

THE ANIMAL WITHIN

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An-i-mal (noun) 1. any being capable of sensation and voluntary motion. 2. any such organism other than man 3. a brutish, debased or inhumane person

An-i-ma (noun, from the Latin for spirit or soul) 1. an individual's true inner self 2. a basic attitude or governing spirit 3. in the analytic philosophy of C. G. Jung, an inner female part of the male personality

an-i-mus (noun) 1. Deep-seated hostility

THE ANIMAL WITHIN

CAST OF CHARACTERS:

DR. ROBERT ARGUS A clinical neurologist. Fascinated by the workings of the mind, he is currently studying schizophrenia and how it relates to emotion, passion and the belief in God. His research is funded through a major university in southern California and relies on grants.

SYLVIA ARGUS Robert's wife, an interior designer. Her family has a great deal of money going back several generations. She has never had to work and takes only the projects she is interested in. Sylvia serves on the board of directors at several major not-for-profit medical research and arts organizations.

MELODY BARSTOW a housekeeper hired by Sylvia as the play begins. Young and sexy, Melody grew up in a small town and had long dreamed of coming to the golden land of California.

SCENE

The kitchen of the Argus home on the Pacific coast, north of Los Angeles. It is very well appointed and hardly ever used to cook food. An entrance stage left comes from the driveway. Up center is a hallway leading to the main part of the house, including the bedrooms. Another doorway stage right leads to a deck with stairs down to the beach.

Stage left, downstage of the driveway door, stands a breakfast bar with coffee maker and toaster. A stove and oven are between the door and the breakfast bar. Upstage of the driveway door, a small broom closet.

Center stage stands an island with two stools. Upstage of the island are a refrigerator, dishwasher, sink and cabinets.

Stage right, downstage of the door leading to the deck, is a two-person window seat with a small table or shelf space downstage. A table and two chairs fill out this nook area.

SCENE ONE

Early morning sunlight shines into the well-appointed kitchen, with the SOUND OF THE OCEAN, and BIRDS SINGING.

SYLVIA ARGUS ENTERS, an attractive woman in a Prada business suit, followed by DR. ROBERT ARGUS, in a dress shirt and no tie.

ROBERT

...you've already interviewed five or six.

SYLVIA

One has to be careful, taking a stranger into one's home.

ROBERT

Exactly my point. We don't need a stranger living in our home.

SYLVIA

She won't be a stranger if I choose properly.

Sylvia pours coffee into a mug. Robert takes a small pitcher from the refrigerator and hands it to her.

ROBERT

The service comes three days a week and they keep the place spotless.

SYLVIA

Robert, I want a live-in girl. I spend too much time running to the market and the dry cleaners and just looking for things around here.

Sylvia pours milk from the pitcher into the mug of coffee and hands it to Robert. She pours another mug of coffee.

ROBERT

If that were true, you would have found one already. Subconsciously you don't want a housekeeper at all.

SYLVIA

Don't analyze me like I'm one of your wack-a-doos.

Sylvia tries pouring from the little pitcher.
Empty. She waves it at him.

SYLVIA (cont.)

I have most of the responsibility for keeping the house in order and I'm sick of it.
You won't do it, so I'm getting a girl.

Robert looks in the fridge.

ROBERT

Gone.

(pause)

We have three eggs, four slices of bread.

SYLVIA

Don't make anything for me. Board meeting.

Sylvia takes his coffee mug and places hers
at his seat. She sits and runs through e-mails
on her Blackberry.

ROBERT

UCLA?

SYLVIA

Getty.

Robert closes the refrigerator.

ROBERT

I'll pick up a bear claw from the cart.

Sylvia gives him a look.

ROBERT (cont.)

Okay, a bran muffin.

Sylvia returns to her Blackberry. Robert sits
and sips his milk-less coffee.

ROBERT (cont.)

Today I'm finally running the PET scan on that 17-year-old boy, the schizophrenic
with auditory and visual hallucinations.

SYLVIA

Hm...

ROBERT

We stopped his haloperidol four days ago, to get the medication out of his system. Yesterday he started seeing disembodied heads floating around the room...

SYLVIA

How awful.

ROBERT

The heads have been talking to him. They tell him to kill us.

SYLVIA

Give him something.

ROBERT

We can't until we've collected the data. In the throes of madness he calls out for God. He says, "Oh, God. Please, God..."

SYLVIA

He thinks only God can save him.

ROBERT

God made him the way he is. The only one who can save him is me.

Sylvia rises.

ROBERT (cont.)

You'll go to the market, then?

SYLVIA

Yes.

SYLVIA EXITS into the house.

ROBERT

Have you seen my blue tie?

SYLVIA (off stage)

They're your ties, Robert.

