

BO Side 1

BO. (His voice holding Elma on her way to refrigerator.) Jest a minute, Miss. That ain't all. I'd also like me some ham and eggs . . . and some potaty salad . . . and a piece a pie. I ain't so pertikler what kinda pie it is, so long as it's got that murang on top of it. (Grace gives hamburger and eggs to Elma.)

ELMA. We have lemon and choc'late. They both have meringue. (Virgil crosses u. s., sits near stove. Grace crosses u. r., sits on bench.)

BO. (Thinking it over.) Lemon'n choc'late. I like 'em both. I dunno which I'd ruther have. (Ponders a moment.) I'll have 'em both, Miss. (Cherie makes another sick face.)

ELMA. Both?

BO. Yep! 'N set a quart a milk beside me. I'm still a growin' boy. (Elma starts preparations as Bo turns to Cherie.) Travelin' allus picks up my appetite. That all you havin', jest a measly doughnut?

CHERIE. I ain't hungry.

BO. Why not?

CHERIE. I jest ain't.

BO. Ya oughta be.

CHERIE. Well—I ain't!

BO. Wait till I get ya up to the Susie-Q. I'll fatten ya up. I bet in two weeks time, ya won't recognize yorself. (Now he puts a bearlike arm around her, drawing her close to him for a snuggle, kissing her on the cheek.) But doggone, I love ya, Cherry, jest the way ya are. Yor about the cutest li'l piece I ever did see. And man! when I walked into that night club place and hear you singin' my favorite song, standin' before that orkester lookin' like a angel, I told myself then and there, she's fer me. I ain't gonna leave this place without her. And now I got ya, ain't I, Cherry?

CHERIE. (Trying to avoid his embrace.) Bo . . . there's people here . . . they're lookin' . . . (And she's right. They are.)

BO. What if they are? It's no crime to show a li'l affection, is it? 'Specially, when we're gonna git married. It's no crime I ever heard of. (He squeezes her harder now and forces a loud, smacking kiss on the lips. Cherie twists loose of him and turns away.)

CHERIE. Bo! fer cryin' out loud, lemme be! (Breaks away R.)

BO. (Following her, grabs her shoulders.) Cherry, thass no way to talk to yor husband.

CHERIE. (Breaks away R. C.) That's all ya done since we left Kanz City, is maul me. (Sits at table.)

What's that matter t' me? That don't give him the right t' insult my manners, does it? No man ever had to tell me what t' do, did he, Virge? Did he?

VIRGIL. No. No. But there allus comes a time, Bo, when . . . (Virgil puts his guitar down, Bo puts bis hat on top of it.)

BO. (Ignoring Virgil, speaking out for the benefit of all.) My name's Bo Decker. I'm twenty-one years old and own me m'own ranch up in Timber Hill, Montana, where I got a herd a fine Hereford cattle and a dozen horses, and the finest sheep and hogs and chickens anywhere in the country. And I jest come back from a rodeo where I won 'bout ev'ry prize there was, din I, Virge? (Josingly, he elbows Virgil in the ribs. Will drifts D. S., looking at Bo.) Yap, I'm the prize bronco-buster, 'n steer-roper, 'n bulldogger, anywhere 'round. I won 'em all. And what's more, had my picture taken by Life magazine. (Confronting Will.) So I'd appreciate your talkin' to me with a little respect in yor voice, Mister, and not go hollerin' orders to me from across the room like I was some no-count servant. (Will is flabbergasted.)

CHERIE. (Privately to Elma.) Did ya ever see anybody like him? WILL. (Finally finds bis voice and uses it, after a struggle with himself to sound just and impartial.) You was the last one in, cowboy, and you left the door open. You shoulda closed it, I don't care who y'are. That's all I'm saying.

BO. Door's closed now. What ya arguin' 'bout? (Leaving a bushed and somewhat awed audience, Bo strides over to the counter and drops to a stool.) Seems like we're gonna be here a while, Virge. How's fer some grub? (Will turns u. c.)

VIRGIL. (Remaining by magazine counter.) Not yet, Bo. I'm chewin' t'backy. (Takes off coat and hat.)

BO. (Slapping a thigh.) Thass ole Virge for ya. Allus happy long's he's got a wad a t'backy in his mouth. Wall, I'm gonna have me a li'l snack. (To Elma.) Miss, gimme 'bout three hamburgers.

ELMA. Three? How do you want them? (Will crosses to stove, watches Bo.)

BO. I want 'em raw. (Cherie makes a sick face. Dr. Lyman quietly withdraws, taking his drink over to the window.)

ELMA. Honest?

BO. It's the only way t'eat 'em, raw, with a thick slice a onion and some pickalili.

ELMA. (Hesitant.) Well . . . if you're sure you're not joking.

