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Death

A Comedy in One Act

by Woody Allen

A SAMUEL FRENCH ACTING EDITION



**SAMUEL
FRENCH**
FOUNDED 1830

New York Hollywood London Toronto

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CAST

(In Order of Appearance)

KLEINMAN

HANK

AL

SAM

HACKER

JOHN

VICTOR

ANNA

DOCTOR

GINA

MAN

COP (POLICEMAN)

BILL

FRANK

DON

HENRY

ASSISTANT

SPIRO

ABE

MANIAC

The curtain rises on KLEINMAN, asleep in his bed at two A.M. There is a pounding at the door. Finally, and with great effort and determination, he gets up.

KLEINMAN

Huh?

VOICES

Open up! Hey—come on, we know you're there! Open up!
Let's go, open! . . .

KLEINMAN

Huh? What?

VOICES

Let's go, open up!

KLEINMAN

What? Wait! (*Turns on the light*) Who's there?

VOICES

Come on, open up! Let's go!

KLEINMAN

Who is it?

VOICE

Let's go, Kleinman—hurry.

KLEINMAN

Hacker—that's Hacker's voice. Hacker?

VOICE

Kleinman, will you open up?!

KLEINMAN

I'm coming, I'm coming. I was asleep—wait! (*All with stumbling and great effort and clumsiness. He looks at the clock*) My God, it's two-thirty . . . Coming, wait a minute! (*He opens the door and a half-dozen men enter*)

HANK

For God's sake, Kleinman, are you deaf?

KLEINMAN

I was asleep. It's two-thirty. What's going on?

AL

We need you. Get dressed.

KLEINMAN

What?

SAM

Let's go, Kleinman. We don't have forever.

KLEINMAN

What is this?

AL

Come on, move.

KLEINMAN

Move where? Hacker, it's the middle of the night.

HACKER

Well, wake up.

KLEINMAN

What's going on?

JOHN

Don't play ignorant.

KLEINMAN

Who's playing ignorant? I was in a deep sleep. What do you think I was doing two-thirty in the morning—dancing?

HACKER

We need every available man.

KLEINMAN

For what?

VICTOR

What's wrong with you, Kleinman? Where have you been that you don't know what's going on?

KLEINMAN

What are you talking about?

AL

Vigilantes.

KLEINMAN

What?

AL

Vigilantes.

JOHN

But with a plan this time.

HACKER

And well worked out.

SAM

A great plan.

KLEINMAN

Er, does anybody want to tell me why you're here? Because I'm cold in my underwear.

HACKER

Let's just say we need all the help we can get. Now get dressed.

VICTOR
(*Menacingly*)

And hurry.

KLEINMAN
Okay, I'm getting dressed . . . May I please know what it's all about?
(*He starts pulling on some trousers apprehensively*)

JOHN
The killer's been spotted. By two women. They saw him entering the park.

KLEINMAN
What killer?

VICTOR
Kleinman, this is no time for babbling.

KLEINMAN
Who's babbling? What killer? You come barging in—I'm in a deep sleep—

HACKER
Richardson's killer—Jampel's killer.

AL
Mary Quilty's killer.

SAM
The maniac.

HANK
The strangler.

KLEINMAN
Which maniac? Which strangler?

JOHN
The same one who killed Eisler's boy and strangled Jensen with piano wire.

KLEINMAN

Jensen? . . . The big night watchman?

HACKER

That's right. He took him from behind. Crept up quietly and slipped piano wire around his neck. He was blue when they found him. Saliva frozen down the corner of his mouth.

KLEINMAN

(Looks around the room)

Yeah, well, look, I have to go to work tomorrow—

VICTOR

Let's go, Kleinman. We've got to stop him before he strikes again.

Kleinman

We? We and me?

HACKER

The police can't seem to handle it.

KLEINMAN

Well, then we should write letters and complain. I'll get on it first thing in the morning.

HACKER

They're doing the best they can, Kleinman. They're baffled.

SAM

Everyone's baffled.

AL

Don't tell us you've heard nothing about all this?

JOHN

That's hard to believe.

KLEINMAN

Well, the truth is—it's the height of the season . . . We're busy . . . *(They're not buying his naïveté)* Don't even take a

lunch hour—and I love to eat . . . Hacker'll tell you I love to eat.

HACKER

But this ghastly business has been going on for some time now. Don't you follow the news?

KLEINMAN

I don't get a chance.

HACKER

Everyone's terrified. People can't walk the streets at night.

