place I worked, it was always that way. Never "Nice job, George." Always "George, you haven't trimmed the flowerbeds right. George, you haven't ruined your back lifting those bags of fertilizer the way you're supposed to." "George, you haven't kissed our upper-class arses all day." Until I came here, that is. Didn't have much education, but here I learned that not as much was expected of the addled-pated dummy, bless his poor, working-class soul! Took me a while to catch on how to get around you rich lot. But finally I did. And now I know *how* to get what I want. (Goes to the flowers he brought in.) (in feeble-minded voice) Oh, I see as how your flowers are somewhat withered, your ladyship. I'll take 'em away, I will! Or shall I not, shall I? Am I wanted, milady? I didn't forget me implement today, you can be sure of that. (Touches his crotch.)

DIANA      You're exceeding the bounds. You're drunk!

GEORGE     Forgetting my place? . . . You bet I'm forgetting my place! I'm going to forget my place for the rest of my life.

DIANA      Not so loud! What am I going to do about Sonia?

GEORGE     Tell her to get out. Or I'm willing to watch while you two . . . (Gestures) You know, in bed.

DIANA      Stop it!

GEORGE     (grinning) I'm even willing to help out. I'm broad-minded.

DIANA      Don't presume too far.

GEORGE     (sarcastic) Pardon me!

DIANA      That's the trouble with 'your lot'. You don't know how to handle prosperity.

GEORGE     Oh, sorry, milady! Ever so sorry! I didn't mean to handle your prosperity. I swear I didn't!

DIANA      Give you an inch and you think . . .

GEORGE I think what? You don't know what I think! You haven't a clue what the lower classes think.

DIANA I'm sure I don't. Fine thoughts, no doubt. Fine, exquisite thoughts, right?

GEORGE (changing the subject) So what are you going to do about Sonia?

DIANA I need your help.

GEORGE For what?

DIANA To get rid of her.

GEORGE What?

DIANA She won't go. She won't leave me alone now, I'm sure of it.

GEORGE What are you saying?

DIANA Suffice it to say that she stands in the way of our marriage. She's competition, George. Competition!

GEORGE Are you really saying what I *think* you're saying?

DIANA How do you feel about it?

GEORGE Feel about it? What do you think I am?

DIANA A little blackmailer with ambition but not the daring to act to get what he wants.

GEORGE Hey, now!

DIANA Not true?

GEORGE Do you mean . . . ?

DIANA Can't you even say it?

GEORGE Murder.

DIANA (jokingly) Murder most foul.

(Wipes her mouth, alluding to Colin's vomit.)

GEORGE What's wrong with your mouth?

DIANA Nothing.

GEORGE Kill your own sister?

DIANA Sorry, I thought I was talking to a *man*.

GEORGE You are talking to a man! Don't pull that on me. It's too obvious.

DIANA You want what you want, don't you?

GEORGE I made up my mind to act once and for all — in the Big Time — when I figured out what you two were up to with your husband. You thought no one would notice, but you were — I'm sorry — wrong.

DIANA It *was* clever of you to see how we arranged Colin's death. Did you know that, despite all our planning, it went a little awry? But it served. It served.

GEORGE You weren't counting on me either, were you?

DIANA That's very true.

GEORGE How do I know you and Sonia aren't plotting *my* death right now?

DIANA Your death?

GEORGE Don't underestimate me. If *him*, why not *me*?

DIANA (smiling) Well, yes, how do you know that we aren't?

GEORGE I don't. That's why I'm being cautious. But I think you sort of like me.

DIANA (Touches him.) I love you. I want to marry you.

GEORGE Now why don't I believe the widow?

DIANA Haven't I proved it in bed?

GEORGE Aye, I think you do fancy me, lass. (Smiles) My dirt. I can tell.

DIANA More than I knew. But now Sonia's making these sexual demands on me. I hadn't counted on that. She could get so upset with me she might reveal everything. If you want to marry me, you'll have to help me get rid of her. And cleverly. It will have to look natural. We can't ruin the first murder by .

..

GEORGE So now it's two murders?

DIANA Afraid to get a little more dirt on your hands — in the Big Time? Do you want to move up the social order or don't you? Do you want me or not?

GEORGE You know I do.

DIANA I want to know what you're willing to do where it really counts. Have you the stuff or haven't you, George? We know you have a dick. But do you have the brains?

GEORGE (after a decision) . . . All right. What do I have to do?

(Lights Fade.)



ACT II, SCENE 2  
(The same. A little later.)

(The room is empty. SONIA enters, looking around.)

SONIA Diana? (No answer.)

(SONIA goes to the collection of weapons, etc., finds the urn on the mantelpiece, picks it up, studies it thoughtfully.)

(GEORGE enters.)

GEORGE (in his new voice) Looking for something, Lady Sonia?

SONIA Nothing in particular. I admire the collection, that's all.

GEORGE (about the urn) Is that him — Colin?

SONIA (takes off the lid) Yes, would you like some in your tea?

GEORGE (makes a face) Ugh! . . . She's gone out, finally.

SONIA Where?