LIGHTS FADE on Robert. The SOUND OF THE OCEAN and BIRDS SINGING rises.

SOUND OF BIRDS SINGING FADES.

SCENE TWO

LIGHTS RISE, now mid-afternoon. Robert is gone and the kitchen is empty.

SYLVIA ENTERS, from the main house and wearing the same suit. MELODY ENTERS with her. The SOUND OF THE OCEAN fades.

SYLVIA

...at least once a day. Here's the kitchen. We don't eat in much, just breakfast, and dinner if we're both here. I get home around six on weekdays, Robert about seven. He likes to cook, so keep the kitchen clean and make sure to tell him if we run out of anything. He keeps a list...

MELODY

I can cook if you want me to.

SYLVIA

You won't have to.

MELODY

Serving at dinner parties and things, they gave me lessons.

SYLVIA

We won't expect you to go the right way around a table or anything. Just keep the place spotless and we'll be happy. Everything is under here, cleanser, soap, sponges, gloves...

Sylvia takes out cleaning supplies.

MELODY

If you get me a uniform, I'll wear it.

SYLVIA

A uniform?

MELODY

One of those little French maid outfits.

SYLVIA

That won't be necessary.

MELODY

Don't you think that would be fun?

SYLVIA

We're not that continental.

MELODY

Maybe for a party or special occasion.

SYLVIA

It would seem pretentious.

MELODY

What does that mean?

SYLVIA

Uppity. Snotty.

MELODY

Then I'll wear it only when you're around.

SYLVIA

It's not necessary.

MELODY

Still, it would be fun. Like playing dress up. I loved that when I was a little girl.

SYLVIA

Most little girls do.

MELODY

I still do, I mean, when I find something I can afford, I like to buy it and wear it brand new. I can't believe the size of your closet. You have so many nice clothes.

SYLVIA

I suppose that is playing dress-up, in a way.

MELODY

We're all still little girls inside, don't you think?

SYLVIA

Perhaps.

MELODY

That's all I'm saying. We all want to play dress up sometimes.

SYLVIA

The agency told me this is your first assignment.

MELODY

I only moved to California last month. They gave me lessons at the agency and I studied real hard. I know all about housekeeping and cleaning and making beds. I will try really hard to make you happy any way I can.

SYLVIA

I'm sure you will.

MELODY

The house is so beautiful. In a million years I could never afford to live in a house like this. The beach is right there. Please give me this job.

SYLVIA

I never said...

MELODY

Please.

SYLVIA

I never said I wouldn't hire you. You're hired.

MELODY

Really? Oh, thank you. Thank you so much.

SYLVIA

Move in tonight if you want.

MELODY

Maybe I should meet Dr. Argus first.

SYLVIA

I have complete autonomy in this decision.

MELODY

What does that mean?

SYLVIA

Autonomy? That means it's up to me.

MELODY

I never went to college or anything.

SYLVIA

You must go. A bright girl like you...

MELODY

School didn't... I didn't fit in there. I've been told my talents lie in other areas.

SYLVIA

You don't have to be a maid all your life.

MELODY

All I ever wanted to do is live on the beach. And now I'm here.

SYLVIA

You must have other ambitions.

MELODY

Sure.

SYLVIA

Good. I admire a person who aspires... has the hope of bettering herself.

MELODY

My plan is to "improve the quality of life for my employers."

SYLVIA

I'm sure you will.

MELODY

That's from the agency handbook. I memorized it.

SYLVIA

We have a good life now, of course...

MELODY

Everyone's life can use improving.

SYLVIA

Since Robert and I both work, we thought having someone around the house... You know, when we're not here.

MELODY

See? I'm making life better already.

SYLVIA

Let me warn you. Robert, I mean, Dr. Argus does not want a live-in girl. He thinks you might get in the way. We have had long discussions about it. Eventually I prevailed. That means "I won." I wanted someone young, like yourself...

MELODY

Why do you wear your hair up like that?

SYLVIA

Excuse me?

MELODY

Your hair.

SYLVIA

Melody, how I wear my hair is none of your business.

MELODY

Oh, it's very attractive. I didn't mean it wasn't. Hairstyles just interest me. If you want me to do your hair...

SYLVIA

That's not your job.

MELODY

But I like doing hair.

SYLVIA

My stylist is very good. He ought to be, he gets two hundred and fifty dollars an appointment.

MELODY

Wow. He must be gay.

SYLVIA

Melody!

MELODY

All the best hairdressers are gay.

SYLVIA

Whether or not a person is gay...

MELODY

Is none of my business, I know. I'm sorry...

SYLVIA

We don't talk about being gay or not being gay. A person's sexuality has nothing to do with us.