JOHN

Streets nothing. The Simon sisters were killed in their own home because they didn't lock the door. Throats cut ear to ear.

KLEINMAN

I thought you said he's a strangler.

JOHN

Kleinman, don't be naïve.

KLEINMAN

N—now that you mention it, I could use a new lock on this door.

HACKER

It's horrible. No one knows when he'll strike next.

KLEINMAN

When did it start? I don't know why I wasn't told anything.

HACKER

First one body, then another, then more. The city's in a panic. Everyone but you.

KLEINMAN

Well, you can relax, because now I'm in a panic.

HACKER

It's difficult in the case of a madman because there's no motive. Nothing to go on.

KLEINMAN

No one's been robbed or raped or—tickled a little?

VICTOR

Only strangled.

KLEINMAN

Even Jensen . . . He's so powerful.

SAM

He *was* powerful. Right now, his tongue is sticking out and he's blue.

KLEINMAN

Blue . . . It's a bad color for a man of forty . . . And there's no clue? A hair—or a fingerprint?

HACKER

Yes. They found a hair.

KLEINMAN

So? All they need today is one hair. Put it under a microscope. One, two, three, they know the whole story. What color is it?

HACKER

Your color.

KLEINMAN

My—don't look at me . . . Nothing of mine's fallen out recently. I . . . Look, let's not get crazy . . . The trick is to remain logical.

HACKER

Uh-huh.

DEATH

KLEINMAN

Sometimes there's a clue in the victims—like they're all nurses or they're all bald . . . or bald nurses . . .

JOHN

You tell us what the similarity is?

SAM

That's right. Between Eisler's boy and Mary Quilty and Jensen and Jampel—

KLEINMAN

If I knew more about the case . . .

AL

If he knew more about the case. There *is* no similarity. Except once they all were alive and now they're all dead. There's the thing in common.

HACKER

He's right. No one is safe, Kleinman. If that's what you're thinking.

AL

He probably wants to reassure himself!

JOHN

Yeah.

SAM

There is no pattern, Kleinman.

VICTOR

It's not just nurses.

AL

No one's immune.

KLEINMAN

I wasn't trying to reassure myself. I was asking a simple question.

SAM

Well, don't ask so many damn questions. We've got work to do.

VICTOR

We're all worried. Anyone can be next.

KLEINMAN

Look, I'm not good at these things. What do I know about a manhunt? I'll just be in the way. Let me make a cash donation. That'll be my contribution. Let me pledge a few dollars—

SAM

(Finding a hair by the bureau)

What's this?

KLEINMAN

What?

SAM

This? In your comb. It's a hair.

KLEINMAN

That's because I use it to comb my hair.

SAM

The color's identical with the hair found by the police.

KLEINMAN

Are you crazy? It's a black hair. There's a million of black hairs around. Why are you putting it in an envelope? Wha—it's a common thing. Here—*(Points to JOHN)* him—he's got black hair.

JOHN

(Grabs KLEINMAN)

What are you accusing me of, eh, Kleinman?!

KLEINMAN

Who's accusing!?! He's got my hair in an envelope. Give me that hair back!

(Grabs the envelope, but JOHN pulls him off)

JOHN

Leave him alone!

SAM

I'm doing my duty.

VICTOR

He's right. The police have requested all citizens' help.

HACKER

Yes. Now we have a plan.

KLEINMAN

What kind of plan?

AL

We can count on you, can't we?

VICTOR

Oh, we can count on Kleinman. He figures in the plan.

KLEINMAN

I do figure in the plan? So what's the plan?

JOHN

You'll be informed, don't worry.

KLEINMAN

He needs my hair in that envelope?

SAM

Just get your clothes on and meet us downstairs. And hurry up. We're wasting time.

KLEINMAN

Okay, but give me a hint what the plan is like?

HACKER

Hurry, Kleinman, for God's sake. This is a matter of life and death. You better dress warm. It's cold out there.

KLEINMAN

Okay, okay . . . just tell me the plan. If I know the plan I can think about it.

(But they go, leaving KLEINMAN to dress with a nervous clumsiness)

KLEINMAN

Where the hell's my shoehorn? . . . This is ridiculous . . . wake a man up in the middle of the night and with such horrible news. What are we paying a police force for? One minute I'm curled up asleep in a nice warm bed and the next I'm involved in some plan, a homicidal maniac who comes up behind you and—

ANNA

(An old battle-ax, enters with candle, unseen, surprising KLEINMAN) Kleinman?