GEORGE She didn't tell me.

SONIA To buy more devices like these? (Points to weapons)

GEORGE Right.

SONIA She *is* going to try to do me in, then? In one of her so-called clever and perverse ways?

GEORGE Oh, yes.

SONIA And you agreed to go along?

GEORGE I did. I'm such a wicked fellow!

(He grabs SONIA and kisses her. She hugs him back.)

SONIA So you seem. What's it to be?

GEORGE She said she'd explain it in detail when she gets back.

SONIA That's all you got? You should have insisted on an explanation.

GEORGE I did the best I could. I'll find out tonight.

SONIA And she hasn't caught on about *us*?

GEORGE Not a clue.

SONIA You're sure?

GEORGE I'm sure! How could she know?

SONIA We can't be too careful. You never know *who* might be in league with *whom* around here, do you?

(There is a moment when both SONIA and GEORGE look uncertain about *which* plots and counterplots are going on.)

GEORGE She believes you're in love with her.

SONIA She's so vain she'll believe anything! I also did a good job of convincing her.

GEORGE She thinks *I'm* in love with her. That I want to marry her.

SONIA But you're really in love with me. I'm younger. (jokingly) More fertile.

GEORGE Exactly. She said you two both killed her husband. Sonia, you didn't *really*, did you?

SONIA I told you, George. *She* did it. I thought that was all cleared up.

GEORGE She sounded pretty convincing.

SONIA And now she's trying to blame it on me! She'll have everyone believing it. She *used* me to get rid of Colin — without my even suspecting what she was up to. She said she just wanted to frighten him for refusing to give back his settlement.

GEORGE Do we really have to kill her? I've never done anything like —

SONIA Do you think she'll hesitate to get rid of me? Hasn't the fact that she's off getting some means to do it proof enough?

GEORGE She might not go through with it.

SONIA I know how she did it. She's got to. And then logically *you'll* be the next, because *you* know too. We can't let her get away with it!

GEORGE She'll have to make our deaths look natural, won't she, if she's not to undo what she's done already?

SONIA She'd do anything. She's demented. You'd better be careful.

GEORGE It's pretty complicated. But I know I'm smarter. In fact, I welcome the challenge. I suspect the aristocracy could use someone like me to improve the line, don't you think?

SONIA I love you! Remember that. As soon as Diana's out of the way, all the property, the income fall to me. Together with what my husband left me we'll live in splendour here. I love this house!

GEORGE Oh, Sonia, I can't wait! (Hugs her) I'll marry into the . . .

SONIA . . . upper class. And I'll be the wife of the sexiest man in the county! And the mother of his children. His heirs. My last husband couldn't give me children.

GEORGE She's planning to practice your death with me tonight, once she gets back. She did say that much.

SONIA After she explains it to you, come and let me know. We must keep one step ahead of her.

GEORGE I'm good at that.

SONIA You'd better leave now. I'll meet you in your room in a little while. Then we'll practice *her* death! (Laughs)

GEORGE All right. I have some ideas myself.

SONIA Good. . . . Take the flowers with you, so it looks like you had a good reason for being in here.

GEORGE Always thinking, aren't you!

SONIA It comes easy for some of us in the aristocracy, George. (Smiles)

(GEORGE gathers the flowers.)

GEORGE So I've learned. (as he leaves with the flowers, in his feeble-minded voice) So I've learned, Lady Sonia. And I do beg your pardon, milady, I do beg it, about the flowers! (Exits)

SONIA (after he is gone) Everything is falling into place! Must watch myself,

though. Getting too confident. Whoa, Sonia! Whoa. Just a few more arrangements, just a few more!

(Lights Out.)

ACT II, SCENE 3

(The stage is dark. The door to the study opens slowly. Carrying items in a bag, DIANA enters and turns on the light switch. No lights go on.)

DIANA (in the dark) Oh! The fuse must have blown. (Stumbles around.) Damn! . . . There are some candles in here somewhere. . . Oh, god, where *are* they!

(The door to the bedroom opens, causing a breeze. The SL door that DIANA entered slams shut.)

DIANA (startled) What was that? . . . A draft? Who's in here? . . . (frightened) Who's in here?

(Long pause in the dark.)

COLIN Just me, Diana.

DIANA Colin?

COLIN Colin.

DIANA (She screams, fumbles for the door she entered, finally finds it, opens it.)

SONIA (entering with a candle) What's wrong?

DIANA Sonia?

SONIA Yes. What's going on? I heard you scream.

DIANA I heard a voice . . . Colin's voice. (Puts down the bag of items, upstage.)

SONIA But he's dead. You couldn't have heard him.

DIANA I tell you I did! Right over there.

SONIA I'll look.

DIANA No! Don't go over there! He's still in the bedroom.

SONIA (going offstage to the bedroom anyway) I'll show you you're mistaken.

DIANA Sonia! (SONIA disappears.) Sonia! Oh, my God!

SONIA (coming back) There's nobody here. (Closes the bedroom door.)

DIANA (somewhat relieved) He must have left by the French doors in my —  
(The lights suddenly come on.) The lights! How . . . ?

