

*the counter, having returned from the bookshelves in 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 defiantly 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*.

*He 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.

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 something 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 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*!

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 behind counter, gets suitcase, takes it U. L. and looks for costume.*