KLEINMAN

(Turning, frightened out of his wits)

Who's that!!?

ANNA

What?

KLEINMAN

For God's sake, don't creep up on me like that!

ANNA

I heard voices.

KLEINMAN

Some men were here. All of a sudden I'm on a vigilante committee.

ANNA

Now?

KLEINMAN

Apparently there's a killer loose—it can't wait for the morning. He's a night owl.

ANNA

Oh, the maniac.

KLEINMAN

So if you knew about it, why didn't you tell me?

ANNA

Because everytime I try and talk to you about it you don't want to hear.

KLEINMAN

Who doesn't?

ANNA

You're always too busy with work—and your hobbies.

KLEINMAN

Do you mind if it's the height of the season?

ANNA

I said to you there's an unsolved murder, there's two unsolved murders, there's six unsolved murders—and all you say is, "Later, later."

KLEINMAN

Because the times you pick to tell me.

ANNA

Yeah?

KLEINMAN

My birthday party. So I'm having a good time, I'm opening presents, so you creep up to me with that long face and say, "Did you read in the paper? A girl got her throat cut?" You couldn't pick a more appropriate time? A man has a little fun—enter the voice of doom.

ANNA

Unless it's something nice, no time is appropriate.

KLEINMAN

Meanwhile, where's my tie?

ANNA

What do you need a tie for? You're going to hunt a maniac?

KLEINMAN

Do you mind?

ANNA

What is it, a formal hunt?

KLEINMAN

Do I know who I'm going to meet? What if my boss is down there?

ANNA

I'm sure he's dressed casually.

KLEINMAN

Look who they're enlisting to track down a killer. I'm a salesman.

ANNA

Don't let him get behind you.

KLEINMAN

Thanks, Anna, I'll tell him you said to keep in front.

ANNA

Well, you don't have to be so nasty. He's got to be caught.

KLEINMAN

Then let the police catch him. I'm scared to go down there. It's cold and dark.

ANNA

Be a man for once in your life.

KLEINMAN

That's easy for you to say, because you're going back to bed.

ANNA

And what if he should find his way to this house and come in a window?

KLEINMAN

Then you got problems.

ANNA

If I'm attacked, I'll blow pepper on him.

KLEINMAN

Blow what?

ANNA

I sleep with a little pepper near the bed, and if he comes near me I'll blow pepper in his eyes.

KLEINMAN

Good thinking, Anna. Believe me, if he gets in here, you and your pepper will be on the ceiling.

ANNA

I'm keeping everything double-locked.

KLEINMAN

Hm, maybe I better take some pepper.

ANNA

Take this.

(She hands him a charm)

KLEINMAN

What's this?

ANNA

A charm that wards off evil. I bought it from a crippled beggar.

KLEINMAN

(Looks at it, unimpressed)

Right. Just give me some pepper.

ANNA

Oh, don't worry. You won't be alone down there.

KLEINMAN

That's true. They've got a very clever plan.

ANNA

What?

KLEINMAN

I don't know yet.

ANNA

So how do you know it's so clever?

KLEINMAN

Because these are the best minds in town. Believe me, they know what they're doing.

ANNA

I hope so, for your sake.

KLEINMAN

All right, keep the door locked and don't open it for anyone—not even me, unless I happen to be screaming, "Open the door!" Then open it quickly.

ANNA

Good luck, Kleinman.

KLEINMAN

(Takes a look out his window into the black night)

Look at it out there . . . It's so black . . .

ANNA

I don't see anybody.

KLEINMAN

Me neither. You'd figure there'd be groups of citizens with torches or something—

ANNA

Well, as long as they've got a plan.

(Pause)

KLEINMAN

Anna—

ANNA

Yes?

KLEINMAN

(Looking into the black)

Do you ever think of dying?

ANNA

Why should I think of dying? Why, do you?

KLEINMAN

Not usually, but when I do, it's not by being strangled or having my throat cut.

ANNA

I should hope not.

KLEINMAN

I think of dying in a nicer way.

ANNA

Believe me, there's plenty of nicer ways.

KLEINMAN

Like what?

ANNA

Like what? You're asking me a nice way to die?

KLEINMAN

Yeah.

ANNA

I'm thinking.

KLEINMAN

Yeah.

ANNA

Poison.

KLEINMAN

Poison? That's terrible.

ANNA

Why?

KLEINMAN

Are you joking? You get cramps.

ANNA

Not necessarily.

KLEINMAN

Do you know what you're talking about?