MELODY

Don't be mad. I only meant, I mean... oh, no. Now you're mad at me. Please, don't be mad. I always make such a mess of things.

SYLVIA

I'm not mad.

MELODY

Please...

SYLVIA

Melody, it's fine. You didn't say anything wrong. I like you. I want you to work for me. You don't have to impress me any more.

MELODY

Okay.

SYLVIA

And just so you know, Leon is gay. He's a fountain of gayness. If you cut him, he'd bleed rainbows.

MELODY

(laugh)

Mrs. Argus, you're funny.

SYLVIA

Please. Call me Sylvia. With only three of us there's no point in using titles.

MELODY

I'd like that.

SYLVIA

Good.

MELODY

Mrs. Monkeyjaw at the agency...

SYLVIA

Who?

MELODY

I mean, Mrs. Montague. The girls, we called her Mrs. Monkeyjaw. Not to her face, of course.

SYLVIA

She did look a little simian.

MELODY

Mrs. Montague said you interviewed seven other maids and rejected them all.

SYLVIA

One has to be careful, taking in a live-in housekeeper.

MELODY

They all had more experience than me.

SYLVIA

The other applicants were older, more set in their ways. I wanted to find someone like yourself. Someone young. Someone with whom I had a rapport... that means someone I could talk to.

MELODY

Is that why you bought me lunch?

SYLVIA

You liked that, didn't you?

MELODY

Oh, yes. Such a nice place. I hardly ever get to eat shrimp, and they cooked it with cocoanut!

SYLVIA

You also enjoyed our conversation.

MELODY

Uh-huh.

SYLVIA

I needed to see if we could get along, if we had a... a connection. Taking a girl into one's home... some people might consider that inappropriate.

MELODY

What people?

SYLVIA

My social circle. Some of them are quite conservative.

MELODY

All rich people have maids.

SYLVIA

And talk about them endlessly. Nothing goes unexamined. I might as well live in a laboratory, the way they poke and prod.

MELODY

People think what they want to think, whether it's true or not. Please tell me you're not having second thoughts. You still want me to work for you.

SYLVIA

Oh, yes. Very much.

MELODY

Then I want to start right away. What can I do for you?

SYLVIA

Nothing right now.

MELODY

Let me get you something to drink.

SYLVIA

I'm fine.

MELODY

I can make some ice tea, or I saw a bar in there...

SYLVIA

You don't have to fetch for me.

MELODY

I want to do it. It's my job. You sit down. What would you like, Sylvia?

SYLVIA

A cosmopolitan, I suppose.

MELODY

What's that?

SYLVIA

Well, it's vodka and... I don't know. I opened some Pinot Grigio last night. In the little cooler under the bar.

MELODY

Be right back. Uh... what is it?

SYLVIA

White wine.

MELODY

Take off your shoes.

MELODY EXITS. Sylvia is suddenly agitated. She fusses with her hair, takes off her shoes, puts them back on, the dashes across the stage to sit as casually as possible on the window seat.

MELODY REENTERS, with wine bottle and glass.

MELODY (cont.)

I brought the bottle so I don't have to keep running, if you want more.

SYLVIA

Bring it here.

Melody pours wine with a napkin over her arm.

MELODY

They told me in training that you only fill a wine glass half way, never all the way. I don't know why.

SYLVIA

White wine is served cold...

MELODY

If you like wine, you should drink lots of it.

SYLVIA

...but it would get warm before you finished if you filled the glass. You don't chill red wine, but it has to breathe. You only fill it half way for breathing.

MELODY

Wine breathes?

SYLVIA

Red wine tastes better exposed to air. They call it "breathing."

MELODY

You are really smart, Sylvia. And so attractive. Wait. I want to show you something.

MELODY EXITS. Sylvia takes a huge slug of wine. She pours more. Then, she takes the wine and glass to the island and sits on one of the stools.

MELODY REENTERS with a hand mirror and brush. She gives Sylvia the mirror.

MELODY (cont)

You have classic features. That's what they call your type of face. I read about it in a magazine. Your cheekbones, and the shape of your chin, like those statues that have been around for hundreds of years. People like looking at them so much they keep them and look at them again and again.

Melody touches Sylvia's hair.

SYLVIA

Wait. Wait.

MELODY

Let me do this for you.

SYLVIA

I don't think you should.

MELODY

You said before you weren't going back to the studio today. As long as you have the day off, let's have some fun.

SYLVIA

Fine. But be careful.

MELODY

Let your hair down!

Melody undoes a clasp releasing Sylvia's hair.

MELODY (cont.)

Look how pretty. You should always wear it down. Now, I'm going to just brush it out. See? That feels good, doesn't it?

SYLVIA

Yes...it does.

MELODY

Back home, my friend Debbie and I always brushed each other's hair.