SONIA George must have fixed the fuse. We've really got to do something about  
this place; it's falling apart.

(Starts to blow out her candle.)

DIANA Wait! Don't blow that out! Here, I've got one. (Gets a candle from her desk  
Drawer.) Light one for me, in case the lights go out again. (Holds it out so  
that SONIA can light it from her candle.)

SONIA Are you that frightened? Hold still.

DIANA I'm sorry. I know I heard something.

SONIA It was just the wind blowing through. (shivering) It's always icy in here.

DIANA (overwrought) I tell you I *heard* him!

SONIA Diana! Calm down.

DIANA (still excited) Right over there!

SONIA This isn't good for your heart.

DIANA I know, I know . . .

SONIA Do you want a drink? Do you have any more of your medicine left?

(GEORGE enters.)

GEORGE Is everything all right in here? (joking, in his feeble-minded voice) I fixed  
the fuses. Two of 'em. I fixed 'em! I fixed 'em, I did!

SONIA Thank you, George. We appreciate it.

DIANA Yes, thank you, George.

GEORGE (in his real voice) Are you well, Lady Diana? I thought I heard a scream.

DIANA Yes. Very well.

SONIA It was just the power failure, nothing more.

GEORGE Nothing more?

DIANA (Goes to the bedroom door) No, I'm certain *someone* was standing in this room with me.

GEORGE (sarcastic) What, milady? Who, milady?

DIANA (Goes to the mantelpiece, almost picks up the urn) Could . . . ?

SONIA (mockingly) Colin's still inside, isn't he? Do you want to look to make sure?

DIANA No. (Leaves the urn.)

SONIA Do you want George to carry him away?

DIANA (seeing that she's been overwrought) No, it's fine.

SONIA Maybe we should simply chuck Colin out if he's going to cause that much trouble. George, take the urn and —

DIANA It's not necessary. I'm not frightened any longer.

GEORGE You're sure, Lady Diana?

DIANA I'm sure! Don't treat me like I'm losing my mind!

GEORGE I'm sorry! Will that be all?

DIANA Yes, you may leave.

GEORGE (slightly ironic) Thank you, milady. (He backs out.)

DIANA (going to the door) It must have been *him* in the dark.

SONIA What?

DIANA Pretending to be Colin. Impersonating his voice.

SONIA George? How could he —

DIANA He's impersonated voices before. He's up to something. Do you think he's caught on to us?

SONIA No, he believed the story about the lesbian incest. Easily. I think it even appealed to him.

DIANA You sure? Did he overhear us?

SONIA I don't think so. But he bought it. My "declaration" to you. The ninny!

DIANA — It took him a while to answer the phone. He could have been —

SONIA Most likely we didn't have to play out that whole 'lesbo' scene for his benefit. He has a tabloid mind to begin with.

DIANA Better to be safe. And you made such a good lesbian.

SONIA Thank you, darling.

DIANA . . . Now he must have stood over here when he spoke to me. Then he ran out this door and around to the shed where we keep the fuses. Then in through this other door. (demonstrating)

SONIA George couldn't plan a grocery list, let alone all that. . . . (doubtful) I think.

DIANA Then how do you account for it? I know Colin's dead. I saw them carry his body out of the house. I saw it cremated. Maybe George is plotting behind both *our* backs, like we're plotting behind his? What does he tell you?

SONIA He's willing to murder you.

DIANA Lovely. He said the same about you.

SONIA So much for sex to create a binding relationship. By the way, how is he in bed with you?

DIANA So-so. With you?

SONIA It varies from clumsy to pathetic. And he thinks he's such a lover! We'll have to get rid of him pretty soon — before he bungles all the elaborate, delightful plans we made to free you of Colin.

DIANA It's a nuisance, I know. Next time warn me if you're planning to turn the fuses off. And I should have known he was going to impersonate Colin in the dark.

SONIA (whispering) You really *did* hear a voice in the dark? You're not just saying that?

DIANA (whispering) Couldn't you see I was upset?

SONIA I thought you were pretending.

DIANA I wasn't pretending just now.



SONIA No? Not to get George on edge? I thought you'd begun some plan to get him.

DIANA He did a very good job of impersonating Colin's voice. As best I could see, he even looked like him. Did you loan him some of Colin's clothes?

SONIA Diana, we didn't turn off any fuses. I didn't tell George to scare you just now.

DIANA You didn't? Then who . . . ? (She is a bit frightened.)

SONIA Do you think *I'm* lying to you? Your own sister?

DIANA Lying? Of course not. (then not sure) Of course not . . .

SONIA Oh, my god, you don't suppose somehow Colin could have . . . ? (SONIA goes to the mantelpiece, lifts the urn, and opens it.) My god, it's empty. . . . His ashes are gone!

(The two women look at each other. DIANA shivers.) (A beat is held, then:)

SONIA Are you all right?

DIANA (recovering) Yes. . . . Let's see this through to the end. Let's practice George's death. We'll use these. (Gets the bag she brought in at the top of the scene.)

SONIA What did you get?