ANNA

Potassium cyanide.

KLEINMAN

Oh . . . my expert. You're not catching me with poison.
You know what it is even if you eat a bad clam?

ANNA

That's not poison. That's food poisoning.

KLEINMAN

Who wants to swallow anything?

ANNA

So how do you want to die?

KLEINMAN

Old age. Many years in the future. When I'm through the

long journey of life. Surrounded in a comfortable bed by relatives—when I'm ninety.

ANNA

But that's just a dream. Obviously, at any second you could get your neck snapped in two by a homicidal killer—or your throat cut . . . not when you're ninety, right now.

KLEINMAN

It's so comforting to discuss these things with you, Anna.

ANNA

Well, I'm worried about you. Look at it down there. There's a killer loose and plenty of places to hide on such a black night—alleys, doorways, under the railroad overpass . . . You'd never see him in a dark shadow—a diseased mind, lurking in the night with piano wire—

KLEINMAN

You made your point—I'm going back to bed!
(Knock on door and voice)

VOICE

Let's go, Kleinman!

KLEINMAN

I'm coming, I'm coming. *(Kisses ANNA)* See you later.

ANNA

Look where you're going.
(He goes out, joining AL, who has been left to see that he gets things straight)

KLEINMAN

I don't know why this is suddenly my responsibility.

AL

We're all in it together.

KLEINMAN

It'll be just my luck, I'll be the one to find him. Oh, I forgot my pepper!

AL

What?

KLEINMAN

Hey, where is everybody?

AL

They had to move on. Correct timing is urgent in bringing the plan off.

KLEINMAN

So what is this great plan?

AL

You'll find out.

KLEINMAN

When are you going to tell me? After he's captured?

AL

Don't be so impatient.

KLEINMAN

Look—it's late, and I'm cold. Not to mention nervous.

AL

Hacker and the others had to leave, but he said to tell you you'll receive word as soon as possible as to how you fit in.

KLEINMAN

Hacker said that?

AL

Yes.

KLEINMAN

So what do I do, now that I'm out of my room and my warm bed?

AL

You wait.

KLEINMAN

For what?

AL

For word.

KLEINMAN

What word?

AL

Word of how you fit in.

KLEINMAN

I'm going back home.

AL

No! Don't you dare. A wrong move at this point could endanger all our lives. You think I want to wind up a corpse?

KLEINMAN

So tell me the plan.

AL

I can't tell you.

KLEINMAN

Why not?

AL

Because I don't know it.

KLEINMAN

Look, it's a cold night—

AL

Each of us only knows one small fraction of the overall plan at any given moment—his own assignment—and no one is allowed to disclose his function to another. It's a precaution

against the maniac finding out the plan. If each man properly brings off his own part, then the whole scheme will be brought to a successful conclusion. In the meantime, the plan can't be either carelessly disclosed or given up under duress or threat. Each one can only account for a tiny fragment which would have no meaning to the maniac should he gain access to it. Clever?

KLEINMAN

Brilliant. I don't know what's going on and I'm going home.

AL

I can't say any more. Suppose it was you who killed all those people?

KLEINMAN

Me?

AL

The killer might be any of us.

KLEINMAN

Well, it's not me. I don't go around hacking people to death at the height of the season.

AL

I'm sorry, Kleinman.

KLEINMAN

So what do I do? What's my assignment?

AL

If I were you I would try and contribute as best I could until my function became clearer.

KLEINMAN

Contribute how?

AL

It's hard to be specific.

KLEINMAN

Can you give me a hint? Because I'm beginning to feel like a fool.

AL

Things may seem chaotic but they're not.

KLEINMAN

But there was such a rush to get me out here. Now I'm here and ready and everybody's gone.

AL

I have to go.

KLEINMAN

So what was so urgent? . . . Go? What do you mean?

AL

My work is finished here. I'm due elsewhere.

KLEINMAN

That means I'll be out here on the street myself.

AL

Perhaps.

KLEINMAN

Perhaps nothing. If we're together and you leave, I'm alone. That's arithmetic.

AL

Be careful.

KLEINMAN

Oh, no, I'm not staying here alone! You gotta be kidding! There's a madman walking around loose! I don't get along with madmen! I'm a very logical guy.

AL

The plan doesn't allow for us to be together.

KLEINMAN

Look, let's not make it into a romance. *We* don't have to be together. Me and any twelve strong men will do.

AL

I must go.

KLEINMAN

I don't want to be here alone. I'm serious.

AL

Just be careful.

