

Till Murder do us Part
By Andrew Gordon and Jenny Greenlee

Act I

The play takes place at the banquet hall of the Hotel Joie De Vivre in New York City. It is the day of the wedding of Audra Hastings and Tom Brickford. The stage is bare except for two tables decked out as if for a wedding reception – three chairs per table, which can be used in any arrangement needed. Sound of offstage crash, and the voice of the Bride, Audra Hastings.

Audra: *(Off.)* YOU CALL THIS A FLOWER ARRANGEMENT?

*The Maid of Honor, **Jessica Tyler**, and the Best Man, **Reggie Danvers**, enter from opposite sides, and cross to R and L respectively. They both carry champagne glasses, and a knife. They are each rehearsing their reception toast, but not in the same location. If possible, they will be isolated by lighting. When in position, they both tap on the glasses.*

Jessica: Hey, hi there!

Reggie: Yo, everybody, listen up!

Both: No, that doesn't sound right.

Jessica: Something more confident...

Reggie: Something more formal...

They both tap the glasses again.

Jessica: As Audra's maid of honor...

Reggie: As Tom's best man...

Both: It falls on me to toast the happy couple.

Reggie: I look around here, and it's like a company picnic for Hastings Chemicals...

Jessica: Mr. Hastings, the father of the bride, and my boss, congratulations on this happiest of days.

Reggie: Mrs. Brickford, happy mother of the groom. Your husband began the company with Mr. Hastings.

Jessica: Would that Mrs. Hastings...

Reggie: Would that Mr. Brickford...

Both: ...could be with us here today.

Reggie: Helluva tragedy. Here's to their memory.

Jessica: I met Tom in the lab at Hastings Chemicals. That's where he and I became...

Reggie: As the CFO, I spend a lot of time working with the CEO, Mr. Hastings. So I came to know Audra too. In time we became...

Jessica: Friends.

Reggie: Heh...friends.

Jessica: And then there's Reggie Danvers, the best man...

Reggie: Hey, Jessica Tyler, maid of honor...

Jessica: We were...

Reggie: We were...

Both: ...complicated. *(Pause. Ring glasses, to start again.)*

Jessica: Audra and I...we've been...friends since childhood.

Reggie: I met Tommy his first year at Hastings. He was a junior lab rat, I was a bottom-of the rung paper pusher.

Jessica: Audra's always been, well...her own woman, right? *(Takes a drink.)* Right.

Reggie: Tommy, what can I say – smart guy, right? Not the most charming guy in the world, but that's why he's got me!

Jessica: Audra is...

Reggie: Tommy is...

Jessica: ...spirited...

Reggie: ...well-groomed...

Jessica: ...intense...

Reggie: ...real “nice” ...

Jessica: ...a bit rough, to be honest...

Reggie: ...kind of a wimp, really...

Jessica: ...she’s not always a good person!

Reggie: ...he’s got all the personality of a lab coat!

Jessica: No...

Reggie: ...no...

Both: *(A pause. They both sigh, then)*...needs work.

They exit, Jessica taking another swig of her drink, Reggie more relaxed. Another crash offstage, as we once again hear Audra’s voice.

Audra: BABY’S BREATH! I HATE BABY’S BREATH!!!

*Enter **June Brickford**, the Mother of the Groom, and **Jim Hastings**, the Father of the Bride.*

Jim: June, it all looks very...nice. Thanks for helping out. The flowers – they’re quite...

June: Nice?

Jim: Yes.

June: Oh, glad to help out...and it lets me show off a bit.

Jim: Yes, they’re very...bright, aren’t they?

June: Well, I may not be a chemical genius like my son, but I’ve learned a thing or two over the years. My flowers have won awards, you know! Vibrant, full of color – and all organic!

Jim: Yes, the, uh...colors, hmm? And the...

June: Arrangements?

Jim: Yes, first-rate.

June: I'm glad you think so. Nothing's too good for my son's wedding day! I understand that dear Audra is...less than pleased.

Jim: Well, you know how brides can be...she's a bundle of nerves right now.

June: Yes. I wondered why you didn't hire a...professional florist.

Jim: Well, I wanted to keep it...in the family, so to speak.

June: No other reason?