Bo Side 2

CHERIE. No! He kep tellin' me all week, he and Virge'd be by the night the rodeo ended, and they'd pick me up and we'd all start back to Montana t'gether. I knew that if I was around the Blue Dragon that night, that's what'd happen. So I decided to beat it. One a the other girls at the Blue Dragon lived on a farm 'cross the river in Kansas. She said I could stay with her. So I went to the Blue Dragon last night and just sang fer the first show. Then I told 'em I was quittin' . . . I'd been wantin' to find another job anyway . . . and I picked up my share of the kitty . . . but darn it, I had to go and tell 'em I was takin' the midnight bus. They had to go and tell Bo, a course, when he come in a li'l after eleven. He paid 'em five dollars to find out. So I went down to the bus station and hadn't even got my ticket, when here come Bo and Virge. *(Bo rises walks slowly to window.)* He jest steps up to the ticket window and says, "Three tickets to Montana!" I din know what to say. Then he dragged me onto the bus and I been on it ever since. And somewhere deep down inside me, I gotta funny feelin' I'm gonna end up in Montana. *(She sits now in troubled contemplation as Elma resumes her work. On the other side of the stage, Bo comes d. s., straddles a chair after a period of gestation, begins to question Virgil.)*

BO. Tell me somethin', Virge. We been t'gether since my folks died, and I allus wondered if mebbe I din spoil yer chances a settlin' down.

VIRGIL. *(Laughs.)* No, you never, Bo. I used to tell myself ya did, but I just wanted an excuse.

BO. But you been lookin' after me since I was ten.

VIRGIL. I coulda married up, too.

BO. Was ya ever in love?

VIRGIL. Oncet. B'fore I went to work on your daddy's ranch.

BO. What happened?

VIRGIL. Nuthin'.

BO. Ya ask her to marry ya?

VIRGIL. Nope.

BO. Why not?

VIRGIL. Well . . . there comes a time in every fella's life Bo, when he's gotta give up his own ways . . .

BO. How ya mean?

VIRGIL. Well, I was allus kinda uncomfortable around this gal,

'cause she was sweet and kinda refined. I was allus scared I'd say or do somethin' wrong.

BO. I know how ya mean.

VIRGIL. It was cowardly of me, I s'pose, but ev'ry time I'd get back from courtin' her, and come back to the bunkhouse where my buddies was sittin' around talkin', or playin' cards, or listenin' to music, I'd jest relax and feel m'self so much at home, I din wanta give it up.

BO. Yah! Gals can scare a fella.

VIRGIL. Now I'm kinda ashamed.

BO. Y'are?

VIRGIL. Yes I am, Bo. A fella can't live his whole life dependin' on buddies. *(Bo takes another reflective pause, then asks directly.)*

BO. Why don't she like me, Virge?

VIRGIL. *(Hesitant.)* Well . . .

BO. Tell me the truth.

VIRGIL. Mebbe ya don't go about it right.

BO. What do I do wrong?

VIRGIL. Sometimes ya sound a li'l bullheaded and mean.

BO. I do?

VIRGIL. Yah.

BO. How's a fella s'posed to act?

VIRGIL. I'm no authority, Bo, but it seems t'me you should be a little more gallant.

BO. Gall—? Gallant? I'm as gallant as I know how to be. You hear the way Hank and Orville talk at the ranch, when they get back from sojournin' in town, 'bout their women.

VIRGIL. They like to brag, Bo. Ya cain't b'lieve ev'rything Hank and Orville say.

BO. Is there any reason a gal wouldn't go fer me, soon as she would fer Hank or Orville?

VIRGIL. They're a li'l older'n you. They learned a li'l more. They can be *gallant* with gals . . . when they wanta be.

BO. I ain't gonna *perkend*.

VIRGIL. I cain't blame ya.

BO. But a gal *oughta* like me. I kin read and write, I'm kinda tidy, and I got good manners, don't I?

VIRGIL. I'm no judge, Bo. I'm used to ya.

BO. And I'm tall and strong. Ain't that what girls like? And if I do say so, m'self, I'm purty good lookin'.

End

Carl

ACT III

Start

By this time, it is early morning, about five o'clock. The storm has cleared, and outside the window we see the slow dawning, creeping above the distant hills, revealing a landscape all in peaceful white.

Bo, Cherie and Virgil are back now from the sberiff's office. Bo has returned to his corner, where he sits as before, with his back to the others, his head low. We can detect, if we study him, that one eye is blackened and one of his hands is bandaged. Virgil sits close to him on arm of bench, like an attendant. Dr. Lyman is still asleep on the bench, snoring loudly. Cherie tries to sleep at one of the tables. Elma is clearing the tables and sweeping. The only animated people right now are Carl and Grace. Carl is at the telephphone trying to get the operator, and Grace is behind the counter.