DIANA This for a start. (Takes a bottle of red wine out of the bag.)

SONIA What is it? Red wine?

DIANA Another natural cause of death! (Takes out sangria mix in a bottle.) Plus sangria mix. Sangria — from the Spanish for blood. (Takes out an envelope of pills, displays them.) Combined with another ingredient. (Starts preparing the sangria for real, adding fruit slices, etc.)

SONIA Alcohol and seconal?

DIANA No, seconal is too bitter, even in a sweet drink. But, yes, the gardener will have an overdose. You should see how he displays his new-found confidence by sipping my drinks. More than sipping — swilling them. Well, next time he's going to get more drink than he bargained for. (Doing so as she explains.) I'll prepare a pitcher full of sangria, only with amytriptoline. I got these from my doctor for depression. He was reluctant, but I was persistent. They make the heart stop if overused.

SONIA They'll dissolve?

DIANA (dropping them into the pitcher, adding fruit slices) Yes.

SONIA Won't they show up in his blood?

DIANA We want them to. It'll look like a suicide.

SONIA But no one will believe George was suicidal.

DIANA It will be *my* suicide.

SONIA Yours?

DIANA (Goes to the typewriter.) I'll type the note now. (Types as she speaks. "I'm sorry. I can't go on any longer." (to SONIA) Old but reliable. (Types. "Not without someone to love." Nice touch? They'll think I mean Colin.

SONIA Yes, go on.

DIANA (Types.) "It's easier this way. Life is too much for me. I'm sorry if this causes pain for anyone. I'm sure it won't." (Takes the typed note out of the typewriter.) I think the self-pity is excellent, don't you?

SONIA I'm still not clear on the —

DIANA — Lady Diana was trying to kill herself, you see, and the feeble-minded gardener sneaked into her study and —

SONIA (continuing the alibi) — We knew the poor, sad fellow wasn't right in the head. Everybody around here knew that. Compounded by his drinking, which had been a problem for some time. Oh, we *tried* to get him to stop. He was *always* stealing liquor from the kitchen —

DIANA — But you never dreamed that he would have the temerity to come right into your sister's study and —

SONIA — inadvertently drink the fatal concoction prepared by Lady Diana for *herself*.

DIANA Precisely. . . . Good?

SONIA (testing her) Why didn't Lady Diana drink the drinks before the gardener got to them?

DIANA Because she had decided not to kill herself after all. True, she'd prepared the pitcher and had intended to go through with it, but when she saw what she was

doing, she couldn't face it and went into her bedroom to lie down, upset with herself.

SONIA She fell asleep. During which time the gardener came in to the study, saw the pitcher, and drank enough to kill him. The glutton.

DIANA See my fingerprints on the glass? (Holds it up) With George's fingerprints on top of mine? . . . Well, what do you say?

SONIA I think you've got it down quite well, Diana.

DIANA I've learned from an expert. (Toasts SONIA.)

SONIA Perhaps I should be writing the thrillers.

DIANA Perhaps.

SONIA Though I prefer plotting such things in real life more than in books. In most books there's always at least one loophole. In life things have to be much, much more foolproof.

DIANA It's easier said than done. There! I'll leave this in the refrigerator overnight and add the ice just before serving. (Puts the pitcher in the liquor cabinet) I'll sign the note itself tomorrow.

SONIA Why not now?

DIANA Because it's too . . . final.

SONIA I didn't know you were so tender-hearted, Diana.

DIANA Yes, I tend to be — about my own death. (Smiles, puts the note with the pitcher) And we wouldn't want anyone to use it in the wrong way, would we?

SONIA (testing her as if the police) What about two different men dying in this house within a week of each other? Not good.

DIANA Colin's was natural. The second was brought on by all the stress and disturbance caused by the first. *We* can't be blamed because some fool drinks our liquor, can we? Besides, the death of a feeble-minded gardener will hardly cause a ripple in anybody's life, now will it?

SONIA Am I one to be sentimental about the lower class? (Laughs) And *when* are we going to do this?

DIANA Tomorrow afternoon, at two. That'll give George plenty of time to take a nap

after his drinking binge — a natural and oh-so healthful nap.

SONIA Plenty of time not to wake up.

DIANA We'll discover the poor man's body when we . . .

SONIA Late. Very late. (deliberately slangy) Gotcha! See you tomorrow then. Exits)

(DIANA nods, then hurriedly gathers up the empty wine bottle, the sangria mix, the amyltriptoline, and anything else that GEORGE shouldn't see and puts everything in the bag and hides the bag.)

(DIANA then goes to her desk and begins to write on her book, trying to appear nonchalant just as GEORGE enters.)

GEORGE I waited for Sonia to go to her room. She's going to sleep.

DIANA Marvelous. Did she say good night to you?

GEORGE She did. She's been very friendly lately. But let me check. (Opens the door) She's not here! (closing the door) . . . So what have we got planned for milady Sonia?

DIANA We?

GEORGE Begging your pardon, you ladyship. You!

DIANA An accident.

GEORGE Oh?

DIANA What do you think about an accident in the greenhouse or in one of the outbuildings in the rear?

