

SIDE 'K' CHERIE, VIRGIL, ELMMA, LYMAN & BO

but . . . ya gotta feel he respects ya. Yah, thass what I mean.

ELMA. (Not impudent.) I should think so.

CHERIE. I want a guy I can look up to and respect, but I don't want one that'll browbeat me. And I want a guy who can be sweet to me but I don't wanna be treated like a baby. I . . . I just gotta feel that . . . whoever I marry . . . has some real regard for me, apart from all the lovin' and sex. Know what I mean?

ELMA. (Rusily digesting all this.) I think so. What are you going to do when you get back to Kansas City?

CHERIE. I dunno.—There's a hillbilly program on one of the radio stations there. I might git a job on it. If I don't, I'll probably git me a job in Liggert's or Walgreen's. Then after a while, I'll probably marry some guy, whether I think I love him or not. Who'm I to keep insistin' I should fall in love? You hear all about love when you a kid and jest take it for granted that such a thing really exists. Maybe ya have to find out fer yourself it don't. Maybe everyone's afraid to tell ya.

ELMA. (Glum.) Maybe you're right . . . but I hope not.

CHERIE. (After squirming a little on the stool.) Gee, I hate to go out to that cold powder room, but I guess I better not put it off any longer. (Cherie hurries out the rear door as Dr. Lyman sits again at the counter, having returned from the bookshelves 'n time to overhear the last of Cherie's conversation. He muses for a few moments, gloomily, then speaks to Elma out of his unconscious reflections.)

DR. LYMAN. How defiant! we pursue love, like it was an inheritance due, that we had to wrangle about with angry relatives in order to get our share.

ELMA. You shouldn't complain. You've had three wives.

DR. LYMAN. Don't shame me. I loved them all . . . with passion. (An afterthought.) At least I thought I did . . . for a while. (He still chuckles about it as though it were a great irony.)

ELMA. I'm sorry if I sounded sarcastic, Dr. Lyman. I didn't mean to be.

DR. LYMAN. Don't apologize. I'm too egotistical ever to take offense at anything people say. (Pours drink.)

ELMA. You're not egotistical at all.

DR. LYMAN. Oh, believe me. The greatest egos are those which are too egotistical to show just how egotistical they are.

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ELMA. I'm sort of idealistic about things. I like to think that people fall in love and stay that way, forever and ever.

DR. LYMAN. Maybe we have lost the ability. Maybe Man has passed the stage in his evolution wherein love is possible. Maybe life will continue to become so terrifyingly complex that man's anxiety about his mere survival will render him too miserly to give of himself in any true relation.

ELMA. You're talking over my head. Anyone can fall in love, I always thought . . . and . . .

DR. LYMAN. But two people, really in love, must give up some thing of themselves.

ELMA. (Trying to follow.) Yes.

DR. LYMAN. That is the gift that men are afraid to make. Sometimes they keep it in their bosoms forever, where it withers and dies. Then they never know love, only its facsimiles, which they seek over and over again in meaningless repetition.

ELMA. (A little depressed.) Gee! How did we get onto this subject?

DR. LYMAN. (Laughs heartily with sudden release, grabbing Elma's hand.) Ah, my dear! Pay no attention to me, for whether there is such a thing as love, we can always . . . (Lifts his drink) . . . pretend there is. Let us talk instead of our forthcoming trip to Topeka. Will you wear your prettiest dress?

ELMA. Of course. If it turns out to be a nice day, I'll wear a new dress. Mother got me for spring. It's a soft rose color with a little lace collar.

DR. LYMAN. Ah, you'll look lovely, lovely. I know you will. I hope it doesn't embarrass you for me to speak these endearments . . .

ELMA. No . . . it doesn't embarrass me.

DR. LYMAN. I'm glad. Just think of me as a fatherly old fool, will you? And not be troubled if I take such rapturous delight in your sweetness, and youth, and innocence? For these are qualities I seek to warm my heart as I seek a fire to warm my hands.

ELMA. Now I am kind of embarrassed. I don't know what to say.

DR. LYMAN. Then say nothing, or nudge me and I'll talk endlessly about the most trivial matters. (They laugh together as Cherie comes back in shivering.)