Jim: Well, I've had my hands full at the plant. The Nitricine trials...*(Note - the word is pronounced "nice-uh-treen")*

June: Still no luck, after all these years?

Jim: No.

June: Not even with Bill's notes?

Jim: Nothing yet. We've been working on them since...Whatever breakthrough Bill thought he was on the verge of is eluding us, if it ever existed. Instead of advancing his work, we've gone backwards.

June: There's a lot riding on Nitricine, isn't there?

Jim: Yes, there is.

June: Which helps explain why you wanted to save money on the flower arrangements. *(Jim says nothing.)* Well...the big day.

Jim: Yes. Congratulations, by the way. I meant to say earlier.

June: Thank you, Jim. You too.

Jim: I certainly hope that they'll be happy in this marriage. Happier than I was in mine, at least.

June: As for me, my precious boy came from my marriage. Whatever else I thought of Bill, I will be eternally grateful for that. I'm sure you feel the same way about Daina.

Jim: Daina. Bill...and Daina. Yes, children – a delight, yes? A comfort in our old age. That’s what the stories tell us, anyway. You care...deeply for Tom, don’t you?

June: Of course I do! He’s my first thought in the morning, and my last thought at night. Don’t you feel the same about Audra?

Jim: Hmm...of course. Look, I wanted to tell you...Tom’s a fine man.

June: I know he is.

Jim: A good employee. Always on time. Keeps his workspace cleaned. Well-groomed.

June: Thank you. And?

Jim: And...nothing. I wish him the best, with my daughter.

June: How very kind.

Jim: *(Starts to leave, turns back.)* While I believe he’s all those things I said, and as clever as his father, I can’t say that I approve of this! With Audra’s inheritance, this marriage makes him a rich man.

June: James. Tom is twice...three times the man his father was! If you’re suggesting that he’s marrying above himself, for money...

Jim: I am.

June: Then you’re a fool. Tom is marrying Audra because he *thinks* it will make him happy. And trust me, I will do whatever it takes to see that my boy is happy. *(She storms off. Jim is alone onstage as we hear yet another series of crashes.)*

Audra: *(Off.)* AND NONE OF IT GOES WITH THE BRIDESMAID’S DRESSES!!

Tom: *(Off.)* Ow!!!

Jim: God. *(He exits.)*

*The groom, **Tom Brickford** enters, clutching his head, followed by Jessica. June re-enters, unseen, and lurks in the background.*

Jessica: Tom! Are you alright?

Tom: Jessie, yes, I'm fine.

Jessica: It doesn't look fine – let me see. (*Looking at his head.*) It didn't break the skin at least.

Tom: No, I was able to duck in time...well, almost in time. It was a big vase, and she put some English on it. (*June exits.*)

Jessica: Tom...

Tom: Look – I'm fine! I'm usually able to get out of the way. She's just a little more...on edge today.

Jessica: Most brides get a little weepy on their wedding day...

Tom: ...Audra's aim gets just gets better.

Jessica: Tom...I'm so sorry.

Tom: What do you have to be sorry about?

Jessica: Nothing...everything.

Tom: Jessie – you're a good friend. And, for all the troubles we've had in the lab, you've been rock solid – I can always rely on you.

Jessica: I'm glad...glad you think so! (*She starts crying.*)

Tom: Jessie, what is it?

Jessica: It's just...it's...Audra...she...we used to be so close. But she's just become bitter. I hate her. Hate her for what she's doing to you.

Tom: Jessie...

Jessica: Look, no – I'm sorry. I just wish you...could be happy.

Tom: Me too.

Jessica: Tom?

Tom: Yeah?

Unseen, Reggie enters. He's not wearing his tux jacket, and is looking a little dishevelled. He takes in the following.

Jessica: You know, you don't really have to go through with this.

Tom: You sound like my mom.

Jessica: What?

Tom: Mom's been at me to call it off. But you know mom – no one's good enough for me in her book. But no, she's not going to get in the way this time.

Jessica: Tom, your mom's right! You're not happy. Audra...I'm not sure she's ever been really happy. This wedding isn't a good idea.

Tom: Well, that's never stopped me before.

Jessica: Look, Tom – I'm serious! You deserve better!

Tom: Jessie, you know I've had...bad luck in the past...in relationships. There's something about Audra – I get glimpses of it every once in a while. She reminds me of...

