ACT II

SCENE: *The same. The next morning.*

*The room is pleasantly untidy, as if it had seen a lot of living in the preceding hours. The ashtrays have all been used, the cushions are crushed, chairs have been moved around. The curtains are still drawn, the lamps burning as if the occupants had forgotten that day might have dawned. In various parts of the room are soiled dishes and coffee cups, always in sets of two*

*At rise Laura is stretched out on the couch, listening while Mark, leaning against the mantel, tells a story.*

MARK. *(Continuing story.)* and this was in the fall of '41, right after I started working for the D. A.'s office. This guy was actually running for Congress and, like most would-be Fuehrers, used all the phony American trappings. Campaigned in a covered wagon.

LAURA. I hope they booed him.

MARK. It's one of the few times I lost my head and took a poke at a guy. Bad detective work but very gratifying personally.

LAURA. You had every right. I'm glad you socked him.

MARK. *(Crosses to R. sofa.)* Picture of a Fuehrer. The guy has beautiful wavy blonde hair he puts up in curlers every night.

LAURA. No!

MARK. Listen to me. I'm talking too much. Am I boring you?

LAURA. No, of course not! I haven't been so excited since I quit reading Dick Tracy.

MARK. Ouch! Now you've really got me embarrassed. *(Sits R. arm sofa.)*

LAURA. Why do men always get self-conscious when they're most interesting? No, of course not. If you were, I'd have been asleep long ago. Please go on.

MARK. Better not encourage me. You might regret it.

LAURA. Not at all*. (Stifles huge yawn.)* Oh, I'm not tired! Really. *(Tries not to yawn again, but can't help it.)* It's just that I

haven't quite got over being a corpse. *(Jumps up.)* Good heavens, the coffee! (Runs to kitchen.)

MARK. *(Crosses to drapes, looks at watch. Calling.)* Hey, do you know what time it is?

LAURA. Don't tell me.

MARK. It's nine o'clock. *(Opens drapes.)*

LAURA. *(Calling from kitchen.)* It can't be.

MARK. *(Crosses table U. R.)* That was a bright idea of mine, those sleeping pills. Do you know we've been gabbing all night? *(Turns*

*out lamp R.)*

LAURA. *(Shouting from kitchen.)* It's been fun.

MARK. *(Crosses to liquor cabinet, turns out lamp.)* Yeah, but I've been bending your ear for ten hours. Fine thing. I'm supposed to be pumping you and I end up by giving out with the Life and Times of McPherson. You ought to be the detective. *(Laura enters, crosses toward sofa with tray.)*

LAURA. I hate detectives.

MARK. Is that nice?

LAURA. *(Crosses to sofa, puts tray down, sits.)* I don't mean you. You're different. I knew the minute I saw you. I said so, didn't I?

MARK. *(Crosses two steps toward L.)* Yes, ma'am, you did.

LAURA. Of course I've never known a detective. I thought you were all sadists who crept up on defenseless innocents and beat confessions out of them with a rubber hose.

MARK. *(Crosses closer to sofa.)* How do you know I'm not?

LAURA. You've got a sense of humor. Besides, what you've been doing means something. The people you've been exposing should be exposed. It's important.

MARK. Yeh, so important that I get jerked back to the Homicide Squad for exposing one too many.

LAURA. *(Pouring.)* Do you realize that we've drunk our way through a whole coffee service? If we drink any more, we'll have to start on the Wedgwood. Of course I could wash them. ---No, the kind I hate are the detectives who snoop around and poke into people's business. *(Mark crosses to L. front sofa.)*

MARK. What do you think I'm doing here?

LAURA. Trying to find out who killed me. *(Hands Mark cup.)* After all the important things you've done, you probably resented this case.

MARK. I did, until I got interested in the victim. *(Sits sofa.)*

LAURA. Why, Mr. McPherson, I'll bet you say that to all the corpses.

MARK. You're not exactly a corpse. Which reminds me, that we

never did get straight in your activities last Friday night -- to get

back to some more snooping. *(Laura rises, crosses to table U. R.)* LAURA. Any cigarettes left? *(Crosses to back sofa, leans. Mark puts cup down, hands her cigarette.)*

MARK. Yeh.

LAURA. All right, snoop. *(Mark lights her cigarette.)*

MARK. I understand that you and Carpenter had a quarrel that afternoon. *(Tosses cigarette pack on coffee table.)*

LAURA. Oh!

MARK. What was it about?

LAURA. Didn't he tell you?

MARK. I want you to tell me.

LAURA. The man means business. Oh, nothing much.

MARK. Enough to put him in such a dither he didn't know the difference between Bach and Tschaikowsky.

LAURA. He never did.

MARK. Well?

LAURA. *(Sits on back sofa.)* Huh? Oh, the quarrel. It was about us. The old bromide of wife versus career woman.

MARK. And he wanted you to be a wife?

LAURA. You see, he makes only seventy-five a week.

MARK. What's that got to do with it?

LAURA. I make three hundred. Do you see any sense in living on seventy-five when you can live on three hundred and seventy-five?

MARK. No.

LAURA. Well, he does. That's Southern chivalry for you. Of course he can't help it, poor lamb, he's a gentleman. But hell, I like my work. Some women can sit home and tat. I write damn good advertising copy. I know it sounds silly, but it's not with a man who takes himself as seriously as Shelby. I had to decide whether I was going to be myself or Elsie Dinsmore. *(Crosses to fireplace, sits sofa. Sips coffee.)*

MARK. Why'd you break your dinner date with Waldo?

LAURA. Shelby and I had been at it for two hours and I'm a bitch when I'm sore. Why take it out on poor Waldo? One epigram and I'd have thrown his Spode right in his face. *(Sips coffee.)*

MARK. So you went straight up to the country instead?

LAURA. Um-hum. Took the five-fifteen.

MARK. Anybody on the train who knew you?

LAURA*. (Shakes her head.)* No.

MARK. See anybody at the station?

LAURA. *(Shakes it again.)* No.

MARK. How'd you get to your place?

LAURA. Walked up the track.

MARK. Did ANYONE see you since then?

LAURA. *(Shakes her head.)* No.

MARK. How'd you get your groceries?

LAURA. Cans in the pantry, vegetables in the garden, and I abhor milk. *(Puts cup down.)*

MARK. Very helpful. *(Puts cup down.)*

LAURA. Be terrible if I were trying to establish an alibi, wouldn't it?

MARK. *(Rises, crosses to D. S. fireplace.)* You didn't get a news- paper, and your radio was broken?

LAURA. Can I help it?

MARK. You certainly were intent on being alone.

LAURA. I had to make a decision. That's my way. I've got to weed the garden, wax floors, paint furniture. It's the only way I can get at the root of what's bothering me. *(She waits, Mark is silent.)* Or don't you believe me?

MARK. I don't know. *(Crosses a step closer.)* I don't get you at all.

LAURA. There's really nothing to get. I'm a very simple person. MARK. Or a damned good liar. *(Scrutinizes her more closely, crosses to R. front sofa.)* What is there about you that makes such different men go nuts over you?

LAURA. Are you asking that as a detective, Mr. McPherson? *(Her face is close to his, taunting him.)*

MARK*. (Wavers a moment, then pulls away.*) I'd better get down to the office. *(Crosses to mirror, looks, rubs his beard.*) Oh, HELL!

LAURA. You can shave here if you want.

MARK. *(Crosses to below steps c.)* I can stop on my way down.

LAURA. If it's a razor you're worried about, there's one in the bathroom. *(Marks looks at her, then the bathroom, then at her*

*again.)*

MARK. All the comforts of home. Thanks.