CHERIE. (Crosses to stove.) Brrr, it's cold. Virgil, I wish you'd

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START
SIDE 'K'

play us another song. I think we all need somethin' to cheer us up.
(Elma crosses D. S., around counter.)
 VIRGIL. I'll make a deal with ya. I'll play if you'll sing.
 ELMA. *(A bright idea comes to her.)* Let's have a floor show! *(Her suggestion comes as a surprise and there is silence while all consider it.)* Everyone here can do something! *(Crosses L.)*
 DR. LYMAN. A brilliant idea, straight from Chaucer. You must read Juliet for me.
 ELMA. *(Not hearing Dr. Lyman, running to Virgil.)* Will you play for us, Virgil? *(Cherie runs L. behind counter, gets suitcase, takes it u. L. and looks for costume.)*
 VIRGIL. I don't play opery music or jitterbug.
 ELMA. *(Turning to Bo.)* Will you take part? *(Stabornly, Bo just turns the other way.)* Please! It won't be fun unless we all do something.
 VIRGIL. *(Rises, crosses L. to R. of Bo.)* G'wan, Bo.
 BO. I never was no play-actor, Miss.
 VIRGIL. Ya kin say the Gettysburg Address.
 BO. *(Gruffly.)* I ain't gonna say it now.
 VIRGIL. Then why don't ya do your rope tricks? Yer rope's out on the bus. I could get it for ya easy enough.
 ELMA. Oh, please! Rope tricks would be lots of fun.
 BO. *(Emphatically.)* No! I ain't gonna get up before a lotta strangers and make a fool a m'self.
 VIRGIL. *(To Elma.)* I guess he means it, Miss.
 ELMA. Shucks! *(Crosses D. L. to behind counter.)*
 VIRGIL. *(Quietly to Bo.)* I don't see why ya couldn't a co-operated a little, Bo.
 BO. *(Rises, stands at window facing U. S.)* I got too much on my mind to worry about doin' stunts.
 ELMA. *(To Cherie.)* You'll sing a song for us, won't you, Cherie?
 CHERIE. I will fer a piece a pie and another cup a coffee.
 ELMA. Sure. *(Cherie hurries to Virgil.)*
 CHERIE. Virgil, kin you play for me?
 VIRGIL. You start me out and I think I can pick out the chords. *(Cherie sits by his side as they work out their number together. Elma hurries to Dr. Lyman.)*
 ELMA. And you'll read poetry for us, won't you? *(Bo walks D. R.)*
 DR. LYMAN. *(Already assuming his character.)* Why, I intend to play Romeo opposite your Juliet.

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ELMA. Gee, I don't know if I can remember the lines.
 DR. LYMAN. *(Holding her a volume he has taken off the shelves.)* Sometimes one can find Shakespeare on these shelves among the many lurid novels of juvenile delinquents. Here it is, *Four Tragedies of Shakespeare*, with my compliments. *(They begin to go over the scene together as Bo, resentful of the closeness between Cherie and Virgil, goes to them belligerently.)*
 BO. *(To Cherie.)* Thass my seat.
 ELMA. *(Taking book from Dr. Lyman.)* If I read it over a few times, it'll come back. Do you know the Balcony Scene?
 CHERIE. *(Jumping to her feet.)* You kin have it. *(Hurries to Elma, at counter.)*
 DR. LYMAN. My dear, I know the entire play by heart. I can recite it backwards. *(Elma comes from behind counter to sit on stool. Dr. Lyman sits by her.)*
 CHERIE. *(To Elma.)* I got a costume with me. Where can I change?
 ELMA. Behind the counter. There's a mirror over the sink. *(Cherie darts behind the counter, digging into her suitcase.)*
 BO. *(To Virgil.)* She shines up to you like a kitten to milk. *(Sits at Virgil's table.)*
 ELMA. Gee, costumes and everything. *(She resumes her study with Dr. Lyman.)*
 VIRGIL. *(Trying to make a joke of it.)* Kin I help it if I'm so darn attractive to women? *(Unfortunately, Bo cannot take this as a joke, as Virgil intended. Virgil perceives he is deeply hurt.)*
 Shucks, Bo, it don't mean nothin'.
 BO. Maybe it don't mean nothin' to you.
 VIRGIL. She was bein' nice to me 'cause I was playin' my guitar.
 BO. Guitar music's kinda tender and girls seem to like it.
 VIRGIL. Yah, Bo! Girls like things t' be tender.
 BO. They do!
 VIRGIL. Sure they do, Bo.
 BO. A fella gets "tender," then someone comes along and makes a sap outa him.
 VIRGIL. Sometimes, Bo, but not always. You just gotta take a chance.
 BO. Well . . . I allus tried t' be a decent sorta fella, but I don't know if I'm tender.

