

NORMA. For us both!

BARBARA. I've come to see Bob. Is he home?

NORMA. *(Hiding photos behind her back.)* No. He's out with my husband. At the fight!

BARBARA. Ah.

NORMA. I live next door. Just popped over to visit Bob's wife, Mildred. Have you met her?

BARBARA. Possibly, a Christmas party or something, I'm not sure, huh?

NORMA. Oh! Of course. Sorry of me.

*(She lets BARBARA in and speaks a little loud.)*

Mrs. Martin had to go on an errand all of the sudden. We'd just got coffee on the stove, here for a cup?

BARBARA. That would be perfection.

*(BARBARA looks around the room and removes her gloves as NORMA exits to the kitchen with the photos.)*

NORMA. *(Offstage.)* So, what brings you to see Bob?

BARBARA. I was doing a little shopping on Wisconsin, that new hat shop – it's darling, have you been?

NORMA. *(Offstage.)* Not yet. Is that where you got the one you're wearing?

BARBARA. No, this is Balenciaga. From my last trip to Paris. All the American designers are favoring these tiny confectionery styles lately. They've convinced women to wear floral centerpieces on their heads. The Europeans still have a sense of grandiose, which I prefer. But I did pick up a little something appropriate for, I don't know, luncheons perhaps.

NORMA. *(Offstage.)* I'll give it a whirl, then! So you were out shopping, and thought of Bob?

BARBARA. I had a few things to cover with him at the office on Monday, but I thought I'd save us both the trouble and take care of it this weekend, seeing as I was merely a few blocks away.

*(NORMA re-enters with a tray of coffee.)*

NORMA. Your job sounds so exciting, Barbara. It must be so fulfilling knowing other languages, other cultures, you know... I took a few years of Spanish in high school, just for the language credit. I have no idea when on Earth I thought I'd use it. I don't, I really don't!

BARBARA. I speak a little Spanish.

NORMA. Do you?

BARBARA. Sí.

NORMA. Say something.

BARBARA. I just did. And that's pretty much all I know.

*(They laugh. The amusement dies of neglect.)*

NORMA. Forgive me, I can't remember precisely, you just got back from –

BARBARA. Scotland.

NORMA. Don't they speak English there?

BARBARA. A version of it, yes.

NORMA. Why would they need a translator?

BARBARA. One of those diplomatic nightmares – a meeting on neutral ground in Edinburgh between our people and the Koreans.

NORMA. You speak Korean?

BARBARA. No, but their translator speaks German, as do I. It was exhausting.

NORMA. It's amazing anything ever gets accomplished. It really is!

BARBARA. Sometimes I wonder if anything does. I wasn't scheduled to return until June, but they called me home and...cleared my calendar. All the way through autumn. Everything was reassigned to Dale Ramsey. You know Dale, his wife just had a baby? A boy, nine-and-a-half pounds, can you imagine? He'd asked to keep domestic for a while, but they're sending him to Burma for seven weeks. I do so hate to see a new father torn away from his child. It's important to support strong families, don't you agree?

NORMA. Ah, yes, family is so important.

BARBARA. Well, then. Let's put our heads together. What can we do get me back overseas and allow Dale Ramsey to be a proper father to that elephantine infant?

NORMA. Did you consult your supervisor?

BARBARA. Yes. He told me I was needed on local matters. So I thought I'd best speak with Bob.

NORMA. Bob's certainly in no position to override a Department head. I'm sure they have their reasons.

BARBARA. Really, Mrs. Baxter? Pick that up from the J. Edgar Hoover Handbook? *They have their reasons.* Well, that explains everything. I suppose I shouldn't question it at all, then. I'll just go out and try on more hats without a care in the world.

NORMA. Barbara, I don't appreciate your hostility.

BARBARA. When I received the memorandum on your new criteria, I knew it was only a matter of time before I made an appearance on one of your little lists. But I was not expecting it to happen with such haste. Enlighten me, Norma. Why is the Personnel Security Board the only government agency that's capable of doing things quickly? There's nary a scrap of red tape in the whole goddamn department.

NORMA. Barbara, really, even if you were –

BARBARA. They think *I'm* a security risk? Me? As if I care to be so deeply entrenched in the games these little Napoleons play with each other.

NORMA. Barbara, you know I'm not at liberty to – Look. Even if – if you've done nothing wrong you have nothing to fear.

BARBARA. Is my name on a list or not, Norma?

NORMA. I cannot say, and you know it, so stop asking, Barbara.

BARBARA. Very well. You tell Bob Martindale something for me. Will you do that, at least?

NORMA. Certainly.

BARBARA. This little morality task force they're creating, the return of the Puritans, it's not Constitutionally sound. I have neither harmed anyone nor broken any laws. I am forty-six years old, I have lived my life as I see fit. I have enjoyed the company of a number of bedmates, some less than others. That is my business. I am not vulnerable to blackmail because I have nothing to hide. I am not a security risk, and I won't be stoned like a whore in the public square to satisfy whatever it is Jack Peurifoy or Ted Sunderson hope to gain from this. And if you support them, you're just as bad as they are.

NORMA. I'll show you to the door, Barbara.

BARBARA. You're an intelligent woman, Norma. They hate that. Eventually they'll find a way to come for you as well.

NORMA. I appreciate your candor. Good afternoon.

BARBARA. Thank you for the coffee, Norma. Have a lovely weekend.

NORMA. *(Opening the door.)* And you as well.

*(BARBARA exits. NORMA closes the door and sighs.)*

MILLIE *(enters, dressed.)*

MILLIE. So that was

NORMA. Barbara. Great. The most popular gal in translation?

MILLIE. Is she under investigation?

NORMA. Of course she is. For the company she keeps.

MILLIE. That poor woman.

NORMA. She's prepared for the attack. Said she's not vulnerable to blackmail because she has nothing to hide.

MILLIE. One can say that until the character attacks and really begins