

TOBIAS PERSIS

30

LET'S MURDER MARSHA

dining room and show him where he'll be seated at dinner?!

MARSHA. But we're not dining till eight o'clock!

TOBIAS. Better late than never! . . . Or something.

MARSHA. Oh, very well, very well! (*links arms with VIRGIL*) Shall we?

(*They start for dining room via archway, TOBIAS starts for door; but the moment he has moved to a point where he can no longer see them, MARSHA reverses field, grabs VIRGIL's hand, and drags him behind bar; he opens his mouth as if to protest, but she—always keeping an eye on TOBIAS—puts one hand over his mouth and the other hand atop his head, and swiftly ducks down behind bar, pulling him down out of view with her; this is the work of a few seconds, and then TOBIAS has door open, and PERSIS hurries into room.*)

TOBIAS. Persis! Are you insane, coming back here?! My wife's right in the next room!

PERSIS. Don't worry, I've figured out a cover story. Just tell her I'm an interior decorator, come to redo the apartment.

TOBIAS. Persis, you *are* an interior decorator!

PERSIS. That's what's so *perfect* about it! I can show her credentials and everything! She'll never guess the *real* reason I'm here!

TOBIAS. (*reluctantly shutting hall door*) And what is the real reason, come to think of it?! (*will lead her down to sofa, where they will both sit, and as they sit, MARSHA and VIRGIL will raise their heads up from behind bar, watching them*) We'd better have our stories

straight—if she suspects for a moment what we have in store for her tomorrow—!

PERSIS. She won't if we're careful. I want to knock her dead tomorrow just as much as you do!

(NOTE: Without specifying reactions, MARSHA and VIRGIL, during the course of the TOBIAS/PERSIS colloquy, will react with appropriate horror, outrage, chagrin, bewilderment, etc., to whatever sounds sinister or criminally insane in the colloquy.)

TOBIAS. *Ssh!* If she hears you, it would ruin everything!

PERSIS. You're right! Let's get matters settled before she returns. Here's what I came back to show you . . . (opens purse [MARSHA and VIRGIL, of course, can see nothing but the backs of TOBIAS's and PERSIS's heads over the sofaback] and takes out a bunch of colorful swatches of various fabrics, and shows him one) How would this look stitched to the back of her seat?

TOBIAS. Would it hold together if she squirmed a lot?

PERSIS. Hmmm. Perhaps not. Tell you what—I can attach it with a lot of upholstery nails!

TOBIAS. Ah, yes! Sounds perfect. She'd never work it loose, no matter how much she thrashed about.

PERSIS. (shows him another swatch) And this I thought would be dramatic cemented over her head.

TOBIAS. Cemented?

PERSIS. Well, ordinary glue wouldn't hold it in place. The bay's very damp.

TOBIAS. Oh, do anything you want. The point is, once Marcha's in it, I don't want to hear her complaining.

LET'S MURDER MARSHA

PERSIS. That reminds me—(*shows yet another swatch*) How do you like this material for the straps? Go on, give it a tug.

TOBIAS. (*doing so*) Well, *that* should certainly hold her securely!

PERSIS. I should hope so! Once she's bobbing in the bay, we don't want her popping out of the thing without warning.

TOBIAS. That's for sure! Here, now, put those things away before she comes back and sees them!

PERSIS. (*replacing swatches in her purse*) By the way, you'd better figure out some excuse to lure her down there tomorrow.

TOBIAS. I already have. Crab!

PERSIS. (*reacts*) I was *only* trying to help!

TOBIAS. (*impatiently*) Persis, I'm not calling you names, I'm referring to the sea creature. Marsha adores crab. I'll simply tell her I've discovered a new bayside restaurant that specializes in it, and pretend I'm taking her to lunch there for her birthday, do you see?

PERSIS. It sounds like a foolproof scheme! You drive her to the pier—

TOBIAS. We stroll casually down to the end of it—

PERSIS. And as she glances idly down toward the water—

TOBIAS. I take out the champagne bottle, and—

PERSIS. Crash!

TOBIAS. Splash!

PERSIS. And home for the bash! (*BOTH laugh, while MARSHA and VIRGIL react with revulsion to this apparently heartless merriment.*)

BIANCA. (*appears in archway*) Excuse me, Mister Gilmore, but—will Miss Devore be staying for dinner?

TOBIAS. (*to PERSIS*) Have you *had* dinner—?

PERSIS. Well, as a matter of fact—