

MRS. OSGOOD. No. I've invited a few dozen to attend tonight's festivities.

DUNLAP. *You what?*

MRS. OSGOOD. I've given them front row seats at tonight's Benefit and a block of rooms down on the fourth floor. I told them to look at the Palm Beach Royale as if it were their own home.

DUNLAP. You didn't.

MRS. OSGOOD. I did!

DUNLAP. No, really. *You didn't.*

MRS. OSGOOD. *(Delighted:) I assure you I did!*

*(She giggles with girlish glee.)*

MRS. OSGOOD. *Isn't that just too wonderful?*

DUNLAP. *(Through clenched teeth:) I can't begin to tell you.*

MRS. OSGOOD. I was hoping to get the Marines too, but that seems iffy. Well then, I'm off. I want to powder my nose before the festivities begin.

*(She exits.)*

DUNLAP. Oh dear God, the Navy.

*(He moves to the phone and dials.)*

DUNLAP. *(Into phone:) Hello Hedges, this is Mr. Dunlap. Cancel the Code Red in the Presidential Suite. Also, I want you to ring me the second that—*

*(Suddenly, the hall door bursts open and in sweeps CLAUDIA MCFADDEN.)*

*(She is an impressive woman. Larger than life. Every word, every gesture is an exclamation point. She moves into the room like an elegantly dressed tornado.)*

*(She is followed by MR. PIPPET, her private personal male secretary. Compared to his employer, PIPPET is a tiny man. He carries an attaché in one hand and a small, unhappy looking lap-dog in the other. This is MR. BOODLES.)*

*(Every time either one of them barks, PIPPET jumps.)*

CLAUDIA. God, how I love this hotel! How I love this suite! How I love—

*(She notices DUNLAP.)*

CLAUDIA. Who the hell are you?

DUNLAP. (*Putting down the phone:*) Bernard S. Dunlap, Miss McFadden. I am the General Manager of the Palm Beach Royale, at your ser—

CLAUDIA. PIPPET!

PIPPET. Yes, Miss McFadden.

CLAUDIA. Where the hell are my long-stem white roses?

(PIPPET *turns and looks at DUNLAP.*)

PIPPET. Mr. Dunlap, we were assured long stem white roses.

DUNLAP. They're in the bedroom, Miss McFadden. Four dozen roses. Just as you asked for.

CLAUDIA. Well, why are they all in there? (*She turns to her secretary.*) PIPPET.

PIPPET. Yes, Miss McFadden.

(*He sets the attaché down, hands the dog to DUNLAP and exits into the stage left bedroom. CLAUDIA turns to DUNLAP.*)

CLAUDIA. Rooms should *always* be filled with long stem white roses. They bring such joy, such *calm*. Don't you agree?

DUNLAP. Actually, I—

CLAUDIA. But *white*, not red. *White*. White roses are pure and clean. Red roses make me sad. They remind me of my ex-husband. May he rest in peace. (*Beat.*) Soon.

(PIPPET *reenters from the bedroom carrying all four dozen roses. He places them about the room.*)

CLAUDIA. Pippet, where is the *son of bitch* now?

PIPPET. Monte Carlo, last I heard.

CLAUDIA. Still too close.

DUNLAP. (*Beat.*) Yes, well...I'd just like to say, Miss McFadden, what a great pleasure it is to have you staying with us again.

CLAUDIA. Of course it is, darling.

DUNLAP. (*Placing a folder on one of the tables:*) If there's anything you need, please feel free to ask. I have here a schedule for this evening's performance. You're on at 9:30. If you'd like to rehearse—

CLAUDIA. (*Cutting him off:*) What I'd like darling, is a drink. Does this suite come with gin?

DUNLAP. (*Indicating the bar:*) Um...yes.

CLAUDIA. Vermouth?

DUNLAP. Yes.

CLAUDIA. Olives?

DUNLAP. Yes.

CLAUDIA. Splendid! PIPPET!

PIPPET. Yes, Miss McFadden.

*(He goes to the bar and begins to make a pitcher of martinis.)*

DUNLAP. Well then, unless there's anything else you need from me.

CLAUDIA. Actually, Mr...

DUNLAP. Dunlap.

CLAUDIA. Yes Mr. Dunlap. There is one thing. Athena Sinclair. *(The name is poison on her lips.)* Has she arrived yet?

DUNLAP. Not that I know of. *(Beat.)* Is there a problem?

CLAUDIA. No. And there won't be. As long as you keep the little witch as far away from me as possible.

DUNLAP. I can assure you, you'll never see the woman.

CLAUDIA. Because if I do...

DUNLAP. You have my word, you won't.

CLAUDIA. Lovely! Would you like to join me for a martini?

DUNLAP. *(Beat.)* Do you really mean that?

CLAUDIA. Of course not.

DUNLAP. In that case—no thank you. Now, if you'll excuse me, I think I'll go and check on your luggage.

*(DUNLAP exits.)*

CLAUDIA. Splendid! I do so very much love this hotel.

*(PIPPET brings CLAUDIA her martini.)*

*(A second later, there is a knock on the hall door. PIPPET moves to the hall door and opens it. DUNLAP is there, still holding MR. BOODLES.)*

DUNLAP. *(To CLAUDIA:)* Your dog.

*(PIPPET takes the dog and closes the door on DUNLAP's face.)*

CLAUDIA. Mr. Booodles! Let me see you, precious doggie.

*(She makes cooing baby sounds as PIPPET brings the dog to her.)*

CLAUDIA. Oh, I think Mr. Boodles needs a little lie down, don't we Mr. Boodles? *Yes we do!* (To PIPPET:) Bedroom.

PIPPET. Yes, Miss McFadden.

(PIPPET takes MR. BOODLES into the stage left bedroom.)

CLAUDIA. (Calling off:) Pippet, Mr. What's-his-name left a schedule. Who's listed as the headliner?

(PIPPET reenters, picks up the folder and pulls out the schedule.)

PIPPET. You are, Miss McFadden.

CLAUDIA. And where is Athena Sinclair?

PIPPET. Third on the bill. Under yourself and Jimmy Durante.

CLAUDIA. Good.

PIPPET. Would you like to—?

CLAUDIA. What *I'd like* is another olive in this martini.

PIPPET. Yes, Miss McFadden.

(PIPPET gets an olive from the bar and brings it to CLAUDIA on a toothpick.)

CLAUDIA. Martinis are like women of a certain age. They should never be under dressed.

PIPPET. Yes, Miss McFadden.

(He gingerly drops it into Claudia's glass.)

CLAUDIA. God, I'm exhausted. Long train trips always tire me so. And all those dreadful reporters and photographers down in the lobby. All those flashbulbs popping in my face. Tell me Pippet, how do I look?

PIPPET. Oh please, Miss McFadden.

CLAUDIA. Tell me.

PIPPET. But I told you on the train.

CLAUDIA. Tell me again.

PIPPET. You look very young.

CLAUDIA. And what else?

PIPPET. You look very thin.

CLAUDIA. And what else?

PIPPET. You look better than Athena Sinclair on her very best day.