CARL. (After jiggling the receiver.) Still dead. (He bangs up.)
 GRACE. (Yawns.) I'll be glad when you all get out and I can go to bed. I'm tired.
 CARL. (Returning to counter, he sounds a trifle insinuating.) Had enough a me, baby? (Grace gives him a look, warning him not to let Elma overhear.) I'm kinda glad the highway was blocked tonight.
 GRACE. (Coquettishly.) Y'are?
 CARL. Gave us a chance to become kinda acquainted, din it?
 GRACE. Kinda!
 CARL. Just pullin' in here three times a week, then pullin' out again in twenty minutes, I . . . I allus left . . . just wonderin' what you was like, Grace.
 GRACE. I always wondered about you, too, Carl!
 CARL. Ya did?
 GRACE. Yah. But ya needn't go blabbing anything to the other drivers. (Elma sweeps u. s. and toward front door R.)
 CARL. (His honor offended.) Why, what makes ya think I'd . . . ?

End

GRACE. Shoot! I know how you men talk when ya get t'gether. Worse'n women.
 CARL. Well, not me, Grace.
 GRACE. I certainly don't want the other drivers on this route, some of 'em especially, gettin' the idea I'm gonna serve 'em any more'n what they order over the counter.
 CARL. Sure. I get ya. (It occurs to him to feel flattered.) But ya . . . ya kinda liked me . . . din ya, Grace?
 GRACE (Coquettish again.) Maybe I did.
 CARL. (Trying to get more of a commitment out of her.) Yah? Yah?
 GRACE. Know what I first liked about ya, Carl? It was your hands. (She takes one of his hands and plays with it.) I like a man with big hands.
 CARL. You got everything, baby. (For just a moment, one senses the animal heat in their fleeting attraction. Now Will comes stalking in through the front door, a man who is completely relaxed with the authority he possesses. He speaks to Grace.)
 WILL. (Crosses L. to R. of Carl.) One of the highway trucks just stopped by. They say it won't be very long now. (Elma crosses D. R. to sweep near Cherie.)
 GRACE. I hope so.
 WILL. (With a look around.) Everything peaceful?
 GRACE. Yes, Will.
 WILL. (He studies Bo for a moment, then goes to him.) Cowboy, if yor holdin' any grudges against me, I think ya oughta ask yourself what you'd'a done in my place. I couldn't let ya carry off the li'l lady when she din wanta go, could I? (Bo has no answer. He just avoids Will's eyes. But Will is determined to get an answer.) Could I? (Grace leans on counter.)
 BO. I don't feel like talkin', Mister.
 WILL. Well, I couldn't. And I think you might also remember that this li'l lady . . . (Cherie begins to stir.) if she wanted to . . . could press charges and get you sent to the penitentiary for violation of the Mann Act.
 BO. The what act?
 WILL. The Mann Act. You took a woman over the state line against her will.
 VIRGIL. That'd be a serious charge, Bo.

Cherie side 1

Start

CHERIE. Mebbe I'm a sap.
ELMA. Why do you say that?
CHERIE. I dunno why I don't go off to Montana and marry him.
I might be a lot better off'n I am now.
ELMA. He says he loves you.
CHERIE. He dunno what love is.
ELMA. What makes you say that?
CHERIE. All he wants is a girl to throw his arms around and hug
and kiss, that's all. The resta the time, he don't even know I exist.
ELMA. What made you decide to marry him in the first place?
CHERIE. (*Giving Elma a wise look.*) Ya ain't very experienced,
are ya?
ELMA. I guess not.
CHERIE. I never *did* decide to marry him. Everything was goin'
fine till he brought up *that* subjeck. Bo come in one night when I
was singin' "That Old Black Magic." It's one a my best numbers.
And he liked it so much, he jumped up on a chair and yelled like
a Indian, and put his fingers in his mouth and whistled like a steam
engine. Natur'ly, it made me feel good. Most a the customers at
the Blue Dragon was too drunk to pay any attention to my songs.
ELMA. And you liked him?
CHERIE. Well . . . I thought he was awful cute. (*She shows a
mischievous smile.*)
ELMA. I think he looks a little like Burt Lancaster, don't you?
CHERIE. Mebbe. Anyway . . . I'd never seen a cowboy before.
Oh, I'd seen 'em in movies, a course, but never in the *flesh* . . .
Anyway, he's so darn healthy lookin', I don't mind admittin', I
was attracted, right from the start.
ELMA. You were?
CHERIE. But it was only what ya might call a *sexual* attraction.
ELMA. Oh!
CHERIE. The very next mornin', he wakes up and hollers, "Yip-
pee! We're gittin' married." (*Bo rises, walks L. Virgil pulls him
down to sit.*) I honestly thought he was crazy. But when I tried to
reason with him, he wouldn't listen to a word. He stayed by my
side all day long, like a shadow. At night, a course, he had to go
back to the rodeo, but he was back to the Blue Dragon as soon as
the rodeo was over, in time fer the midnight show. If any other
fella claimed t'have a date with me, Bo'd beat him up.
ELMA. And you never told him you'd marry him?

