

# MURDER IN THE FIRST PERSON SINGULAR

A Two-Act Play

By Nikki Harmon

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## **STORY OF THE PLAY**

It's a chilly, rainy California night at the Stonebridge School for Proper Young Ladies, as the English teacher, the home ec. teacher, the athletics coach, the butler, Mrs. Snitwell (head of the alumnae), and a Mafia hit-man from New Jersey, break into the Dean's study to kill him, only to find him already very dead with a noose around his neck, two suicide notes in his pocket, and a Japanese ceremonial dagger in his chest. Now, it's Detective Bliss' job to find out who did what to whom, with what, when, and why. Meanwhile, the suspects try to bump each other off...And who is that mysterious man in the trench coat, and what about the rapidly defrosting moose on the kitchen table?

## **SETTING**

The Dean's study. A desk is SR, covered with papers and assorted framed pictures. DSR is a bathroom. USR is a closet. USC are double doors leading to the foyer. SL is a door, with heavy drapes, leading to the side garden next to a bay window with a window seat. DSL is a dumbwaiter. CS is a sofa, with a table behind, a coffee table in front, and chairs on either side.

**CAST OF CHARACTERS**

*(4 M, 3 W, 1 dead male body)*

**JASPER:** The butler, 45 years old.

**SHIRLEY MADISON:** An English teacher, 35 years old.

**DOTTY VAN PELT:** A Home Ec. teacher, in her 20s.

**SIDNEY MAITLAND:** The athletics coach, 46 years old.

**JOHNNY MORRAN:** A hit man.

**MRS. SNITWELL:** Head of the school alumnae, in her 60s.

**DET. BLISS:** Homicide detective

**A DEAD BODY:** Edward Worthington-Smythe, the Dean of  
The Stonebridge School for Proper Young Ladies. 70  
years old.

**NOTE:** The ages of Shirley, Sidney, and Jasper can be  
lowered or raised by changing the year the play takes  
place, as long as their ages would have been 10, 21, 20  
respectively in 1945.

**SYNOPSIS OF THE PLAY**

**ACT I**

Scene 1: The Dean's study - 10:30 PM.

Scene 2: A few minutes later.

Scene 3: Midnight.

**ACT II**

Scene 1: Five hours later.

Scene 2: A moment later and through to sunrise.

### **PROPS**

DOTTY: Match, paper and pen, gun, pliers, pillow, switchblade knife.

MAITLAND: Noose, tennis racquet, dagger.

JOHNNY: Baseball bat, ski mask, matches, candle, suicide note.

SNITWELL: Ether bottle, cotton, suicide note, medicine bottles, ice pack.

SHIRLEY: Dagger, lapel pin

JASPER: Bottle of sleeping pills, suicide note, tea trolley with sandwiches, martini pitcher, pot of coffee, cups, brush and silent butler, lace tablecloth, plate of cookies, towel, glass of milk, record, 2 martini glasses (1 with olive), cream pitcher.

DETECTIVE BLISS: Flashlight, gun, handcuffs.

SET PROPS: trophy, picture frame with tontine hidden inside.

### **SOUND EFFECTS**

Clap of thunder, Rain, Door rattling, Another rattle of door, Crash on stage, Crash in closet, Thud from closet, Door opening and closing, Footsteps, Toilet flushing, Thunder, Thump, Vase breaking, Body hitting the floor, Loud crash, Running on gravel, Door opening and slamming shut, Door opening and slamming shut, Running upstairs, Running downstairs, Running on gravel, Scuffle in bushes, Running on gravel, Running downstairs and across, wooden floor, Running on gravel toward the house, and away again, Running up the gravel path, Footsteps running upstairs, Running downstairs and across, wooden floor, Running across wooden floor and back upstairs, Running downstairs, Running downstairs, Front door opening and running on gravel, Running downstairs, Running on gravel, Scuffle in garden, Running on gravel, Recording of "The Sabre Dance"(by Aram Khatchaturian), Footsteps on gravel path, Footsteps on gravel path, Running upstairs, Footsteps coming downstairs, Squad car pulling up, Running up gravel path, Running down gravel path

**ACT I**  
**Scene 1**

*(AT RISE: California, 1970. The Dean's study. The stage is dark, save for a lit candle being carried from USC to DSR by JASPER. There's a sudden clap of THUNDER and a GUST of wind blows open the garden door. The candle extinguishes and Jasper ducks into the bathroom just as a bolt of LIGHTING silhouettes SHIRLEY and DOTTY, dressed in black trench coats, standing in the doorway. The door slams shut, it's dark again, and we hear the sound of RAIN. Dotty strikes a match.)*

SHIRLEY: Put it out! He'll see us! *(DOTTY blows out the match.)* Now all we have to do is ... *(Stumbles and falls.)* ... find him.