GEORGE What kind of accident?

DIANA Isn't there some poison that she might somehow . . .

GEORGE Yes, there's anabasine. An insecticide. It's colorless, very deadly. But it would take a lot to kill her.

DIANA I don't suppose we could drown her in a malmsey butt of it, could we?

GEORGE What?

DIANA Never mind. It's merely literary. How about an accident inside the house?

GEORGE I thought you had it all planned.

DIANA It doesn't happen like that! I want perfection.

GEORGE What about all these gruesome devices? (Picks up the poison dart gun)  
What's this?

DIANA A poison dart gun. My father's.

GEORGE Does it work?

DIANA I believe so. However, I don't think we can use it on Sonia. People have a way of noticing darts in a dead body.

GEORGE I wasn't suggesting it. Just asking.

DIANA Actually, I've been thinking about one of these devices myself. It would be somehow appropriate since she hates all this so much. (Gestures)

GEORGE Which one?

DIANA I know! How about if the family coat of arms fell and . . . ?

GEORGE Is it that heavy?

DIANA Yes.

GEORGE How would it fall on her?

DIANA With your help. Some bolts are loose already.

GEORGE Yes. Loosen the two bolts, get her to stand under it and have it crush her skull when it falls? Family member crushed by family crest?

DIANA Not bad.

GEORGE One problem!

DIANA Which is?

GEORGE How do we get her to stand underneath it long enough to fall on her? Two problems. Where would *I* be?

DIANA You would have loosened it even more earlier. It's been up there for some time. Don't you recall my mentioning it to you, George? The family's coat of arms that's been coming loose. Who better than you to fix it?

GEORGE (testing) I'm the gardener, not the handy man. And I'm feeble-minded, right? Why would you ask me?

DIANA Alice and Sean no longer work here, that's why. I can call a repair shop, and I'm sure they won't be able to come right away. No one else could do it soon enough, and it was dangerous, so I *had* to ask you.

GEORGE (continuing the alibi, acting it out) I'm up on the ladder taking it down at your request, just when Lady Sonia is in here getting *something* you've asked her to bring you — you're in the garden — because you're not feeling well. (joking) Colin's *urn* — how about *that*?

DIANA (also joking) Because I miss his ashes *so* much?

GEORGE Why not?

DIANA Do better, George! This isn't a comedy. I think.

GEORGE All right, you've asked Sonia to get you a drink from here — a soft drink — because of your heart?

DIANA No, she needs to *make* a drink. It'll take longer.

GEORGE All right, so she makes the drink here. (Touches the liquor cabinet) Under the coat of arms.

DIANA And?

GEORGE I'll be on the ladder trying to fix the bolts. But unfortunately —

DIANA It falls when you touch it and —

GEORGE — Hits Lady Sonia on the head, killing her instantly. . . . But why would she stand that close to me if she thought it was dangerous?

DIANA She's busy fixing the drink!

GEORGE I don't believe it.

DIANA Then what?

GEORGE Lady Sonia is standing under the coat of arms when it falls because poor, stupid George *calls for* her assistance when he starts to tighten the bolts. She comes over to steady the ladder for him.

DIANA She might not come. She looks out for herself.

GEORGE But I have the coat of arms already resting on the top step of the ladder when she comes in. As soon as she begins making your drink, I smash the damn thing on her head.

DIANA What about forensic medicine? A good coroner can tell the exact angle, the velocity of the “fall.”

GEORGE I’ll be sure to hit her in the temple. That’s the best place.

DIANA And of course it must be one blow. Coats of arms don’t tend to fall on someone’s head more than once!

GEORGE You don’t like the plan?

DIANA I don’t know yet.

GEORGE Well, what then?

DIANA We need something as a backup, in case all this fails.

GEORGE Such as?

DIANA I don’t know. (a joke for herself) Maybe a poisoned chalice, as in *Hamlet*.

GEORGE I think the falling coat of arms will work.

DIANA You have to be absolutely certain you aim it so that it will *kill* her.

GEORGE We should practice it.

DIANA Now?

GEORGE When else? We want this to happen tomorrow, correct? How about two-thirty? Can you make sure she’ll be here?

DIANA Two-thirty is fine. I’ll make sure she’s here. But be flexible about the time.

GEORGE Why don’t you pretend to be her — right now? I’ll stand on the liquor cabinet. (He does.) You begin to fix a drink.

DIANA (trying to avoid practicing) We should have your ladder. This isn’t the way —

GEORGE It’s good enough. I’ll come in early to loosen the bolts.

DIANA Yes, around two.

GEORGE (He touches the coat of arms.) Come over here.

DIANA (reluctantly moving closer) And Sonia will be fixing my drink . . . here.

GEORGE Why don't you get a real glass?

DIANA (miming) This is good enough.

GEORGE Wouldn't she be looking the other way? Away from me?

DIANA (not turning her back to him, suspicious of what he's up to) Not if *you're* up there. She's too suspicious. She'd keep her eyes on you at all times. (as DIANA is doing)

GEORGE (threateningly) Are you afraid of me, right now?

