

ACT II

JESSE & MURIEL

JESSE. All right... My second wife, Carlotta... She was keeping her Spanish guitar teacher... Keeping him! ...I never caught her but she didn't fool me. No one takes twenty-seven thousand dollars worth of guitar lessons in one year...

MURIEL. Is Carlotta the one you met at Kirk Douglas's house?

JESSE. Yes, as a matter of fact. Was that in the paper too?

MURIEL. Sheila Graham's column. It was a big party for the Ukrainian Folk Dancers and the Los Angeles Rams.

JESSE. (Getting up, replenishes her drink.) Muriel, forget the Los Angeles Rams... (Putting bottle and his glass down on the console table, he crosses behind sofa.) Listen to what I'm saying to you. I am in a very bad way. I've been through three hellish, miserable marriages. I don't want to go that route again. I am losing my faith and belief that there is anything left that resembles an uncorrupt woman... (Sighs.) So last week my mother, who still gets the Tenafly newspaper, shows me a picture of the PTA annual outing at Palisades this year and who is there on the front page, coming in first in the Mother and Daughter Potato Race, (Leans in to MURIEL over side arm of couch.) looking every bit as young and lovely and as sweet as she did seventeen years ago, was my last salvation... Muriel Tate. (Gradually moving to bedroom door.) That's why I had to see you, Muriel. Just to talk to you, to have a drink, to spend five minutes, to reaffirm my faith that there are decent women in this world...even if it's only one...even if you're the last of a dying species...if somebody like you exits, Muriel...

then maybe there's still somebody for me... That's why I called you yesterday.

(JESSE has finished his speech. He is somewhat spent, emotionally. He moves to the bed and sits.)

MURIEL. (Getting up and moving toward bedroom door.) Well...well...well...

JESSE. (From the bedroom.) I hope whatever I said didn't embarrass you, Muriel... but hell, if you expect honesty from another person you can't be anything less than honest yourself.

MURIEL. (Still at doorway.) I'm not embarrassed, I'm flattered. To think a famous person like you wants to confide in a plain person like me...

JESSE. (Gets up and moves to her in living room.) Now you finish your vodka stinger and then I'm going to let you go.

MURIEL. (Pouring herself a drink at bar.) Oh, I've got plenty of time. Larry's never home till seven. (She holds up drink.) Cheers.

(She drinks. JESSE crosses to MURIEL, touches her.)

JESSE. How are you, Muriel? Are you happy?

MURIEL. Happy? ...Oh, yes. I think if I'm anything, I'm happy. (Moves down to sofa.)

JESSE. I'm glad. You deserve happiness, Muriel.

MURIEL. Yes, Larry and I are very happy... (She drinks.) I would have to say that Larry and I have one of the happier marriages in Tenafly. (She drinks again.)

JESSE. That's wonderful.

MURIEL. I mean we've had our ups and downs like any married couple but I think in the final analysis what's left is...that we're happy.

JESSE. (Moves down to her.) I couldn't be more pleased. Well, listen, it's no surprise. Larry's a wonderful guy.



MURIEL. Do you think so?

JESSE. Don't you?

MURIEL. Yes, I do. But no one else seems to care for him. *(Sits on sofa.)* Of course, they don't know him the way I do. I'm out of stinger again. *(Holds glass out to JESSE.)*

JESSE. *(Takes her glass.)* Are you sure you're going to be all right? I mean driving?

MURIEL. *(Gradually feeling the effects of the drinks, she slowly exposes a whole, new, unexpected MURIEL.)* If I had to worry about getting home every time I had three vodka stingers, I'd give up driving.

*(JESSE crosses to bar, looking back at her in puzzlement.)*

Yes, I'd say that in spite of everything, Larry and I have worked out happiness...or some form of it.

JESSE. Is he doing well in business? *(Fills her glass once again.)*

MURIEL. Oh, in business you don't have to worry. In that department he's doing great. I mean he's really got a wonderful business there... Of course, it was good when my father had it.

*(JESSE hands her drink.)*

Ooh, cheers. *(She drinks.)*

JESSE. *(Sitting on arm of sofa.)* In what department isn't he doing well?