End

Cherie side 2

VIRGIL. Yah.

BO. When I get spruced up, I'm just as good lookin' a fella as a gal might hope to see.

VIRGIL. I know ya are, Bo.

BO. (*Suddenly seized with anger at the injustice of it all. Jumps up, crosses u. s.*) Then hellfire and damnation! Why don't she go back to the ranch with me? (*His hands in his hip pockets, he begins pacing, returning to his corner like a panther, where he stands with his back to the others, watching the snow fly outside the window.*)

ELMA. (*Having observed Bo's disquiet.*) Gee, if you only loved him!

CHERIE. That'd solve ev'rything, wouldn't it? But I don't. So I jest can't see m'self goin' to some God-forsaken ranch in Montana where I'd never see no one but him and a lotta cows.

ELMA. No. If you don't love him, it'd be awfully lonely.

CHERIE. I dunno why I keep expectin' m'self to fall in love with someone, but I do.

ELMA. (*Sits on stool by Cherie.*) I know I expect to, some day.

CHERIE. I'm beginnin' to seriously wonder if there is the kinda love I have in mind.

ELMA. What's that?

CHERIE. Well . . . I dunno. I'm oney nineteen, but I been goin' with guys since I was fourteen.

ELMA. (*Astounded.*) Honest?

CHERIE. Honey, I almost married a cousin a mine when I was fourteen, but Pappy wouldn't have it.

ELMA. I never heard of anyone marrying so young.

CHERIE. Down in the Ozarks, we don't waste much time. Anyway, I'm awful glad I never married my cousin Malcolm, 'cause he turned out real bad, like Pappy predicted. But I sure was crazy 'bout him at the time. And I been losin' my head 'bout some guy ever since. But Bo's the first one wanted to marry me, since Cousin Malcolm. And natur'ly, I'd like to get married and raise a fam'ly and all them things but . . .

ELMA. But you've never been in love?

CHERIE. Mebbe I have and din know it. Thass what I mean. Mebbe I don't know what love is. Mebbe I'm expectin' it t'be somethin' it ain't. I jest feel that, regardless how crazy ya are 'bout some guy, ya gotta feel . . . and it's hard to put into words,

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 wanta 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. (*Busily 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 a the radio stations there. I might git a job on it. If I don't, I'll prob'ly git me a job in Liggett's or Walgreen's. Then after a while, I'll prob'ly 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 yor a kid and jest take it for granted that such a thing really exists. Maybe ya have to find out fer yorself 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 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. (*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 Side 1

ness, are employed behind the counter. Elma is a big-eyed girl still in high school. Grace is a more seasoned character in her thirties or early forties. A bus is expected soon and they are checking, somewhat lackadaisically, the supplies. Outside, the powerful, reckless wind comes and goes, blasting against everything in its path, seeming to shake the very foundation of the little restaurant building, then subsiding, leaving a period of uncertain stillness. When the curtain goes up, Elma stands far R., looking out the large plate-glass window, awed by the fury of the elements. Grace is at the telephone, an old-fashioned wall phone behind counter U. L.

Start

ELMA. (u. R., drying a glass.) Listen to that wind. March is coming in like a lion. (Grace jiggles the receiver on the telephone with no results.) Grace, you should come over here and look out, to see the way the wind is blowing things all over town.

GRACE. Now I wonder why I can't get th' operator.

ELMA. I bet the bus'll be late.

GRACE. (Finally hanging up.) I bet it won't. The roads are O.K. as far as here. It's ahead they're havin' trouble. I can't even get the operator. She must have more calls than she can handle. (Crosses D. L. behind counter, clears dishes from D. S. end of counter.)

ELMA. (Still looking out the window.) I bet the bus doesn't have many passengers.

GRACE. Prob'ly not. But we gotta stay open even if there's only one. (Takes dishes to sink.)

ELMA. I shouldn't think anyone would take a trip tonight unless he absolutely had to.

GRACE. Are your folks gonna worry, Elma?

ELMA. No—Daddy said, before I left home, he bet this'd happen.

GRACE. Well, you better come back here and help me. The bus'll be here any minute and we gotta have things ready.

ELMA. (Leaving the window, following Grace.) Nights like this, I'm glad I have a home to go to.

GRACE. (Washing and drying.) Well, I got a home to go to, but there ain't anyone in it.