KLEINMAN

Look, my hand is shaking—and you haven't left yet! You go and my whole body'll shake.

AL

Kleinman, other lives are dependent on you. Don't fail us.

KLEINMAN

You shouldn't count on me. I have a great fear of death! I'd rather do almost anything else than die!

AL

Good luck.

KLEINMAN

And what about the maniac? Is there any further news? Has he been spotted again?

AL

The police saw a large, terrifying figure lurking near the ice company. But no one really knows.

(Exits. We hear his footsteps going off softer and softer)

KLEINMAN

It's enough for me! I'll stay away from the ice company! *(Alone—wind sound effects)* Oh, boy, nothing like a night on the town. I don't know why I can't just wait in my room till I'm given a specific assignment. What was that noise!? The

wind—the wind is not too thrilling either. It could blow a sign down on me. Well, I've got to keep calm . . . People are counting on me . . . Keep my eyes open and if I see something suspicious I'll report it to the others . . . Except there are no others . . . I have to remember to make some more friends next chance I get . . . Maybe if I walked up a block or two I'll run into some of the others . . . How far could they have gotten? Unless this is what they want. Maybe this is part of the scheme. Maybe if anything dangerous happens, Hacker has me under some kind of surveillance where they'd all come to my aid . . . (*Laughs nervously*) I'm sure I haven't been left alone to wander the streets all by myself. They have to realize I'd be no match for a crazy killer. A maniac has the strength of ten and I have the strength of a half of one . . . Unless they're using me as a decoy . . . You think they'd do that? Leave me out here like a lamb? . . . The killer pounces on me and they come bursting out quickly and grab him—unless they come bursting out slowly . . . I never had a strong neck. (*A black figure runs across background*) What was that? Maybe I should go back . . . I'm starting to get far from where I started . . . How are they going to find me to assign me my instructions? Not only that, but I'm going toward a part of the city which is unfamiliar to me . . . then what? Yeah—maybe I better turn around and retrace my steps before I become good and lost . . . (*He hears slow, menacing steps coming toward him*) Uh-oh . . . That's footsteps—the maniac probably has feet . . . Oh, God, save me . . .

DOCTOR

Kleinman, is that you?

KLEINMAN

What? Who is it?

DOCTOR

It's just the doctor.

KLEINMAN

You gave me a scare. Tell me, have you heard anything from Hacker or any of the others?

DOCTOR

Concerning your participation?

KLEINMAN

Yes. Time is being wasted and I'm wandering around like a jackass. I mean, I'm keeping my eyes open, but if I knew what I was supposed to be doing—

DOCTOR

Hacker did mention something about you.

KLEINMAN

What?

DOCTOR

I can't remember.

KLEINMAN

Great. I'm the forgotten man.

DOCTOR

I think I heard him say something. I'm not sure.

KLEINMAN

Look, why don't we patrol together? In case there's trouble.

DOCTOR

I can only walk along a little way with you. Then I have other business.

KLEINMAN

It's funny to see a doctor up in the middle of the night . . . I know how you guys hate to make house calls. Ha-ha-ha-ha. *(No laugh)* It's a very cold night . . . *(Nothing)* You, er—you think we'll spot him tonight? *(Nothing)* I suppose you have an important function to carry out in the plan? See, I don't know mine yet.

DOCTOR

My interest is purely scientific.

KLEINMAN

I'm sure.

DOCTOR

Here is a chance to learn something about the nature of his insanity. Why is he the way he is? What goads someone toward such a type of antisocial behavior? Are there some other unusual qualities about him? Sometimes the very impulses that cause a maniac to murder inspire him to highly creative ends. It's a very complex phenomenon. Also, I would like to know if he has been mad from birth or if his madness is caused by some disease or accident that has damaged his brain or from the accumulated stress of adverse circumstances. There are a million facts to learn. For instance: Why does he choose to express his impulses in the act of murder? Does he do it of his own will or does he imagine he hears voices? You know at one time the mad were considered to be divinely inspired. All this is worth examining for the record.

KLEINMAN

Sure, but first we have to catch him.

DOCTOR

Yes, Kleinman, if I have my way, I will be left alone to study this creature scrupulously, dissecting him down to the last chromosome. I would like to put his every cell under a microscope. See what he's composed of. Analyze his juices. Break down the blood, probe the brain minutely, until I had a one hundred percent understanding of precisely what he is in every aspect.

KLEINMAN

Can you ever really know a person? I mean, know him—not know about him, but know—I mean, actually

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