BESSIE. *(At cupboard.)* Would you help me with this box, Mr.

McPherson?

MARK. Sure*. (Starts to cross. Waldo crosses fast to steps.)*

WALDO. No, no. Allow me. *(Crosses to cupboard.)*

MARK. Be delighted. *(Crosses to fireplace.)*

WALDO. Why didn't you ask me, Bessie?

BESSIE. It's the one on the top shelf. I can't quite reach it. *(Bessie steps away. Waldo reaches up and takes down an uncovered box.)*

WALDO. Here we are.

BESSIE. Thank you. *(Waldo gives Bessie box, but grabs paisley shawl from top of it as Bessie crosses to bedroom.)*

WALDO. Oh, she kept it.

BESSIE. She ain't worn it for years. *(Exits.)*

WALDO. *(Mark sits chair D. R. Waldo crosses to back sofa R., holding shawl.)* A gift of mine. I recall the night I gave it to her. Her birthday. We'd been at the theatre and I'd arranged a little supper afterwards at my apartment. There was a mood about the place... candles, the fire, white orchids on the table... pure enchantment. We drank Lacrymi Christi… my servant left*… (Catches Mark smiling, puts down shawl on back of sofa.)* Don't misunderstand me. My interest in Laura was not merely a mature man's desire for a pretty young girl. I was a cold and egocentric man who amused himself by showering a naive child with treats and trinkets. Her gratitude warmed me. In her eyes I was a generous man, hence I became one*. (Sighs.)* Have a drink*? (Crosses to liquor cabinet, L. back of sofa.)*

MARK. I'll have a slug of that Scotch. There's a bottle open. WALDO*. (Taking out bottle.)* Soda or straight?

MARK. *(Rising.)* Straight's fine.

WALDO. Curious. *(Bessie enters, crosses toward sofa R.)*

MARK. What?

WALDO. *(Holding up bottle, about three fourths full.)* Four Horses! *(Bessie pauses at top steps c.)*

MARK. What about it?

WALDO. Where'd this come from, Bessie? *(Bessie at sofa, picking up shawl.)*

BESSIE. *(Stops hesitantly.)* From where you took it.

WALDO. That scarcely explains how it got there.

BESSIE. I don't know nothing about it. *(Moves determinedly to ward bedroom.)*

MARK. Just a minute, Bessie. *(Bessie stops below steps c. Mark crosses behind sofa. To Waldo.)* Isn't it supposed to be there?

WALDO. The only Bourbon Laura ever used was Old Taylor. Unless Bessie here's a solitary tippler.

BESSIE. I took the pledge, I'd have you know, Mr. Lydecker. Be- sides, I wouldn't keep it here, I'd have it hid in the kitchen.

WALDO. How can we be sure you didn't? *(Puts bottle down.)*

BESSIE. That bottle's never been near my kitchen.

MARK. *(Quietly.)* Where was it, Bessie?

BESSIE. *(Starts to cross to bedroom, still below steps.)* Just where you found it. That's all I know.

WALDO. Careful, Bessie, you're talking to the police. *(Bessie stops.)*

BESSIE. Cops don't scare me. I was brought up to spit whenever I saw one.

MARK. *(Crosses to below steps c.)* Go ahead and spit, only when did you find it?

BESSIE. I don't know I don't remember.

MARK. *(Crosses closer to Bessie.)* Was it here on Friday?

BESSIE. No.

MARK. Who are you shielding? If you don't tell us now, you'll tell us later.

BESSIE. *(Hesitates, looks at Waldo and Mark, then at portrait.)* Her.

MARK. But she's dead.

BESSIE. Her reputation ain't. That's why I put it there and wiped off the fingerprints. So's you wouldn't notice. *(Crosses to middle steps.)*

MARK. What do you mean, you wiped off the fingerprints? *(Bes- sie stops.)*

BESSIE. I took a wet rag to everything in her bedroom. I didn't want people getting ideas. Besides, I don't believe in fingerprints

MARK. Then why'd you wipe them off?