ELMA. (Puts tops on three sugar bowls on counter.) Where's your husband now, Grace?

GRACE. How should I know?

ELMA. (Crosses R. with two sugars.) Don't you miss him?

End

GRACE. No!

ELMA. (Puts sugars on tables.) If he came walking in now, wouldn't you be glad to see him?

GRACE. You ask more questions.

ELMA. I'm just curious about things, Grace.

GRACE. Well, kids your age are. I don't know. I'd be happy to see him, I guess, if I knew he wasn't gonna stay very long.

ELMA. (Crosses back to u. s. end of counter.) Don't you get lonesome, Grace, when you're not working down here?

GRACE. Sure I do. If I didn't have this restaurant to keep me busy, I'd prob'ly go nuts. Sometimes, at night, after I empty the garbage and lock the doors and turn out the lights, I get kind of a sick feelin', 'cause I sure don't look forward to walkin' up those stairs and lettin' myself into an empty apartment.

ELMA. Gee, if you feel that way, why don't you write your husband and tell him to come back?

GRACE. (Thinks a moment, leans on D. S. end of counter.) 'Cause I got just as lonesome when he was here. He wasn't much company, 'cept when we were makin' love. But makin' love is one thing, and bein' lonesome is another. The resta the time, me and Barton was usually fightin'.

ELMA. (u. of Grace.) I guess my folks get along pretty well. I mean . . . they really seem to like each other.

GRACE. Oh, I know all married people aren't like Barton and I. Not all! (Goes to u. L. telephone again. Elma goes to sink, dries glasses which she puts D. S. on counter.) Now, maybe I can get the operator. (Jiggles receiver.) Quiet as a tomb. (Hangs up.)

ELMA. I like working here with you, Grace.

GRACE. Do you, honey? I'm glad, 'cause I sure don't know what I'd do without ya. Week ends especially.

ELMA. You know, I dreaded the job at first.

GRACE. (Kidding her.) Why? Thought you wouldn't have time for all your boy friends? (Elma looks a little sour. Grace gets rag from sink, wipes counter.) Maybe you'd have more boy friends if you didn't make such good grades. Boys feel kind of embarrassed if they feel a girl is smarter than they are.

ELMA. What should I do? Flunk my courses?

Elma Side 2

... 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 ham, 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!

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-pacing clouds,

And sails upon the bosom of the air.”

(He is getting weary but he is not yet ready to give up.)

ELMA.

“'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 that?”

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?”

Side 1

ness, are employed behind the counter. Elma is a big-eyed girl still in high school. Grace is a more seasoned character in her thirties or early forties. A bus is expected soon and they are checking, somewhat lackadaisically, the supplies. Outside, the powerful, reckless wind comes and goes, blasting against everything in its path, seeming to shake the very foundation of the little restaurant building, then subsiding, leaving a period of uncertain stillness. When the curtain goes up, Elma stands far R., looking out the large plate-glass window, awed by the fury of the elements. Grace is at the telephone, an old-fashioned wall phone behind counter U. L.

ELMA. (U. R., drying a glass.) Listen to that wind. March is coming in like a lion. (Grace jiggles the receiver on the telephone with no results.) Grace, you should come over here and look out, to see the way the wind is blowing things all over town.

GRACE. Now I wonder why I can't get th' operator.

ELMA. I bet the bus'll be late.

GRACE. (Finally hanging up.) I bet it won't. The roads are O.K. as far as here. It's ahead they're havin' trouble. I can't even get the operator. She must have more calls than she can handle. (Crosses D. L. behind counter, clears dishes from D. S. end of counter.)

ELMA. (Still looking out the window.) I bet the bus doesn't have many passengers.

GRACE. Prob'ly not. But we gotta stay open even if there's only one. (Takes dishes to sink.)

ELMA. I shouldn't think anyone would take a trip tonight unless he absolutely had to.

GRACE. Are your folks gonna worry, Elma?

ELMA. No—Daddy said, before I left home, he bet this'd happen.

GRACE. Well, you better come back here and help me. The bus'll be here any minute and we gotta have things ready.

ELMA. (Leaving the window, following Grace.) Nights like this, I'm glad I have a home to go to.

GRACE. (Washing and drying.) Well, I got a home to go to, but there ain't anyone in it.

ELMA. (Puts tops on three sugar bowls on counter.) Where's your husband now, Grace?

GRACE. How should I know?

ELMA. (Crosses R. with two sugars.) Don't you miss him?

GRACE. No!

ELMA. (Puts sugars on tables.) If he came walking in now, wouldn't you be glad to see him?

GRACE. You ask more questions.

ELMA. I'm just curious about things, Grace.

GRACE. Well, kids your age are. I don't know. I'd be happy to see him, I guess, if I knew he wasn't gonna stay very long.

