

LYNETTE PERSIS
TOBIAS VIRGIL

46

LET'S MURDER MARSHA

TOBIAS. I'm *going* to be in a *moment*, Persis! Just stand guard over there and make sure she doesn't return until I've finished my call!

PERSIS. (*moving obediently but uncertainly toward archway right*) How do I stop her? Drag her screaming back to the bedroom, or just wrestle her to the floor?

TOBIAS. (*has wardrobe shut now, and is moving for phone*) Hopefully, I'll be finished before you have to make that decision! (*grabs phone up, starts dialing*)

PERSIS. But who are you calling so *urgently*, Tobias?

TOBIAS. That *airplane* manufacturer, of course! After the conversation I had with him a few moments ago, it wouldn't surprise me if he *canceled* the delivery—and *then* what would I do for Marsha's birthday?! (*Is just finishing dialing when there is a KNOCK at the door; he hangs up in annoyance.*) Damn. Probably that idiot from across the hall! (*Opens door, then reacts in pleased surprise as LYNETTE THOREN, an elegantly coiffed and garbed woman of late middle age, enters from hall.*) Why—Lynette! What a pleasant surprise!

LYNETTE. Now, Toby, you *know* I always drop by on Marsha's *birthday!* (*extends rectangular package*) Even shelled out for a present. (*notices PERSIS as TOBIAS is closing door*) I don't believe we've met—?

TOBIAS. Oh, I'm sorry—Persis Devore—Lynette Thoren.

PERSIS. How do you *do?*

LYNETTE. How do you *do?*

TOBIAS. (*will take LYNETTE's coat—she'll place package on desk while he does so—and hang it in wardrobe over next few speeches*) Persis is the lady I told you about—the one who's helping me with Marsha's birthday surprise.

LYNETTE. Oh, of course! I knew the name sounded

familiar! (*will briefly clasp PERSIS's hand*) But aren't you taking a chance, my dear? Won't Marsha be curious about who you are and why you're here? And come to think of it, why *are* you here? Shouldn't you be off in that seaplane with upholstery tacks and glue?

PERSIS. Well, I *was* going there as soon as I left here — but —

TOBIAS. (*joining them*) Matters got a bit out of hand. Had to cook up a quick story when Marsha met Persis unexpectedly, and now I'm afraid Persis has to stay for dinner, whether she likes it or not.

BIANCA. (*off*) Was that a crack?!

TOBIAS. (*calls kitchenward*) I mean whether she likes staying — not whether she likes dinner!

LYNETTE. Oh, is *Bianca* still here?

TOBIAS. I don't have enough nerve to fire her.

LYNETTE. Don't be silly, Toby. I merely meant that this is normally her night off. (*will move to desk and retrieve package, during:*)

TOBIAS. Oh, it is. She's leaving as soon as she serves dinner.

BIANCA. (*off*) And it better be soon! (*appears in archway*) I suppose *you'll* be dining with us, *too*, Mrs. Thoren?

LYNETTE. If it's not too much trouble. . . ?

BIANCA. (*hopefully*) Do you *mean* that?

TOBIAS. Of *course* she doesn't! Now go set another place at once.

BIANCA. The soup's gonna be like *ice!* (*exits toward dining room*)

LYNETTE. (*moving toward archway, package in hand*) Perhaps she can help me with this . . . (*calls*) Bianca—? I wonder if you'd do me a small favor—? (*exits toward dining room*)