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VIRGIL. I think ya are, Bo. You know how ya feel about deer-huntin'? Ya never could do it. Ya couldn't any more shoot one a them sweet h'l deers with the sad eyes than ya could jump into boilin' oil.

BO. Are you makin' fun of me?

VIRGIL. *(Impatient with him.)* No, I'm not makin' fun of ya, Bo. I'm just tryin' to show ya that you got a tender side to your nature, same as anyone else.

BO. I s'pose I do.

VIRGIL. A course ya do.

BO. *(With a sudden feeling of injustice.)* Then how come Cherry don't come over and talk sweet to me, like she does to you?

VIRGIL. Ya got a tender side, Bo, but ya don't know how to show it.

BO. *(Weighing the verdict.)* I don't!

VIRGIL. No, ya just don't know how.

BO. How does a person go about showin' his tender side, Virge?

VIRGIL. Well . . . I dunno as I can tell ya. *(Elma comes over to them ready to start the show.)*

ELMA. Will you go first, Virgil?

VIRGIL. It's all right by me.

ELMA. O.K. Then I'll act as Master of the Ceremonies. *(Center stage, to her audience.)* Ladies and gentlemen! Grace's Diner tonight presents its gala floor show of celebrated artists from all over the world! *(Virgil plays an introductory chord.)* The first number on our show tonight is that musical cowboy, Mr. Virgil—*(She pauses and Virgil supplies her with his last name.)*—Virgil Blessing, who will entertain you with his guitar. *(Applause. Elma retreats to the back of the room where she sits on bench. Dr. Lyman crosses to sit by her. Virgil begins to play. During his playing, Bo is drawn over to the counter where he tries to further himself with Cherie, who is behind the counter, dressing.)*

BO. *(At u. s. end of counter. Innocently.)* I think you got me all wrong, Cherry.

CHERIE. Don't you come back here. *(He turns around, goes front of counter.)* I'm dressing.

BO. Cherry . . . I think you misjudged me.

CHERIE. Be quiet. *(Pops up.)* The show's started.

BO. *(Leans on counter.)* Cherry, I'm really a very tender person.

You jest don't know. I'm so tenderhearted I don't go deer-huntin'.

'Cause I jest couldn't kill them "sweet h'l deers with the sad eyes."

Ask Virge.

CHERIE. I ain't interested. *(Ducks down.)*

BO. Ya ain't?

CHERIE. No. And furthermore I think you're a louse fer comin' over here and talkin' while yor friend is tryin' to play the guitar.

BO. Ya talk like ya thought more a Virge than ya do a me.

CHERIE. Would ya go away and lemme alone?

BO. *(A final resort.)* Cherry, did I tell ya 'bout my color-television set with the twenty-four-inch screen?

CHERIE. One million times! Now go 'way. *(Elma begins to make a shushing noise to quiet Bo. Finally Bo dejectedly returns to the other side of the room, where Virgil is just finishing his number. Bo sits down at a table in the midst of Virgil's applause.)*

CHERIE. That was wonderful, Virge!

DR. LYMAN. Brilliant!

ELMA. Swell! Play us another!

VIRGIL. No more just now. I'm ready to see the rest of ya do somethin'.

BO. *(To Virgil.)* A lot she cares how tender I am!

ELMA. *(Coming forth again as Master of Ceremonies.)* That was swell, Virgil. *(Turns back to Dr. Lyman.)* Are you ready?

DR. LYMAN. *(Preening himself, rises.)* I consider myself so.

ELMA. *(Taking the book to Virgil.)* Will you be our prompter?

VIRGIL. It's kinda funny writin', but I'll try.

ELMA. *(Back to Dr. Lyman above table.)* Gee, what'll we use for a balcony?