ELMA. (Crosses back to U. S. end of counter.) Don't you get lonesome, Grace, when you're not working down here?

GRACE. Sure I do. If I didn't have this restaurant to keep me busy, I'd prob'ly go nuts. Sometimes, at night, after I empty the garbage and lock the doors and turn out the lights, I get kind of a sick feelin', 'cause I sure don't look forward to walkin' up those stairs and lettin' myself into an empty apartment.

ELMA. Gee, if you feel that way, why don't you write your husband and tell him to come back?

GRACE. (Thinks a moment, leans on D. S. end of counter.) 'Cause I got just as lonesome when he was here. He wasn't much company, 'cept when we were makin' love. But makin' love is one thing, and bein' lonesome is another. The resta the time, me and Barton was usually fightin'.

ELMA. (U. of Grace.) I guess my folks get along pretty well. I mean . . . they really seem to like each other.

GRACE. Oh, I know all married people aren't like Barton and I. Not all! (Goes to U. L. telephone again. Elma goes to sink, dries glasses which she puts D. S. on counter.) Now, maybe I can get the operator. (Jiggles receiver.) Quiet as a tomb. (Hangs up.)

ELMA. I like working here with you, Grace.

GRACE. Do you, honey? I'm glad, 'cause I sure don't know what I'd do without ya. Week ends especially.

ELMA. You know, I dreaded the job at first.

GRACE. (Kidding her.) Why? Thought you wouldn't have time for all your boy friends? (Elma looks a little sour. Grace gets rag from sink, wipes counter.) Maybe you'd have more boy friends if you didn't make such good grades. Boys feel kind of embarrassed if they feel a girl is smarter than they are.

ELMA. What should I do? Flunk my courses?

GRACE. (Puts rag on sink.) I should say not. You're a good kid and ya got good sense. I wish someone coulda reasoned with me when I was your age.

ACT III

By this time, it is early morning, about five o'clock. The storm has cleared, and outside the window we see the slow dawning, creeping above the distant hills, revealing a landscape all in peaceful white.

Bo, Cherie and Virgil are back now from the sheriff's office. Bo has returned to his corner, where he sits as before, with his back to the others, his head low. We can detect, if we study him, that one eye is blackened and one of his hands is bandaged. Virgil sits close to him on arm of bench, like an attendant. Dr. Lyman is still asleep on the bench, snoring loudly. Cherie tries to sleep at one of the tables. Elma is clearing the tables and sweeping. The only animated people right now are Carl and Grace. Carl is at the telephone trying to get the operator, and Grace is behind the counter.

start

CARL. (After jiggling the receiver.) Still dead. (He bangs up.)

GRACE. (Yawns.) I'll be glad when you all get out and I can go to bed. I'm tired.

CARL. (Returning to counter, he sounds a trifle insinuating.) Had enough a me, baby? (Grace gives him a look, warning him not to let Elma overhear.) I'm kinda glad the highway was blocked tonight.

GRACE. (Coquettishly.) Y'are?

CARL. Gave us a chance to become kinda acquainted, din it?

GRACE. Kinda!

CARL. Just pullin' in here three times a week, then pullin' out again in twenty minutes, I . . . I allus left . . . just wonderin' what you was like, Grace.

GRACE. I always wondered about you, too, Carl!

CARL. Ya did?

GRACE. Yah. But ya needn't go blabbing anything to the other drivers. (Elma sweeps u. s. and toward front door R.)

CARL. (His honor offended.) Why, what makes ya think I'd . . . ?

GRACE. Shoot! I know how you men talk when ya get t'gether. Worse'n women.

CARL. Well, not me, Grace.

GRACE. I certainly don't want the other drivers on this route, some of 'em especially, gettin' the idea I'm gonna serve 'em any more'n what they order over the counter.

CARL. Sure. I get ya. (It occurs to him to feel flattered.) But ya . . . ya kinda liked me . . . din ya, Grace?

GRACE (Coquettish again.) Maybe I did.

CARL. (Trying to get more of a commitment out of her.) Yah? Yah?

bus

GRACE. Know what I first liked about ya, Carl? It was your hands. (She takes one of his hands and plays with it.) I like a man with big hands.

CARL. You got everything, baby. (For just a moment, one senses the animal heat in their fleeting attraction. Now Will comes stalking in through the front door, a man who is completely relaxed with the authority he possesses. He speaks to Grace.)

WILL. (Crosses L. to R. of Carl.) One of the highway trucks just stopped by. They say it won't be very long now. (Elma crosses D. R. to sweep near Cherie.)

GRACE. I hope so.

WILL. (With a look around.) Everything peaceful?

GRACE. Yes, Will.

