

Side # 5 .

Lowise,  
Jackie,  
Arthur

GUILTY CONSCIENCE

33

(There are voices outside the room. ARTHUR hangs up the phone, pours himself another drink. LOUISE enters, followed by JACKIE WILLIS, apparently somewhat flustered, a girl in her late twenties. She is balancing herself on one foot, hopping. In her hand she carries a sandal with a broken strap.)

Start →

LOUISE. (as they come in) . . . It's perfectly all right. No bother at all.

JACKIE. This is really very nice of you. I mean, I feel so silly. I just bought these yesterday and now the strap breaks. You'd think when you pay thirty-eight fifty— (She pauses as she sees ARTHUR.)

LOUISE. This is my husband. Arthur, this is Miss Willis.

JACKIE. How do you do? And it's Jackie. I'm sorry to barge in on you like this—

LOUISE. Miss Willis has a problem.

ARTHUR. So it seems.

JACKIE. Oh, not my sandal—its your neighbors. Do you mind if I sit down? I feel kind of foolish standing here on one foot.

LOUISE. If you'd be more comfortable—

JACKIE. Well, maybe I shouldn't. I'm only going to stay a minute.

ARTHUR. You said something about our neighbors?

JACKIE. (nods) The Starks.

LOUISE. The Starks are in Europe.

JACKIE. I know. Maybe I'll just take the other one off. Is that all right?

LOUISE. (amused) Of course.

JACKIE. (kicking off her other sandal) You wouldn't have a key to their front door, would you?

LOUISE. I beg your pardon?

JACKIE. Oh, I don't want to rob them or anything. Vivian—Mrs. Stark—is a friend of mine. I'm just doing her a favor.

LOUISE. I'm not sure I understand.

JACKIE. I'm supposed to water the plants. I mean, I don't do it professionally. But I told them I'd come by once a week and help them out. They've got a lot of ferns and things, and some of those little Japanese shrubs. The trouble is, I can't get in.

LOUISE. Didn't they give you a key?

JACKIE. That's the problem. I lost it. (*She rumages around in her purse.*) I know I had it this morning. I took it down from my bulletin board—I keep it tacked to the bulletin board in my kitchen—but when I got to their door it was missing. That's why I came over here. I thought maybe the Starks left you an extra key.

LOUISE. No, I'm afraid they didn't. We don't really know them all that well. Have you talked to their other neighbors.

JACKIE. I rang the bell but nobody answered.

LOUISE. I'm sorry. I wish we could help you.

JACKIE. Well, I tried. Thanks anyway. It's not my day. (*She looks ruefully at her sandal, hops up on one foot, and slips it on.*)

ARTHUR. (*to LOUISE*) Don't the Starks have a daughter?

LOUISE. I don't know. Do they?

ARTHUR. I seem to remember Bill Stark giving me her number in case of an emergency. She might have a key.

JACKIE. (*hopeful*) Does she live here in town?

ARTHUR. Somewhere in the Village. Louise—see if the number's in my address book, will you? It should be

upstairs in the top bureau drawer. I'll get — Miss Willis, isn't it? — a drink.

JACKIE. I don't want to put you people to any more trouble —

LOUISE. No, let's see if we have it.

JACKIE. I really appreciate this. I'd hate the Starks to come home to a houseful of dead plants. (*LOUISE exits through the archway and goes upstairs. ARTHUR turns to JACKIE. He's frowning. Before he can say anything she kicks off her sandal, crosses to him, and kisses him on the mouth. He doesn't respond.*) I know. You're angry.

ARTHUR. (*almost meaning it*) I should throw you out the window.

JACKIE. I was worried. I kept calling that hotel in Houston, but they wouldn't put me through.

ARTHUR. I told you I'd be busy.

JACKIE. I thought something might have happened. I didn't hear from you for a week, and you wouldn't let me meet your plane —

ARTHUR. (*exasperated*) Don't you ever listen? I said I'd call when I got back. You must be out of your mind, coming over here like this.

JACKIE. (*crestfallen*) I'm sorry.

ARTHUR. And how the hell did you know about the Starks?

JACKIE. From you. Don't you remember? We were having drinks at that place near your office, and they came in, and you kind of hunched down in your seat. Anyway, you told me they lived next door and that they were leaving for Europe. (*defensive*) Well, I had to say *something*. I was hoping your wife wouldn't be home, but when she opened the door —

ARTHUR. You weren't hoping she wouldn't be home. You wanted to see what she looked like. That's why you came over here.

JACKIE. That's not true. Honestly. I mean, I'm curious about her, sure. But the real reason is that I was worried. I had a weird feeling . . . *(pause)* Well, I did.

ARTHUR. Jackie, I was in Texas. In spite of what you may have heard, that's not a foreign country.

JACKIE. I know. Look, I promise I'll never do it again.

ARTHUR. *(shaking his head)* Jesus. Watering plants.

JACKIE. I think she believed me. Don't you?

ARTHUR. And all that about your sandal—

JACKIE. Oh, that was for real. Thirty-eight-fifty and the damn strap breaks. *(a tentative smile)* Sometimes I'm a mess, aren't I?

LOUISE'S VOICE. *(from upstairs)* Arthur—

ARTHUR. *(moving toward the arch)* Yes?

LOUISE'S VOICE. I can't find your address book.

ARTHUR. Uh—try the front room—by the telephone.

LOUISE'S VOICE. All right.

JACKIE. I guess you don't want me to stay for a drink.

ARTHUR. Right. I don't want you to stay for a drink.

JACKIE. Can you come over tonight?

ARTHUR. Jackie, use your head. I just got home. *(He takes her arm and guides her toward the landing.)* Now I want you out of here before she comes downstairs.

JACKIE. *(glancing around)* It's funny. I've tried to imagine what this place would be like. It's nice.

ARTHUR. It's not nice. She just had it repainted.

JACKIE. Why did she do that?

ARTHUR. A declaration of independence. She also cut her hair.

End

~~JACKIE. I don't want to be independent. I want to be a mess.~~