DIANA Of course not. (But she is.)

GEORGE Then come closer. Let's see the angle. You're a professional. I don't have the coat of arms in my hands now, do I?

DIANA (moves very cautiously to where he is standing) She'll be about here.

GEORGE Yes. (Mimes the coat of arms coming down on her head.) Do you think it could possibly decapitate her?

DIANA (moving away, touching her throat nervously) Decapitate her?

GEORGE No, it's probably not heavy or sharp enough. Though it's metal.

DIANA You'd better go.

GEORGE We're being sloppy.

DIANA This is too much of a strain on me.

GEORGE Really? You shouldn't bite off more than you can chew, Lady Diana.

DIANA And you shouldn't chew more than you bite off. You've got it down. I have every confidence in you, George Tattersall!

GEORGE Thank you! Do you want me to spend the night?

DIANA No. (There is a knock on the door.) Come in!



(SONIA enters in her night clothes.)

SONIA Oh, I'm sorry. Am I interrupting?

DIANA Not at all.

SONIA I couldn't sleep. I thought perhaps you wanted to talk, if you were up.

DIANA I'm really very exhausted.

SONIA Then I won't disturb you. Good night. (Looks at GEORGE suspiciously)

DIANA George was just leaving as well. He was fixing the bolts in the coat of arms. But it can wait till tomorrow. Can't it, George?

GEORGE Yes, I'll fix it tomorrow, in the afternoon. See, I told you it would be good to have another man around the manor house. . . . I'll walk out with you, Lady Sonia, if that's all right.

SONIA Certainly.

GEORGE (keeping very cool) Good night, Lady Diana.

DIANA Good night, George.

(GEORGE crosses to the SL door, where SONIA is waiting.)

SONIA Good night, Diana. Sleep well.

DIANA I will, thank you. Good night.

GEORGE (under his breath to SONIA as he exits) Ashes to ashes.

SONIA (under her breath to GEORGE as she follows him out) Dust to dust.

(DIANA half-overhears what they say, but she isn't sure what they mean, looks doubtful.)

(Lights Fade.)

ACT II, SCENE 4  
(The Same. Later.)

(The study is dark. The SL door opens slowly. Two disguised figures enter. One goes to the sofa, does something to it. The other goes to the mantelpiece, picks up the urn, does something to it. When the task is finished, one figure stands near DIANA's bedroom door. The other bangs on the *far* side of the SL door, then hides *inside* the study.)

(After a moment the door to DIANA'S bedroom opens and DIANA enters the study holding a candle, to see who's knocking. The figure hiding by that door sneaks into DIANA's bedroom.)

DIANA Who's there? (No answer) (She tries the lights; they won't come on.) Damn! . . . Who's there? . . . I have light. (Holds up the candle.) And I have a gun. (Holds up the gun.) George? (No answer) Sonia? (She throws open the SL door. She exits.) Nobody? (She tries an offstage light switch.) (offstage) Goddamn it! No lights! (Re-enters the study.) It won't work, whatever it is you're trying! (No answer.) I'm not afraid! (quietly) I'm not afraid . . .

(DIANA goes back into her bedroom. She utters a small scream. There is the sound of French doors being closed. She comes back into the study, carrying the urn. (half amused) Now who placed *this* in my bed? And left the French doors open. Do you think I don't know who did this? (Puts the urn down.) Colin? It couldn't possibly be you! (No answer.) Your ashes couldn't be back inside this, could they? (She puts down the gun and the candle and takes off the top of the urn.) . . . As I thought — empty! (Replaces the lid, picks up the candle and the gun.) You're dead, my love. Quite dead. I have nothing to fear from you.

COLIN (in the dark) No, my love, you're wrong.

DIANA Colin? But you're dead!

COLIN Am I?

DIANA It's George. . . . Isn't it? Where are you?

COLIN If you're so certain who it is, why don't you come over and look? I'm right over here.

DIANA (afraid to find out) It *can't* be you! (not true) I can see you! I can!

COLIN (in the dark) I'm in your mind, Diana. (A disguised figure rises at the back of the stage.) Do you want to see me up close? Do you want to feel me again in your arms? To taste me as I am now?

DIANA (too terrified to reply)

COLIN A taste of your own medicine?

DIANA No!

COLIN I'll see you soon, Diana!

(DIANA screams. A shot rings out. The figure runs from the room.)

DIANA (closing the door, laughs) I frightened the ghost! You won't get me, you bastards! I know it's either Sonia or George, or both. But you won't get me! Morning is coming. I don't need the lights. I can wait. I can outwait and outwit you all. (She takes the candle and the gun and sits on the sofa.) We'll just see who wins this battle of nerves. Come in, from either door, and see what reception you get. (Aims the gun) (Half-sitting, she stretches out on the sofa, places the candle on the arm.) I'm not afraid of you. I'm quite comfortable here. (Stretches out more, then feels something under her.) What's *this*? (feeling the sofa) What's this on the sofa? (Suddenly DIANA realizes she is lying in COLIN's *ashes*.) Oh, my God! (She screams, drops the gun, begins wiping the ashes from herself.) My God! What are these ashes on me!?