WILL. (He studies Bo for a moment, then goes to him.) Cowboy, if yor holdin' any grudges against me, I think ya oughta ask yourself what you'd'a done in my place. I couldn't let ya carry off the li'l lady when she din wanta go, could I? (Bo has no answer. He just avoids Will's eyes. But Will is determined to get an answer.) Could I? (Grace leans on counter.)

BO. I don't feel like talkin', Mister.

WILL. Well, I couldn't. And I think you might also remember that this li'l lady . . . (Cherie begins to stir.) if she wanted to . . . could press charges and get you sent to the penitentiary for violation of the Mann Act.

BO. The what act?

WILL. The Mann Act. You took a woman over the state line against her will.

VIRGIL. That'd be a serious charge, Bo.

Dr. Lyman Side 1

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 wanta 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. (*Busily 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 a the radio stations there. I might git a job on it. If I don't, I'll prob'ly git me a job in Liggett's or Walgreen's. Then after a while, I'll prob'ly 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 yor a kid and jest take it for granted that such a thing really exists. Maybe ya have to find out fer yorself 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 as y longer. (*Cherie hurries out the rear door as Dr. Lyman sits again at 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. (*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

... 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 ham, 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!

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-pacing clouds,

And sails upon the bosom of the air."

(He is getting weary but he is not yet ready to give up.)

ELMA.

"'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?"

Start

End

Virgil

CHERIE. No! He kep tellin' me all week, he and Virge'd be by the night the rodeo ended, and they'd pick me up and we'd all start back to Montana t'gether. I knew that if I was around the Blue Dragon that night, that's what'd happen. So I decided to beat it. One a the other girls at the Blue Dragon lived on a farm 'cross the river in Kansas. She said I could stay with her. So I went to the Blue Dragon last night and just sang fer the first show. Then I told 'em I was quittin' . . . I'd been wantin' to find another job any way . . . and I picked up my share of the kitty . . . but darn it, I had to go and tell 'em I was takin' the midnight bus. They had to go and tell Bo, a course, when he come in a li'l after eleven. He paid 'em five dollars to find out. So I went down to the bus station and hadn't even got my ticket, when here come Bo and Virge. *(Bo rises walks slowly to window.)* He jest steps up to the ticket window and says, "Three tickets to Montana!" I din know what to say. Then he dragged me onto the bus and I been on it ever since. And somewhere deep down inside me, I gotta funny feelin' I'm gonna end up in Montana. *(She sits now in troubled contemplation as Elma resumes her work. On the other side of the stage, Bo comes D. S., straddles a chair after a period of gestation, begins to question Virgil.)*

BO. Tell me somethin', Virge. We been t'gether since my folks died, and I allus wondered if mebbe I din spoil yer chances a settlin' down.

VIRGIL. *(Laughs.)* No, you never, Bo. I used to tell myself ya did, but I just wanted an excuse.

BO. But you been lookin' after me since I was ten.

VIRGIL. I coulda married up, too.

BO. Was ya ever in love?

VIRGIL. Oncet. B'fore I went to work on your daddy's ranch.

BO. What happened?

VIRGIL. Nuthin'.

BO. Ya ask her to marry ya?

VIRGIL. Nope.

BO. Why not?

VIRGIL. Well . . . there comes a time in every fella's life Bo, when he's gotta give up his own ways . . .

BO. How ya mean?

VIRGIL. Well, I was allus kinda uncomfortable around this gal,

'cause she was sweet and kinda refined. I was allus scared I'd say or do somethin' wrong.

BO. I know how ya mean.

VIRGIL. It was cowardly of me, I s'pose, but ev'ry time I'd get back from courtin' her, and come back to the bunkhouse where my buddies was sittin' around talkin', or playin' cards, or listenin' to music, I'd jest relax and feel m'self so much at home, I din wanta give it up.

BO. Yah! Gals can scare a fella.

VIRGIL. Now I'm kinda ashamed.

BO. Y'are?

VIRGIL. Yes I am, Bo. A fella can't live his whole life dependin' on buddies. *(Bo takes another reflective pause, then asks directly.)*

BO. Why don't she like me, Virge?

VIRGIL. *(Hesitant.)* Well . . .

BO. Tell me the truth.

VIRGIL. Mebbe ya don't go about it right.

BO. What do I do wrong?

VIRGIL. Sometimes ya sound a li'l bullheaded and mean.

BO. I do?

VIRGIL. Yah.

BO. How's a fella s'posed to act?

VIRGIL. I'm no authority, Bo, but it seems t'me you should be a little more gallant.

BO. Gall—? Gallant? I'm as gallant as I know how to be. You hear the way Hank and Orville talk at the ranch, when they get back from sojournin' in town, 'bout their women.

