

HELEN

I'm so glad Dennis is working out for you.

ANGELICA

Been here nearly a year.

HELEN

That long?

ANGELICA

Last July.

HELEN

(Counting) Ten months. Right? Yes. Ten. Since he left us.

ANGELICA

Since I stole him.

HELEN

And our garden has suffered ever since. Sorry I let him go.

ANGELICA

You didn't.

HELEN

You have a good eye. Can't fault you for that. (Pause) Anyway, it looks splendid.

ANGELICA

What does?

HELEN

The garden.

ANGELICA

Ah.

HELEN

It's really quite...

ANGELICA

Splendid.

HELEN

Yes.

ANGELICA

Funny you should bring that up.

HELEN

Oh?

ANGELICA

It's why I asked you to come early.

HELEN

To chat about the garden?

ANGELICA

Exactly.

HELEN

I was wondering—

ANGELICA

Well, that's why. That's exactly why.

(Pause.)

HELEN

Well. Um. The tulips are wonderful. And the daffodils. And the...what are those over there? Irises?

ANGELICA

And the hole over there.

HELEN

The hole where?

ANGELICA

There. In the corner.

HELEN

Oh. Is Dennis planting something?

ANGELICA

No.

(Pause.)

HELEN

Some kind of animal, then?

ANGELICA

Yes.

(Pause. Understanding slowly dawns on HELEN.)

HELEN

Did my Princess do that?

(ANGELICA doesn't answer.)

HELEN

She's restless, you know. Full of pent-up energy. I think it's the pug in her. She's part pug, you know. Part pug and part—

ANGELICA

We want it to go away. Please see to it, Helen.

(HELEN is stunned into silence.)

ANGELICA

He always works in the garden without his shirt. Had to be forty-five degrees this morning. He was out here, no shirt, rooting in the beds like a truffle pig. He likes to work with his hands. Have you taken a good look at them? They're big and rough. But clean, too. You'd think with all that digging, he'd have perpetual dirt under his nails. Must take a brush to them.

HELEN

Who is, "We?"

ANGELICA

Excuse me?

HELEN

You said, "We." "*We* want it to go away."

ANGELICA

Yes.

HELEN

Who is that, exactly? We, the neighborhood? We, the Historical Society?

ANGELICA

We, the household.

HELEN

The household.

ANGELICA

Don't be dense, Helen. You know perfectly well—

HELEN

See, I don't, though. You say, "The household," but it isn't as though Mr. Busso has a say in that.

ANGELICA

(Dangerously) Clearly.

HELEN

And I can't imagine that Dennis or Marta—

ANGELICA

Very well, *I*. *I* want the dog to go away.

HELEN

All right, then.

ANGELICA

There's no reason—

HELEN

But there is, see? This isn't me against the community. It's just one neighbor with a grievance against another neighbor. That's not such a big thing. That's just two people coming to—

ANGELICA

An understanding.

HELEN

Right. Good. Then we—

ANGELICA

*I* want the dog to go away.

HELEN

(Pause) You said. (Pause) When you say, "away"—

ANGELICA

Away. Gone. Use your imagination.

HELEN

We've had Princess for years.

(ANGELICA doesn't answer.)

HELEN

My Clarissa—well, it's like you and Marta. You'd do anything for her, right? Well, my Clarissa loves that dog. Loves it.

ANGELICA

Will you look at—?

HELEN

I know I'm in the wrong, Angelica. I'm not disputing that. But the fact is, those flowers will grow back.

ANGELICA

This is the third time—

HELEN

I know it is. And rest assured, I'll give my Clarissa a good talking-to. She's always leaving that screen door open. But she's eleven. You know how it is.

ANGELICA

Do I?

HELEN

For God's sake, Angelica, I *can't* put the dog down. I'm at fault here, but the punishment has to fit the crime. I'm happy to pay for the flowers. That's only fair. And I promise this will never happen again. I'll punish Clarissa. Install a new latch. Whatever it takes. But I can't put the dog down.

(Pause.)

ANGELICA

Very well, Helen. You know your dog best, and if you say you have a solution, well, then, I'm inclined to believe you.

HELEN

(Pulling out a checkbook and writing) I *do* appreciate this. It means so much to my Clarissa. Now then, I believe those are hyacinths, right? I'm thinking of putting those in, myself. And this is the third time, of course. I know bulbs are expensive.

(ANGELICA watches HELEN write the check.)

ANGELICA

Very generous.

HELEN

Not at all. It's important to make things right. Especially between friends. I'd hate for our friendship to suffer over something like this.

ANGELICA

I'm glad you appreciate my position.

HELEN

Oh, I do. Certainly, I do.

ANGELICA

Then, you should understand, if your dog does this again, I will kill it myself.

(Long pause.)

HELEN

There's no need to threaten me.

ANGELICA

Oh, no! No, no! I would never *threaten* you, Helen. You said yourself that your dog will never do this again, so it isn't even an issue. Which is the best thing for all concerned, because if I were to kill your dog, you wouldn't like it.

HELEN

Well, *naturally*, I—

ANGELICA

No, I mean: You. Wouldn't. Like it. It will be slow. And painful. And messy. And the whole neighborhood will know what's going on, because I'll wring the most pathetic sobs out of the little bastard. You understand me, Helen? I will send your dog to hell in a very special way.

(Long pause.)

ANGELICA

So, how is Clarissa otherwise?

(HELEN doesn't answer.)

ANGELICA

Looking forward to Middle School? Cheerleading?

(HELEN doesn't answer.)

ANGELICA

Well, that's a long way off, I suppose. Eleven. Such a special age. Awkward. Not a girl anymore. Not really. But certainly not a woman, either. When Marta was eleven, she was working on her first schematic. A laser, I think. Or a taser. I forget which—