DOTTY: *(Lighting another match.)* You all right, Shirl?

SHIRLEY: Do I look all right?

DOTTY: I don't know. I can't see you.

SHIRLEY: Then turn on a light.

DOTTY: He'll see us.

SHIRLEY: He's not going to see anyone.

DOTTY: *(Turning on a lamp.)* Why not?

*(A dead EDWARD WORTHINGTON-SMYTHE is laying face down, with his right hand under his chest and his left hand flung toward the garden door.)*

SHIRLEY: *(Feeling HIS left pulse.)* He's dead.

DOTTY: We should have done it last week, Shirl. That's when we should have done it.

SHIRLEY: We're doing it now.

DOTTY: But someone already did it.

SHIRLEY: I can see that. Now, give me a piece of paper so I can write a suicide note.

DOTTY: *(Taking paper and pen from the desk.)* Do you think he killed himself?

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SHIRLEY: (*Scribbling a fast note.*) No, and no one else will if there's no note. And if people don't think he did it himself, they're going to think you did it. And if they find out I was with you they'll think I did it, too.

DOTTY: But I didn't do it. Someone else did it before I could do it.

SHIRLEY: With all those deposits in your account they're going to think you were blackmailing him, he refused to pay and in a struggle, you killed him.

DOTTY: But I wasn't blackmailing him.

SHIRLEY: I know that, and you know that, but they don't know that.

DOTTY: Besides, that's not why I wanted to kill him.

SHIRLEY: The key word here is kill. Are you following me?

DOTTY: Someone we don't know killed the dean of the school before we could, and that someone didn't leave a suicide note, so we have to or else they'll think I'm a blackmailer.

SHIRLEY: Close enough. Give me the gun.

DOTTY: (*Taking the gun out of HER purse.*) But if we had done it we should have used poison.

SHIRLEY: (*Trying to open the fingers and insert the gun.*) Damn. Rigor mortis has set it. Do you see any pliers around?

DOTTY: (*Taking a pair out of HER purse.*) Here.

SHIRLEY: What are you doing with pliers in your purse?

DOTTY: You never know when you'll need them.

SHIRLEY: That's not a reason.

DOTTY: Want to know what else I have in my purse?

SHIRLEY: No. I want you to help me put the gun in his hand.

DOTTY: (*Helping SHIRLEY.*) Poison doesn't take this much work.

SHIRLEY: This wouldn't take this much work if he wasn't already dead. Put that suicide note somewhere obvious.

DOTTY: How about his other hand?

SHIRLEY: I don't have the strength.

DOTTY: We could put it in his pocket.

SHIRLEY: Fine.

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DOTTY: *(Putting the note in the jacket.)* How's that?

*(SOMEONE rattles the garden door.)*

SHIRLEY: Shhhhhhh! *(Another rattle.)* Turn out the light!

DOTTY: *(Turning off the light.)* Who do you think it is?

SHIRLEY: Someone else who got here too late. *(There's a CRASH on stage.)* What was that?!

DOTTY: I knocked over something. Do you want me to turn on the light and see what it was?

SHIRLEY: And let whoever's out there see us? They could have a gun.

DOTTY: We have a gun.

SHIRLEY: We had a gun, now the body on the floor with the stiff fingers has a gun. *(The window opens.)* Duck in the closet!

*(SHIRLEY and DOTTY rush into the closet slamming the door behind them as the window shutters fly open. Moonlight and a slash of LIGHTING illuminates the room. SIDNEY and JOHNNY, wet from the rain and dressed in black trench coats, climb in, closing the shutters behind them throwing the room back into darkness. Sidney's holding a noose and Johnny's got a baseball bat and is wearing a ski mask. JOHNNY strikes a match.)*

SIDNEY: Put it out! He'll see us! *(JOHNNY blows out the match.)* Now all we have to do is ... *(Stumbles and falls.)* ... find him.

JOHNNY: *(Lighting another match.)* Youse all right, Mr. Maitland?

SIDNEY: Do I look all right?

JOHNNY: I don't know. I can't see youse.

SIDNEY: Then turn on a light.

JOHNNY: He's gonna see us.

SIDNEY: He's not going to see anyone.

JOHNNY: *(Lighting the candle from the table behind the sofa.)* Why not?

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