(She frantically tries to wipe away the dead man from her body, then grabs her chest, suffers a heart attack, and dies, her body slumping onto the sofa.)

GEORGE (after a few moments, entering from the SL door, disguised as COLIN, goes over, looks at her body, picks up the urn) What, Diana? You didn't even wait for a mouthful of your dear, departed husband?

SONIA (entering with torch) Diana?

GEORGE It's all right. She's dead. Finally!

SONIA You're sure?

GEORGE I didn't even have to cram any ashes into her mouth. The poor thing was so frightened just *lying* on them she scared herself to death! (Wipes some ashes from the sofa)

SONIA Are you all right? I heard a gun. I didn't know she had a gun.

GEORGE Her shot missed. Here, let's get more light. I brought a torch too. (Turns on his torch (flashlight). The two torches cast eerie shadows in the room.)

SONIA (looking at DIANA's body) I thought she'd never die! Weak heart, indeed!

GEORGE Thanks for putting the urn in her bed. (Pats the urn) It brought her out of her bedroom, just as you said it would.

SONIA Thank you for hiding so well and spreading the ashes so effectively.

(They bow to each other.)

GEORGE She should have known she couldn't beat the two of us. (looking in the urn) There's even some left. (Smiles.)

SONIA To be honest, even I wasn't always sure who was on whose side — until this minute. I thought you might be sleeping with both of us.

GEORGE How could you doubt me? I never slept with Diana. I love you. You're beautiful. My beautiful, aristocratic wife — at last!

SONIA Actually I don't think so, George. (picking up the gun, aiming it at him)

GEORGE What do you mean?

SONIA Just what I said — for once. Thank you for helping me become the exclusive heir of Oakdurham Park, despite my sodding, despicable father, who always favored Diana. I even had to marry that idiot Edwin so I could have enough money to live on! I would've had to finish off Diana on my own, of course. You made it easier. Much love, luv! I thought I'd have to wait a while to get you too, but this will work just fine. Thank you from the bottom of . . . *her* heart.

GEORGE What are you saying? We're going to live here, together. You'll bear my children.

SONIA You'll murder me as soon as you have an heir. You think I don't know that?

GEORGE I couldn't murder the mother of my child.

SONIA (laughing) What utter sentimental, country bullshit! You're going to tell me you're a warm human being underneath it all? You're a murderer, George. A murderer! (Points to DIANA's body.)

GEORGE You just used me?

SONIA Apparently we *all* used each other, you, me, and Diana. All for one — and all *against* one. For our own very personal — and very selfish — reasons. How perfect. At least this time I don't have to be clever. (Aiming the gun.) Let's see. You were in Lady Diana's darkened study when I heard her scream. I came running and found the gardener here, about to rape her. I

pleaded with you, but you simply wouldn't listen. You were obviously crazed. I ran into her bedroom and found this gun. I *had* to shoot when you came toward *me*. (She moves closer to him.)

GEORGE But I'll act normal. I'll be myself — like this! The police will see that.

SONIA All the more reason for the police to suspect you. Earlier why were you pretending to be what you're *not* if it wasn't for such a crime as this? You poor, befuddled noodle, as if I'd let you marry me in a million years!

GEORGE Sonia!

SONIA Crush my skull, would you!

GEORGE Diana told you?

SONIA Of course, just as I told her what you were planning for her and you must have told her what you were planning for me. Now let's see where *you* fall, George. Do you wish to wager that it's near the second woman you were about to rape? (Aims gun at GEORGE) (He moves toward her.) Come on, leap at me! It will just look that much more real.

GEORGE Sonia, please! (He crouches, cowers, then knocks over his torch and grabs a handful of ashes and throws it into her face.)

(SONIA is blinded, chokes.) (GEORGE grabs the gun from her, aims it at her.)

GEORGE Stay right there, milady!

SONIA (wiping her face) Where do you think I'm going to go, you imbecile!

GEORGE Don't try anything. (He controls both torches now. Sets one up for light in the semi-darkened room)

SONIA Like what, George? What would I try?

GEORGE Sonia, you're the most terrible person I've ever known in my entire life. Is there nobody or nothing you care for?

SONIA You're going to give me a lecture on morality? Spare me that at least, George. I care for *kicks*. Kicks plus money. You can't beat the combination.

GEORGE But killing three people? *If* you'd gotten me.

SONIA It's already three — counting my husband.

GEORGE (taking in her admission) I'm sort of in awe of you. You complete bitch,

SONIA And now *you*, George. It's your turn to be mastered by the . . . complete bitch!

GEORGE That's what you think. (Aims the gun)

SONIA Are you going to shoot me? And ruin all your plans? Two sisters found dead, one from fright, one from a bullet you fired? What will people think, do you suppose? Not what *you* do, silly boy. . . . Pardon me, I want a drink.

GEORGE No!

SONIA No? Stop me. (Goes to the liquor cabinet, takes out the pitcher of sangria prepared by DIANA earlier. She adds some ice cubes)

GEORGE What are you up to?

