

ASSASSIN

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SYNOPSIS

Miss Foster is about to be honoured with a Lifetime Achievement Award. Kate, her dresser, is committed to her quest of ensuring Miss Foster receives what she believes she truly deserves.

CHARACTERS

MISS FOSTER: Mid/Late 70's – grumpy, unpleasant, and frail. A successful actress.

KATE: Early seventies. Miss Foster's dresser. Appears subservient, and obliging.

SETTING: A TV studio dressing room.

TIME: The Present: Early Evening

ASSASSIN

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At Rise: We hear off...

MISS FOSTER

Where the devil are you taking me?

KATE

To your dressing room, Miss Foster.

They enter; MISS FOSTER hanging onto KATE's arm. She wheezes and moves at a snail's pace. She is dressed smartly. KATE is dressed casually. Kate has an evening gown slung over one arm.

MISS FOSTER

Why've you dumped me in this dark, dingy dressing room? It smells revolting.

KATE

It's the nearest to the set, Miss Foster. With your diminishing eyesight I thought it best to –

MISS FOSTER

I've Macular Degeneration. I'm not totally blind. Now, get off me!

KATE

Don't want you falling down, Miss Foster, now do we?

MISS FOSTER

I'm not an invalid. I can manage.

KATE

Sure, you can, but I'm taking no chances. That's it. Sit here, for me.

She guides Miss Foster to sit in front of a mirror, framed by lightbulbs.

I'm just going to hang your splendid gown over here, okay?

She hangs up the evening gown on a clothes rack.

KATE (Continued.)

You must be so excited Miss Foster?

MISS FOSTER

Excited?

KATE

Being honoured to-night with a Lifetime Achievement Award.

MISS FOSTER (*Snorts.*)

Lifetime Achievement Award! A trophy they give you when you're about to kick the bucket. What they haven't bargained for, is this old gal has many more years left in her.

ASSASSIN

(She coughs.)

KATE

Surely, you're a little bit excited or nervous?

MISS FOSTER

Nervous! What've I got to be nervous about?

KATE

You're making a speech on live TV with millions watching.

MISS FOSTER

Hah! I'll be saying 'thanks'; getting off set as soon as I can.

KATE

There'll be a standing ovation from the invited studio audience, I bet.

MISS FOSTER *(Wheezing)*

My dear, they'll stand and applaud like performing seals because I've lasted this long. Nothing to do with honouring my achievements.

KATE

You're so well-loved and respected in the industry.

MISS FOSTER

Harrumph!

KATE

You've worked tirelessly throughout your career to achieve what you've achieved.

(Beat.)

MISS FOSTER

What's that over there?

KATE

An old poster of "The Wizard of Oz."

MISS FOSTER

The Wizard of Oz! *(Chuckles.)* My first professional role. I played the Wicked Witch of the West. Nasty characters are such fun to play.

KATE

I imagine so.

(Beat.)

Your career's spanned, what five decades?

MISS FOSTER

Six.

KATE

You've played great parts in great plays; Hedda Gabler, Blanche DuBois. Lady Bracknell.

ASSASSIN

MISS Foster

Wonderful parts, my dear. You been following my career?

KATE

I have. Such a versatile actor. Your ability to transform yourself, embody all these challenging roles. Truly amazing.

(Off, we hear) "This is your five-minute call, Miss Foster. Five minutes, please."

MISS FOSTER

I've always relished the challenge of playing *powerful* women.

KATE

You've not only played powerful women in your long, distinguished career, Miss Foster. You *are* a very powerful woman. A role model to many, some would say.

MISS FOSTER

Yes, I suppose I am.

KATE

You've been extremely successful in an industry, that was, until fairly recently, dominated by powerful men.

MISS FOSTER

Yes, that's very true, erm...

KATE

Kate.

MISS FOSTER

Kate. You the studio manager?

KATE *(Laughs.)*

I'm a freelance dresser. Now, we need to slap on some make-up, get you into your special gown.

KATE attempts to apply make-up. Miss Foster winces, grumbles, and pulls away from her.

MISS FOSTER

Keep that muck away from me.

KATE

You want to look your best, don't you?

MISS FOSTER

Couldn't give a rat's arse what I look like.

KATE

Really?

MISS FOSTER

Really.

KATE goes over to an ice bucket, takes out a bottle of 'champagne,' pops open the bottle, pours a full glass into a flute, and hands it to Miss Foster.

ASSASSIN

MISS FOSTER

Champagne?

KATE

I read somewhere you always have a wee glass before you take to the stage. And it is a very special occasion.