DR. LYMAN. That offers a problem. *(Together they consider whether to use the counter for Elma to stand on or one of the tables.)*

BO. *(To Virgil.)* What is it these folks are gonna do, Virge?

VIRGIL. Romeo and Juliet . . . by Shakespeare! *(Puts guitar down.)*

BO. Shakespeare!

VIRGIL. This Romeo was a great lover, Bo. Watch him and pick up a few pointers. *(Cherie comes running out from behind the counter now, a dressing gown over her costume, and she sits at one of the tables.)*

CHERIE. I'm ready.

BO. *(Reading some of the lines from Virgil's book.)* "But soft

... what light through . . . yonder window breaks? It is the East . . . and Juliet is the sun . . . Arise, fair . . ." (He has got this far only with difficulty, stumbling over most of the words. Virgil takes the book away from him now.)

~~VIRGIL. Shh, Bo! (Virgil comes forth to introduce the act as Dr. Lyman clears the counter.)~~

~~ELMA. (Crosses to C.) Ladies and gentlemen! you are about to witness a playing of the balcony scene from Romeo and Juliet. Dr. Gerald Lyman will portray the part of Romeo, and I'll play Juliet. My name is Elma Duckworth. The scene is the orchard of the Capulets' house in Verona, Italy. (Dr. Lyman takes a quick drink.) This counter is supposed to be a balcony. (Dr. Lyman helps her onto the counter where she stands, waiting for him to begin.) O.K.? (Dr. Lyman takes a quick reassuring drink from his bottle, then tucks it in his pocket, and comes forward in the great Romantic tradition. He is enjoying himself tremendously. The performance proves to be pure barn, but there is pathos in the fact that he does not seem to be aware of how bad he is. He is a thoroughly selfish performer, too, who reads all his speeches as though they were grand soliloquies, regarding his Juliet as a prop.)~~

~~DR. LYMAN.~~

~~"He jests at scars, that never felt a wound.
But soft! what light through yonder window breaks?
It is the east, and Juliet is the sun!~~

~~(He tries to continue, but Elma, unmindful of cues and eager to begin her performance, reads her lines with compulsion.)~~

~~Arise . . . fair sun, and . . . kill the envious. . . ."~~

~~ELMA. (At same time as Dr. Lyman.)~~

~~"O Romeo, Romeo! wherefore art thou, Romeo?"~~

~~Deny thy father, and refuse thy name:~~

~~Or if thou wilt not, be but sworn my love,
And I'll no longer be a Capulet."~~

~~DR. LYMAN.~~

~~"She speaks, yet she says nothing: what of that?
Her eye discourses; I will answer it.~~

~~I am too bold—"~~

~~BO. (To Virgil.) Bold? He's drunk.~~

~~VIRGIL. Ssssh!~~

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DR. LYMAN.

" . . . 'tis not to me she speaks:

Two of the fairest stars in all the heaven,
Having some business, do entreat her eyes
To twinkle in their spheres till they return."

ELMA.

"Ay, me!"

DR. LYMAN.

"O! speak again, bright angel; thou art
As glorious to this night, being o'er my head
As is a winged messenger of heaven
Unto the white-upturned . . ."

(Dr. Lyman continues with this speech, even though Bo talks over him.)

BO. I don't understand all them words, Virge.

VIRGE. It's Romeo and Juliet, for God's sake. Now will you shut up?

DR. LYMAN. (Continuing uninterrupted.)
" . . . wondering eyes
Of mortals; that fall back to gaze on him
When he bestrides the lazy-paading clouds,
And sails upon the bosom of the air."

ELMA.
(He is getting weary but he is not yet ready to give up.)
" 'Tis but thy name that is my enemy;
Thou art thyself though, not a Montague.
What's a Montague? it is not hand, nor foot,
Nor arm, nor face, or any other part
Belonging to a man. O! be some other name:
What's—"

DR. LYMAN. (Interrupts. Beginning to falter now. Leans on back of chair.)
"I take thee at thy word.
Call me but love, and . . . I'll be new baptiz'd;
Henceforth . . . I never . . . will be Romeo."
(It is as though he were finding suddenly a personal meaning in the lines.)

ELMA.
"What man art thou, that, thus bescreen'd in night,
So stumblest on my counsel?"

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