SYLVIA

Melody... brushing my hair... it's not really your job.

MELODY

But you like it. I don't mind doing little things. Anything you want. Like you said, it will be only the three of us.

SYLVIA

Robert won't be here most of the time.

MELODY

When does he get home?

SYLVIA

Not for hours.

MELODY

Good. I mean, we can have some fun. Just the girls.

SYLVIA

Fine.

Melody continues to brush Sylvia's hair.

MELODY

Debbie, my girlfriend in high school, we did everything together. Go to movies, play video games... we learned about hair by reading magazines and styling each other. We did things like this all the time. We didn't have boyfriends. I mean, I like boys and all but I had more fun with Debbie. Sometimes we could even read each other's thoughts. We'd say the same thing at the same time, or we'd be walking and I'd put out my hand and hers would be right there. We'd hold hands a lot. I'd sleep over at her house and we'd talk for hours. We'd laugh about nothing, silly things we made up, we'd laugh until we couldn't breathe. Sometimes we would just stare into each other's eyes... not saying anything... just look into each other's eyes. Did you ever have a special friend like that? Sylvia?

SYLVIA

Yes, I did. In college.

MELODY

Then you know what I mean.

SYLVIA

Not the same...

MELODY

But you had a girlfriend.

SYLVIA

We were close in a different way.

MELODY

You had a special relationship, like Debbie and me.

SYLVIA

We were intimate.

MELODY

What does that mean?

SYLVIA

We could trust each other. We kept secrets.

MELODY

Yes. A secret relationship.

SYLVIA

But it meant nothing.

MELODY

It doesn't sound like nothing.

SYLVIA

Just someone I knew in college.

MELODY

But you still think about her.

(pause)

Before, you said... I mean, you like me, don't you?

SYLVIA

Of course.

MELODY

I like you, too.

SYLVIA

Thank you.

MELODY

We could be friends. I mean, like Debbie and me.

SYLVIA

Maybe not.

MELODY

Like you and your girlfriend. Intimate friends.

SYLVIA

Intimate also means something else, Melody.

MELODY

Uh-huh.

SYLVIA

Intimacy means touching.

MELODY

I like touching.

SYLVIA

Touching in a secret way.

MELODY

I want you to touch me like that.

SYLVIA

Melody...

MELODY

I want you to touch me now.

Sylvia looks up at Melody. Melody bends closer. They kiss.

MELODY (cont)

That was nice.

SYLVIA

Yes, it was.

They kiss more passionately.

SYLVIA

Oh. My god.

Melody takes her hand and leads her to the house.

SYLVIA (cont.)

My god.

LIGHTS FADE to BLACK. The SOUND OF THE OCEAN RISES.

SCENE THREE

LIGHTS RISE and the SOUND OF THE OCEAN FADES. Several hours have passed and late afternoon sun bathes the room.

Offstage, the SOUND OF BREAKING GLASS and a cry of pain from ROBERT'S VOICE.

The door slams open and ROBERT ENTERS. Blood covers one hand, He carries a stone statue of a Mayan god.

ROBERT

Sylvia. Sylvia!

He staggers over to a side table, muttering to himself. He places the statue on the table, then back to the breakfast bar to get a towel for his hand.

ROBERT (cont.)

Sylvia!

He crosses back and addresses the statue.

ROBERT (cont.)

You didn't have to go and do this. I didn't disturb your sacred resting place or anything.

SYLVIA enters, wearing a robe and hastily tying it closed.

SYLVIA

Robert!

ROBERT

I cut my hand.

SYLVIA

You scared the hell out of me.

ROBERT

I cut my goddamned hand on the wind chimes.

SYLVIA

What?!

She looks out the door.

ROBERT

Don't go out. There's glass all over.

SYLVIA

You broke the wind chimes?

ROBERT

Don't go out there. You'll cut your feet.

SYLVIA

How could you break wind chimes?

ROBERT

They came crashing down like the wrath of God.

SYLVIA

You must have done something.

ROBERT

All I did was brush them coming up the stairs. The cord must have frayed, and broke. I tried to catch them as they fell.

SYLVIA

Let me see.

She opens the towel and examines his hand.

SYLVIA (cont)

Oh, my god. Robert, you might need stitches.

ROBERT

I don't need stitches.

SYLVIA

It will leave a scar.

ROBERT

I'm the doctor and I don't need stitches.

SYLVIA

Forgive me for my concern.

ROBERT

Thank you for your concern, but I don't need stitches. Ouch!

SYLVIA

I wanted to see if you had slivers.

ROBERT

Get iodine and a bandage.

SYLVIA

Keep this on it. I'll get the kit.

TO READ THE FULL SCRIPT
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