MISS FOSTER

Usually, it's a little libation at the half-hour call, not the five. (*Chuckles.*) Suppose there's no harm in having a "wee" glass, is there?

KATE

That's the spirit. Take the edge off any nerves you might have.

MISS FOSTER

I've already told you; I never get nervous. Especially, over something as contrived and meaningless as this little charade.

KATE

Some would kill for such recognition.

MISS FOSTER

Unlike some, fame and fortune, wasn't handed to me on a plate, Karen.

KATE

Kate.

MISS FOSTER

What?

KATE

My name's Kate, not Karen.

MISS FOSTER

Kate, Karen. Makes no damn difference to me. Now, where was I?

KATE

Telling me, fame and fortune wasn't handed to you on a plate.

MISS FOSTER

So, I was.

KATE

You've succeeded in a very competitive industry. At the right place, at the right time, mm? I've always wondered what happened to *all* those talented women who worked alongside you. Their careers ended before they'd even begun.

MISS FOSTER

Talented! Best thing I ever did; keeping them off the stage.

KATE

Keeping them off the stage?

MISS FOSTER

Yes.

KATE

Now, let's slap on a little make-up. Promise I'll give you a look that befits you.

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MISS FOSTER grunts as KATE starts applying make-up.

MISS FOSTER

Talent and tenacity are the bedrock of my success. Not so rough, my dear.

KATE

Wee top up?

She refills MISS FOSTER's glass.

MISS FOSTER

I don't think that's –

KATE

Can't let the expensive champers go to waste, now, can we?

MISS FOSTER

I suppose not.

*MISS Foster drinks.
(Beat.)*

KATE

You and I have worked together before. Many years ago.

MISS FOSTER

Did we?

KATE

In a touring production of "Medea."

MISS FOSTER

Medea! That was what... forty years ago?

KATE

Forty-three to be precise.

MISS FOSTER

You were my dresser?

KATE

Your understudy.

MISS FOSTER

My understudy?

(KATE nods.)

MISS FOSTER

How extraordinary! A wonderful tour, that was. Toured all over the country, didn't we?

KATE

We did.

MISS FOSTER

Shame you never got to go on.

(Coughs violently.)

KATE

You okay, Miss Foster?

ASSASSIN

KATE has finished applying MISS FOSTER's make-up. She looks like a pantomime dame – grotesque.

MISS FOSTER

(Still coughing.)

Champagne must have gone down the wrong way.

KATE

I did go on for you.

MISS FOSTER

I've never missed a performance in my entire career!

KATE

You had a chest infection; lost your voice. Doctor ordered complete rest. I played Medea for three performances.

MISS FOSTER

Ah, yes. I erm... vaguely recall that unfortunate incident. It was so long ago.

KATE

My performances were described as "spellbinding." I was, "A star in the making," said the director. *Medea* was about to go on a nationwide tour. I was offered a contract to understudy the role again. You heard how good I was.

MISS FOSTER starts to wheeze.

Falsely accused me of stealing jewelry from your dressing room. On the condition I was dropped from the production, you wouldn't press charges. The director yielded to your demand.

MISS FOSTER *(Sighs)*

It was such a long, long –

KATE

Word quickly spread around all the major theatre producers that I was a 'thief.' No-one would employ me. You effectively killed off any chance I had of forging a successful career.

(Beat.)

MISS FOSTER *(In a sing-song voice)*

Being nice, playing fair, doesn't get you anywhere.

KATE

I've worked with many 'nice', kind, considerate people. People who never trampled on others to get to the top.

MISS FOSTER

Grit, gumption and a killer instinct are the attributes I needed to achieve my ambitions. You got that? A killer instinct?

(Beat.)

Just as I thought. Now, I need to get into my dress, give them what they want. Get me my dress, Karen!

ASSASSIN

KATE brings the dress over. MISS FOSTER almost topples over as she struggles to stand. KATE helps her into the dress.

(Off, we hear) "Miss Foster to the set, please. Miss Foster to the set."

KATE

Turn around please, so I can get a good look at the back of your magnificent gown.

MISS FOSTER turns so her back is facing the audience.

MISS FOSTER *(Giggles.)*

Oh, dear me, I'm a little tipsy.

Emblazoned from top to bottom on the back, in large, red lettering, are the words: ASSASSIN

MISS FOSTER

How do I look?

KATE

Exactly as you should to your millions of adoring fans.

Kate pours herself a glass of bubbly, gulps it down.

I've been *so* looking forward to this. Now, let's get you onto the set.

She escorts MISS FOSTER OFF.

THE END