Jessica: I know who she reminds you of. Tom, Antoinette's gone, and you're still in love with her. You're supposed to be in love with the person you're marrying.

Tom: I am. I will be. She's just stressed out – I know it. It's all the pressure of the wedding!

Jessica: It's not just that! She...

Tom: Jessie, I can handle this. I can. If I can just get through today, it'll be alright.

She takes his hands.

Jessica: Tom, listen to me. You need to know this! Audra, she...

Reggie: *(Pretending he hasn't seen a thing.)* Hey, Tommy! How's my guy! Oh, hi, Jessie.

Tom: Hey, Reggie!

Reggie: I managed to calm the storm.

Tom: How'd you do that?

Reggie: I'm a really great guy, and I have a way with people – what can I tell you?

Tom: Thanks, buddy. I owe you one.

Reggie: You owe me lots, but who's counting? Hey, bud – we have to be getting to the church, right? You should freshen up first.

Tom: Good idea, but you're one to talk, buddy. Been flirting with the chambermaids again? Jessie...thanks for checking up on me.

Jessica says nothing. Tom exits. A pause. Reggie slowly walks around Jessica, whistles.

Reggie: Jessie, looking good!

Jessica: I have nothing to say to you! *(She starts to exit. He intercepts her.)*

Reggie: Nothing, really? Not even for old times sake?

Jessica: They weren't good times.

Reggie: You wound me, sweetheart. Hey, what were you and Tommy talking about by the way?

Jessica: None of your business!

Reggie: Somehow, I rather doubt that.

Jessica: Get out of my way!

Reggie: Good thing I came in when I did. That little speech you gave Tommy – I don't think it was exactly out of the maid of honor's handbook, was it? Trying to talk the groom out of marrying your best friend?

Jessica: You're one to talk – I hate you. I hate both of you.

Audra: *(Off.)* Jessie!

Jessica: God, here she comes. *(Starts to cross away from Reggie. He grabs her hand.)*

Reggie: One more thing. We had an agreement. I keep your secrets, you keep

mine. Remember that.

Audra Hastings, the bride, enters. *She's in her bride's dress, along with Reggie's coat. She's rather drunk.*

Audra: Jessie, where the hell have you been! The wedding starts in an hour, and I'm not ready yet! You call yourself a goddamn maid of honor?

June enters, along with Jim.

Reggie, thanks for helping me calm down just now – don't know what I'd do without you. Get me a drink, would you?

Ah, here she is, mummy! Thanks, by the way, for all the...interesting arrangements!

June: Happy to help out, dear.

Audra: This is my wedding day! I'm supposed to be getting manicures and pedicures, and...all sorts of cures, right? Instead, I'm dragged along to the reception hall, because Daddy dear dropped the frickin' ball! Homemade flower arrangements!

Jessie: Well, we're all happy to pitch in, Audra.

Audra: Daddy!

Jim: Yes, Audra?

Audra: Go pitch in, why don't you! Go find my wayward husband to be, and make yourself useful!

Jim: Audra, I won't be spoken to that way!

Audra: Quick now, daddykins, or I may have to cut back on your allowance! *(He exits. Laughing.)* Shoe's on the other foot now, old man!

Jessie: Was there something you needed, Audra.

Audra: My god, you're stupid. "Something old, something new. Something borrowed, something blue." Old veil, new dress, blue underwear. Well, that is, if I'm still wearing it – I'll have to check on that! *(Laughs.)*

Jessie: Looking for something borrowed, then, are we?

June: Oh, I took care of that, dear. There's an old family brooch in a box – I left it at the front desk.

Jessie: Shall I go fetch it?

Audra: It's your damn job, isn't it? *(Jessie leaves. As she is going.)* Do this right, or I'll tell Daddy what a "good" job you've been doing! It's fun watching them do everything I say!

June: Audra, dear; why don't you sit down?

Audra: Not the worst idea I've heard today. My dogs are barking! *(Noticing the jacket)* Why am I wearing this? Oh, yes, that's right! *(Laughs.)* I'm a little overdressed!

With June's help, and with some difficulty, she takes the jacket off. June stands behind Audra, massaging her shoulders.

June: Just take some deep breaths, relax.

Audra: Uhhh...that feels good.