SONIA Did you know this sangria was prepared for you, for tomorrow at around two-thirty? (Stirs the pitcher.)

GEORGE For me? I don't think so . . .

SONIA Diana and I had it all planned. Pity, now it'll have to be for *me*. Fortunately the suicide note is already typed. (Reads it aloud, with a little difficulty because of the torchlight) "I'm sorry. I can't go on any longer. Not without someone to love." (to GEORGE) They'll think I mean my husband, don't you think? (Reads.) "It's easier this way. Life is too much for me. I'm sorry if this causes pain for anyone. I'm sure it won't." Now let me sign it instead of Diana. (She signs the typed note.)

GEORGE Sonia!

SONIA Do you think I'll consent to go to prison? Or even if you didn't kill me — "the mother of your child" — do you want me to rot with the likes of *you* for *how* many years? Sharing your bed? You must be a moron, actually! (Pours herself a glass of sangria.) See, you weren't *pretending* to be thick after all!

GEORGE Sonia, no. We can work this out.

SONIA I've killed others. Why not myself? In fact, it'll be the ultimate kick. (Fakes taking a sip) Yes, quite a kick to it. (She hesitates, afraid, then defiantly drains the drink, holds up the empty glass, ironically as in a melodrama.) "It was meant for *you*, George!"

GEORGE Sonia, don't! I do care for you. I'm not lying this time.

SONIA But how can I be sure? (Goes to the telephone, dials) How can anyone be sure of anything in this cruel, old world!

GEORGE What are you doing?

SONIA Wait and watch. Or do you just want to shoot me and explain it later to the police? (on telephone) Hello, police station? . . . Yes, this is Lady Sonia Abingdon. . . . Yes, again. I'm afraid I'm very depressed. . . . Why? Because I suspect our gardener, George Tattersall, has been plotting crimes against my family, including me.

GEORGE Sonia!

SONIA (at first covering the mouthpiece, then speaking into the receiver) That's right — plotting. I believe he arranged to frighten my brother-in-law to death and he may be planning something for my sister. He's made unwanted sexual advances to her. She herself told me he did. She told me she was very frightened of him, that he had admitted killing her husband so that he could have her. . . . (Takes a sip.) Would it be possible for you to wait a while before you come over? It's not convenient at the moment. . . . No, we're safe right *now*. . . . Yes, later today will be fine. This afternoon? . . . Yes, thank you. Oh, yes, I do hope I'm wrong about all this too. (Hangs up.)

GEORGE What do you think you're doing?

SONIA Hasn't it finally penetrated your skull, George, my love, my lamb? I'll be dead — a suicide, not worthy to be buried in sacred ground. I'm so depressed, you see! Didn't you just hear me say so? You may be blamed for poor Diana's death. But, because of what I told the authorities, it will be for Colin, whom you didn't even try to kill — surely it will be for Colin that you're *convicted*, the one for whom you will be sent to linger in prison for life! How fitting since you impersonated Colin so well.

GEORGE What!?

SONIA (pouring herself another drink, drinking some) Look at it clearly, George. Who else? The working-class gardener who pretended to be feeble-minded so that he could work his evil ways, as the late Lady Sonia so presciently predicted. Who else? After all, he's the only one left alive. The police think in straightforward ways — with my help. Not all this Byzantine stuff of those of us with brains. They'll find evidence of sexual intercourse with the deceased, will they not?

GEORGE And with you as well!

SONIA All the better. You raped two corpses, you loathsome toad! Who will believe

that the two lofty Oakdurham sisters would have permitted a feeble-minded, filthy lout like you into their beds?

GEORGE The police can tell the difference between consensual sex and forced sex.

SONIA Not with you, George, not with you, they can't!

GEORGE Stop it!

SONIA Poor Lady Sonia! She just couldn't take the recent loss of her dear sister and wonderful brother-in-law. She used her sister's medicine, the poor thing. (Drinks more of the drink.) This is not bad. That leaves George Tattersall as the villain, who only wanted to marry above his station and rise in this wicked, wicked world. Poor Georgie Porgie, he didn't count on being the scapegoat, did he?

GEORGE I can explain everything to the police.

SONIA (ironically) Oh, *that* should get you off! Just how many murders *were* you planning, Mr. Tattersall? Really? *Only two*? Are you sure you didn't force the drinks down poor Lady Sonia's throat? (Takes a long swallow.)

GEORGE I didn't want to kill anybody! I —

SONIA But you did, George, you did! (Toasts him, then swallows more of her drink.) You won't join me? I'll pour. (Pours another glass) It's really *very* nasty. (She smiles, offers him the glass.) You'd love it! Very nasty indeed.

GEORGE Sonia!

SONIA You were almost smart, George, but you weren't quite smart enough! The aristocracy wins again! (She takes a long swallow)

GEORGE (reaching out) No! No! (GEORGE stands there with the gun, bewildered, his torch moving erratically, unable to change his fate as the lights fade.)

SONIA Oh, yes! (SONIA laughs and sips again) (triumphantly) Oh, *yes!*

(Lights out.)

END OF PLAY