VIRGIL. They like to brag, Bo. Ya cain't b'lieve ev'rything Hank and Orville say.

BO. Is there any reason a gal wouldn't go fer me, soon as she would fer Hank or Orville?

VIRGIL. They're a li'l older'n you. They learned a li'l more. They can be gallant with gals . . . when they wanta be.

BO. I ain't gonna pretend.

VIRGIL. I cain't blame ya.

BO. But a gal oughta like me. I kin read and write, I'm kinda tidy, and I got good manners, don't I?

VIRGIL. I'm no judge, Bo. I'm used to ya.

BO. I'm strong and strong. Ain't that what girls like? And if I do say so, m'self, I'm purty good lookin'.

Start

End

Will

GRACE. Shoot! I know how you men talk when ya get t'gether. Worse'n women.

CARL. Well, not me, Grace.

GRACE. I certainly don't want the other drivers on this route, some of 'em especially, gettin' the idea I'm gonna serve 'em any more'n what they order over the counter.

CARL. Sure. I get ya. (It occurs to him to feel flattered.) But ya . . . ya kinda liked me . . . din ya, Grace?

GRACE (Coquettish again.) Maybe I did.

CARL. (Trying to get more of a commitment out of her.) Yah? Yah?

GRACE. Know what I first liked about ya, Carl? It was your hands. (She takes one of his hands and plays with it.) I like a man with big hands.

CARL. You got everything, baby. (For just a moment, one senses the animal heat in their fleeting attraction. Now Will comes stalking in through the front door, a man who is completely relaxed with the authority he possesses. He speaks to Grace.)

WILL. (Crosses L. to R. of Carl.) One of the highway trucks just stopped by. They say it won't be very long now. (Elma crosses D. R. to sweep near Cherie.)

GRACE. I hope so.

WILL. (With a look around.) Everything peaceful?

GRACE. Yes, Will.

WILL. (He studies Bo for a moment, then goes to him.) Cowboy, if yor holdin' any grudges against me, I think ya oughta ask yourself what you'd'a done in my place. I couldn't let ya carry off the li'l lady when she din wanta go, could I? (Bo has no answer. He just avoids Will's eyes. But Will is determined to get an answer.) Could I? (Grace leans on counter.)

BO. I don't feel like talkin', Mister.

WILL. Well, I couldn't. And I think you might also remember that this li'l lady . . . (Cherie begins to stir.) if she wanted to . . . could press charges and get you sent to the penitentiary for violation of the Mann Act.

BO. The what act?

WILL. The Mann Act. You took a woman over the state line against her will.

VIRGIL. That'd be a serious charge, Bo.

BO. (Stands facing Will.) I loved her. (Virgil crosses D. R. near door.)

WILL. That don't make any difference.

BO. A man's gotta right to the things he loves.

WILL. Not unless he deserves 'em, cowboy.

BO. I'm a hard-workin' man, I own me my own ranch, I got six thousand dollars in the bank.

WILL. A man don't deserve the things he loves, unless he kin be a little humble about gettin' 'em.

BO. (Comes D. R., sits at chair R. of C. table.) I ain't gonna get down on my knees and beg. (Virgil crosses D. S. L. of R. table.)

WILL. Bein' humble ain't the same thing as bein' wretched. (Bo doesn't understand.) I had to learn that once, too, cowboy. I wasn't quite as old as you. I stole horses instead of women because you could sell horses. One day, I stole a horse off the wrong man, the Rev. Hezekiah Pearson. I never thought I'd get mine from any preacher, but he was very fair. Gave me every chance to put myself clear. But I wouldn't admit the horse was his. Finally, he did what he had to do. He threshed me to within a inch of my life.

I never forgot. 'Cause it was the first time in my life, I had to admit I was wrong. I was miserable. Finally, after a few days, I decided the only thing to do was to admit to the man how I felt. Then I felt different about the whole thing. I joined his church, and we was bosom pals till he died a few years ago. (He turns to Virgil.) Has he done what I asked him to?

VIRGIL. Not yet, sheriff. (Sits at a table.)

WILL. (To Bo.) Why should ya be so scared?

BO. Who says I'm scared?

WILL. Ya gimme yor word, didn't ya?

BO. (Somewhat resentful.) I'm gonna do it, if ya'll jest gimme time.

WILL. But I warn ya, it ain't gonna do no good unless you really mean it. (Elma is R. with dust pan.)

BO. I'll mean it.

WILL. All right then. Go ahead. (Will crosses u. c. Slowly, reluctantly, Bo gets to his feet and awkwardly, like a guilty boy, makes his way over to the counter to Grace. Carl crosses to stove.)

BO. Miss, I . . . I wanna apologize.

GRACE. What for?

BO. Fer causin' such a commotion.

Start

End