

*(She takes the rose and her martini, and exits into her bedroom.)*

*(THE INSTANT her bedroom door closes, the hall door opens and in walks ATHENA SINCLAIR. She is quite beautiful, elegant and every inch the diva Claudia McFadden is. A one-time screen siren, she moves into the room with all the confidence of the Hollywood Royalty she is. She carries a small piece of luggage which she places on a table. Two steps behind her is MURPHY STEVENS, her personal secretary. MURPHY is young, pretty and very efficient.)*

**MURPHY.** Miss Sinclair, are you sure this is alright? The gentleman at the front desk seemed rather confused. The person I spoke to yesterday said this room was already taken.

**ATHENA.** Nonsense, the person I spoke to yesterday said it was fine. I told them who I was and that I wanted the best suite in the hotel and they said yes. How much simpler could it be?

**MURPHY.** It's just—

**ATHENA.** Oh Murphy, don't be such a bore. We're here. We have the suite. The discussion is over.

**MURPHY.** Yes, Miss Sinclair.

*(ATHENA moves around the suite, admiring the details.)*

**ATHENA.** Such a lovely room. Such elegance. Such history. The parties this suite must have seen. The steamy intimacy. The romance. I think I honeymooned here once. Oddly enough, I can't seem to remember which one.

**MURPHY.** Really?

**ATHENA.** After a while, they all blend together.

**MURPHY.** The honeymoons?

**ATHENA.** The husbands. *(Beat.)* How many have I had now?

**MURPHY.** You're kidding.

**ATHENA.** Darling, I never kid when it comes to men. How many?

**MURPHY.** How can you not know?

**ATHENA.** I lost count at four.

**MURPHY.** Try six.

**ATHENA.** Six?

**MURPHY.** Six.

*(Beat.)*

ATHENA. Oddly enough, I thought I had more. *(Beat.)* I don't have one now, do I?

MURPHY. No.

ATHENA. Oh thank God. Let's try to make sure it stays that way.

MURPHY. I'll do my best.

ATHENA. Although there are all those handsome young servicemen down in the lobby.

MURPHY. Now, now...

ATHENA. With their white fitted uniforms.

MURPHY. Miss Sinclair...

ATHENA. Hugging their firm round bottoms.

MURPHY. *Miss Sinclair.*

ATHENA. What?

MURPHY. You promised.

ATHENA. I promised what dear?

MURPHY. That you'd be good.

ATHENA. But *I am* good darling. I'm always good. Sometimes, I'm *fabulous*. Just ask Errol Flynn.

MURPHY. *Miss Sinclair.*

ATHENA. *Alright, alright.* It's just being in this gorgeous suite. One can't help but feel a bit amorous...that burning tug of passion. Oh Murphy, can't you feel it?

MURPHY. *(Deadpan:)* No.

ATHENA. *Well, why not?* My darling girl, you need to learn *how to live!* You need to go out and grab life by the horns. You need to kiss strange men and dance in fountains. *Now*, while you're still young.

MURPHY. I'm not that young.

ATHENA. But *you are*. You have no idea.

*(Beat. ATHENA smiles to herself, remembers.)*

ATHENA. Oh to be young again. So fresh. So innocent. Those early days at Paramount. At MGM. The movies. The *excitement*. Billie Burke. Adolphe Menjou. Cecil B. DeMille bouncing me up and down on his lap. A little pink dress, my hair in curls. Him telling me what a heartbreaker I'd be. *(Beat.)* Of course I was thirty-two at the time. What a filthy old man he was.

(MURPHY *sighs and shakes her head as she picks up the schedule that Dunlap left for Claudia.*)

ATHENA. What's that you're looking at?

MURPHY. It's the schedule for tonight's benefit.

ATHENA. *Aha.* I told you we were in the right suite.

(*They look at it together.*)

MURPHY. (*Reading:*) "The Palm Beach Ladies for Unity Present a Night of a Thousand Stars." (*Beat.*) How many of these War Benefits have we done now?

ATHENA. Dozens, I would imagine. (*Beat.*) Oh, I see the buffalo got top billing. Well, that should shut her up for a while. Remember the last benefit I did with her... (*Beat.*) ...Where was that again?

MURPHY. San Francisco.

ATHENA. Oh yes, of course. I got top billing on that one. I thought she was going to tear the theatre down.

MURPHY. She did make quite a scene. Of course nothing was as bad as the night at the Roxy.

ATHENA. Oh yes. Wasn't that a festive night? Who knew Edith Head gowns were so easy to wrestle in.

MURPHY. It was the best-dressed brawl I'd ever seen.

ATHENA. Poor Red Skelton. How many stitches did he need?

MURPHY. Fifteen. I warned him not to get between the two of you, but he just wouldn't listen.

ATHENA. Who would have guessed such a tall man could be thrown off a stage so easily?

MURPHY. All those terrible pictures in the Post.

ATHENA. Oh, I don't know. I rather liked the one of me pulling her hair.

MURPHY. Hopefully, we won't see Miss McFadden at all this time around.

ATHENA. I wouldn't worry about it. I'm sure they're going to keep us as far away from each other as possible.

MURPHY. Why do you hate her so much?

ATHENA. Oh darling, there are so many reasons from which to choose.

MURPHY. I'll never forget that very first benefit you two did together. The two of you sang—

ATHENA. Oh, don't say it. I can't bear to even *hear the name* of that song.

MURPHY. It's a lovely song.

ATHENA. It's schmaltz.

MURPHY. The two of you sang it beautifully. You brought down the house.

ATHENA. Did we? How quaint.

MURPHY. And you haven't spoken since.

ATHENA. You make that sound like a bad thing.

MURPHY. (*Scolding:*) All I'm saying—

ATHENA. *Oh Murphy, enough!* Claudia McFadden is a vile, hateful woman, and I want nothing to do with her. That's really all there is to it. Now I refuse to waste another second discussing her, is that understood?

MURPHY. Yes, Miss Sinclair.

ATHENA. Lovely.

(*Beat. She notices the roses.*)

ATHENA. What's with all these white roses? It looks like a wake in here.

MURPHY. I guess they're from the hotel.

ATHENA. Be a sweetheart. Ring down and have someone come get them out of here. I'm going to lie down for a while before the show.

(*She moves to the Claudia's bedroom door and is just about to open it when...*)

MURPHY. Are you sure you want that one?

ATHENA. Why?

MURPHY. It faces east. You know how much you hate the morning sun.

ATHENA. You do look out for me.

MURPHY. I do my best.

ATHENA. Who needs husbands, when I have you?

(*She moves across the room to the Stage Right bedroom door.*)