June: Deep breaths, dear. Soon, it'll all be over.

Audra: Hardly. Soon I'll be married to that son of yours; my own ball and chain. Oh well; he's obedient, you've trained him well. Not much of a temper either, unlike dear old Daddy.

June: Audra, surely it's none of my business, but that's not really the way a good marriage works.

Audra: Like you'd know what makes a good marriage!

June: What?

Audra: Don't play coy with me. I know all about it. And I won't be anyone's doormat. *(June squeezes too hard.)* Ow!

June: Sorry dear, I...

Audra: For a second there I was actually enjoying myself – Oh well, I can relax when I'm dead.

Jessie re-enters, with brooch.

Audra: There she is – what took so goddamn long – did you get lost?

Jessie: No, I just...

Audra: Look, I don't really care, let me see it. *(Looks.)* It'll have to do. Put it on me.

Jim enters, Tom in tow. Reggie enters as well, some time in the next few lines.

On the other hand, don't bother. You're so soused, you'll probably stab me through the heart. Tom, darling – come and assist your bride.

June: Audra, surely...isn't it bad luck for the groom to see the bride before the wedding?

Audra: *(Laughing.)* We've jumped off that particular bridge already, mommy dearest! No mystery, no surprises here. Tom!

Tom pins the brooch on. Reggie re-enters, with drink.

Well, you managed that all right, at least. Reggie, dear – my salvation! *(Reggie moves to hand her the drink. She grabs him, and plants a big, inappropriate kiss. Taking the drink.)* Thank you!

Tom: Audra, what the hell?

Audra: Oh, sorry – forgot where I was! *(Takes a drink, then grabs at her dress where the brooch is pinned.)* Ow! Damn it, Tom – you did poke me – can't you do anything right?

Jim: Audra, you need to calm down.

Audra: *(Puts drink down.)* Calm down? Calm down?! This is my day! My wedding day! I've got a maid of honor drunk off her ass...

Jessie: You're one to talk!

Audra: A mama's boy groom with two left hands, two left feet, and no backbone, and the worst florist that's what's left of your money can't buy! This is my day, and you owe me, Daddy! You all owe...owe...

Her body goes rigid. Tom catches her, and lowers her to the ground. Within moments, she is dead.

Tom: Audra, Audra! *(He inspects the body. With the expert assurance of a character in a murder mystery play)* Dead. She's dead.

Reggie: What? How?

Jim: Don't play dumb, Reginald. You know very well how. She was poisoned.

Tom: I don't understand. The way she died...the rigidity, convulsions...it was just like...

Jim: Thomas, don't be a fool! You know damn well that's impossible.

June: But who...who would do this?

Jessie: Let me see...*(performs quick count.)* I'm guessing any or all of us! *(Laughs.)*

Reggie: Jessie, get a hold of yourself. A horrible thing has just happened!

Jessie: And yet, not a tear is shed. Why is that?

Jim: All of you, listen to me! We've got to pull ourselves together, and find out who did this.

June: Why don't we just wait for the police?

Jim: You heard Jessica – we all of us had motive, and opportunity. If we leave it up to the police, they might arrest the wrong person.

Jessie: Or arrest all of us, just to be sure!

The following is a combination of character-driven exposition, and just plain gotta-do-it exposition. Suck it up, method actors.

Jim: Quiet! Here's what I propose – let's move Audra's body out of here. After that, there are plenty of witnesses, here at the hotel.

Jessica: Yeah, what are they doing here?

Reggie: Looks like they're waiting to be entertained. Good luck with that.

Jim: AS I WAS SAYING ...let's all of us take 15 minutes to circulate around these tables. These people may have seen something we didn't, or may think of a question that we might not.

June: Ladies and gentlemen, on your table, you will find sleuthing sheets, where you may write down the fruits of your investigations

Tom: I agree. And to those witnesses, I'd just like to point out that all of these suspects may be hiding secrets, secrets you cannot learn except through interrogation.

Reggie: All right everyone – enough talking. Let's get this over with.

The actors remove Audra's body from the stage (if she can die behind the drape, this is much easier.) After a brief pause, the actors circulate amongst the tables, and share their thoughts and secrets. Pace yourself so that you cover 1/3rd of the room during each intermission.