MURIEL. He's doing well in every department.

JESSE. Are you sure?

MURIEL. I'm positive.

JESSE. Then I'm glad.

MURIEL. Why, what do you hear?

JESSE. I haven't heard a thing except what you're telling me.

MURIEL. Well, I'm telling you that we have a happy marriage. Are you trying to infer, we don't have a happy marriage?

JESSE. No...

MURIEL. Well, you're wrong. We have a happy marriage.

A Goddamned happy marriage. *(Tries to put glass down on table, misses and nearly slips off the sofa.)* Oh, I'm sorry. I should have had lunch.

JESSE. *(Steadies her and picks up glass from floor and puts it on table.)* Shall I order down for some food?

MURIEL. No, I can't stay. Larry'll be home about five.

JESSE. I thought he comes home at seven.

MURIEL. If he comes home at all... Please forgive me, Jesse, I seem to be losing control of myself.

JESSE. You drank those too quickly. Didn't you have anything to eat all day?

MURIEL. Just an olive with the two stingers I had downstairs... I'll be all right.

JESSE. Do you want to lie down for a while?

MURIEL. What's the point? You're going back to Hollywood in a few days... Oh, I see what you mean... Oh, God, I'm sorry, Jesse, I seem to be running off at the mouth.

JESSE. *(Sits down next to her.)* What is it, Muriel? What's with you and Larry?

MURIEL. Nothing. I told you, we're very happy. We have tiny, little differences like every normal couple but basically we're enormously happy together. I couldn't ask for a better life... *(And she throws her arms around JESSE and gives him a full, passionate kiss on the lips, then she pulls away.)* Oh, you shouldn't have done that, Jesse. I'm very vulnerable right now and you mustn't take advantage... I'm going. I've got to go. *(Gets up and moves away.)*

JESSE. *(Taking her hand.)* Muriel, I didn't know.

MURIEL. *(Pulling away.)* No, Jesse, don't.

JESSE. Why didn't you let me know?

MURIEL. *(Crying, crosses to chair for her things.)* Who knew you were interested? You were always at a party with the Los Angeles Rams.

JESSE. I never suspected for a minute. Why didn't you write to me?

MURIEL. (*Crying.*) Where? I don't know where Humphrey Bogart lived. (*Rushes to JESSE where he sits on sofa, and throws her arms about him.*) I've got to go. Let me go.

JESSE. (*With his arms about her waist.*) God, how I thought about you on the plane all the way to New York.

MURIEL. Please, Jesse. I've got to buy something in Bonwit's and get dinner for Larry. (*He munches on her neck.*) Don't bite my neck, it'll leave marks.

JESSE. You're different, Muriel. I know you are. You're not like any of the others. (*Caressing her.*)

MURIEL. I'm not different, Jesse. I'm a woman. A happily married woman with normal desires and passions. Please don't rub me. (*Pulls away from him.*)

JESSE. (*Reaching out for her.*) My life is empty, Muriel. Empty. But you can fill it for me. You can. (*Gets up and moves to her.*)

MURIEL. (*Retreating behind chair.*) I can't fill your life for you, Jesse, I've got to get home. Larry'll kill me.

JESSE. (*Catching her hands.*) Stay! An hour. Just one hour; that's all.

MURIEL. No, no. Tomorrow I'll be alone with my regrets and you'll be out there with Dino and Groucho...

JESSE. (*Pulling her above sofa in the direction of the bedroom.*) One hour, Muriel. Live my life with me for one hour.

MURIEL. No, please, Jesse. I've got to pick up my lamb chops.

JESSE. One hour, Muriel. The world can change for one hour.

MURIEL. (*Stepping above sofa.*) Can it, Jesse? Can it really?

JESSE. (*Moving behind her.*) It can for me, Muriel. It can for you.

MURIEL. I don't know, Jesse. I just don't know.

JESSE. All right, we'll just talk. (*Reaches around her waist from behind her, and places his hand on her stomach. Soothingly.*) No one ever got hurt just talking, did they?