BESSIE. Cops got dirty minds. I didn't want anybody to think she was the kind that got drunk with a man in her room. . . *(Pause*

*suddenly, claps her hand to her mouth in horror at having said it.)*

MARK. *(Irritably.)* How do you know she DID?

WALDO *(Crosses to steps.)* Credit Bessie with some intelligence. If you had come in here on Saturday morning and found a bottle and a couple of glasses. . . as she obviously did . . .

MARK. *(Breaking in sharply.)* I wouldn't jump to the conclusion that she was drunk or had a man with her. *(Crosses to front of sofa R.)*

WALDO. Quite emotional, aren't we? You seem as concerned as Bessie about the lady's reputation. Obviously the liquor was brought in by someone who didn't know she had plenty, or who disliked her brand. *(Crosses front sofa R.)*

MARK. Nothing's obvious.

WALDO. Easy enough to check. She got all her liquor from my dealer, Mosconi, on Third Avenue. Isn't that so, Bessie?

BESSIE. I ordered every bottle that come into this house, God

help me. *(Shelby enters from bedroom, stops above steps L.)*

SHELBY. What about the winter things, Bessie?

BESSIE. I'll get 'em right away, Mr. Carpenter. *(Exits to kitchen.)* WALDO. *(Crosses behind L. corner sofa, leans.)* Oh, Shelby, Bessie's been revealing some interesting things about your fiancée.

Apparently I wasn't your only rival.

SHELBY. There were many men in love with Laura.

WALDO. She deserted both of us on Friday night to keep a tryst with one of them.

SHELBY. What do you mean?

WALDO. While we cherished the illusion that she was enjoying the peace and solitude of Connecticut, she was, in fact, entertaining a mysterious Mr. X. in her boudoir.

SHELBY. *(Crosses to c. below steps.)* That's a malicious lie.

WALDO. *(Crosses to liquor cabinet.)* Mute evidence. A bottle. *(He picks it up.)* Four Horses Bourbon. And two glasses discov-ered at her bedside. *(Mark crosses L. front sofa R.)*

SHELBY. *(After a pause.)* I don't believe it. *(Bessie enters en route to bedroom with load of clothes in her arms.)*

WALDO. *(Calls.)* Bessie! *(Bessie stops c.)* Did you or did you not find that bottle and two glasses in Miss Hunt's room on Saturday morning?

BESSIE. *(Nods.)* I did, God rest her soul. *(Crosses to bedroom. Shelby tightens, unable to speak.)*

MARK. You'd better have a drink. *(Sits L. arm sofa.)*

WALDO. You ARE a bit pale.. *(Turns to liquor cabinet, lakes Scotch, hands Shelby jigger.)* Oh, of course. You Southerners drink Bourbon, don't you? *(Picks up Four Horses bottle.)* Four Horses, let me see, didn't I know someone who used that brand? It seems to me someone quite close. Steady, old man, you're spilling it.... *(Shelby gulps drink down then mops up with handkerchief.)*

WALDO. If you like, I'll finish that inventory for you.

SHELBY. I'd prefer to do that myself.

WALDO. *(Shrugs, turns to liquor cabinet, puts bottle down.)* I don't wonder at your distress. It must be disquieting to contemplate yourself as the victim of pre-marital cuckoldry*. (Shelby crosses to window. Shelby slams glass down on table, Waldo looking around at the sound, then Shelby, handkerchief still in his right hand, leaps at Waldo, socking him on the jaw. Mark grabs Shelby and swings him around as Waldo is sent reeling D. L.)*

MARK. *(By liquor cabinet.)* Take it easy, Carpenter.

WALDO. *(Holding his cheek.)* Rather dreary, these manly exhibits.

SHELBY. I warn you, Waldo. I stood for you while Laura was alive, but I'll be damned if I'll stand for you now! *(Shelby gets hat, crosses to door.)*

BESSIE. *(Enters from bedroom, stops.)* You leaving, Mr. Carpenter?

SHELBY. Yes. We'll finish in the morning. I'll meet you here at ten. Good night, McPherson*. (Shelby stalks out.)*