



THE GLAMOUR HOUSE

BY LYDIA STRYK



DRAMATISTS
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THE GLAMOUR HOUSE
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For Esther.
And for all the displaced people and the worlds they make.

The world premiere of THE GLAMOUR HOUSE was presented by Victory Gardens Theater in Chicago, Illinois, on November 9, 2001. It was directed by Sandy Shinner; the set design was by Tim Morrison; the costume design was by Judith Lundberg; the sound design was by Andre Pluess and Ben Sussman; the lighting design was by Rita Pietraszek; and the stage manager was A. Tara Shucart. The cast was as follows:

TRUDI STEIN Deanna Dunagan
ESTHER BAYER Anne Fogarty
ROSA PEREZ Carmen Roman
LISELOTTE PAUSCHEL Cindy Gold
TONY PUCCINI Marc Jablon

CHARACTERS

TRUDI STEIN. Owner of The Glamour House.

ESTHER BAYER. The new salesgirl.

ROSA PEREZ. The dress shop alteration-hand.

LISELOTTE PAUSCHEL. A customer of some means.

TONY PUCCINI. A one-handed customer.

SETTING

New York City. Late 1946. The Glamour House, a dress shop on the Upper East Side. The set should contain a shop entrance, a cash register and counter, an alteration station with sewing machine, a dressing booth with a curtain and mirror, and separate exits to the shop's office and storage room. Along the walls are racks of dresses, skirts, and suits by size and style, as well as bins with rack-structures holding blouses and house dresses. Mannequins, both seated and standing, occupy spaces in the shop windows and on the shop floor.

NOTES

Although the dress shop contains many necessarily real material things, the world is anything but mundane. It need not look like an ordinary shop. Many of the objects in it, including certain items of clothing and the mannequins, play roles in the story and, at the same time, cast a supernatural dimension through their presence. At times they take on their own life. Sound effects, such as the constant working of the sewing machine and the scraping of hangers on the racks, also resonate to heighten the world of the play. Silence plays a large role in the play, as does song. It is a world of work, with constant activity, but also watchful stillness.

The characters in this play are immigrants. They come from somewhere else. This is revealed in their speech to varying degrees.

THE GLAMOUR HOUSE

ACT ONE

The Glamour House. Rosa Perez and Trudi Stein are alone in the shop. Rosa is sewing on the sewing machine. Trudi is waiting in stillness — looking out the window.

VOICEOVER. *Vogue says: Here is what 1947 will see — a fashion breeze that seems to blow a little stronger than most, bringing with it indications. Straws in the wind — new directions to follow. Some are inevitable: the government's fabric restrictions have been lifted. Designers are reacting with inventive, easier skirts and fuller coats. And in every collection the dress of '47 has two silhouettes: straight as it stands, and lovely and full in motion. Shoulders now show the first faint leanings toward normalcy, while the figure-line remains, bound by a close mold that makes an unbroken run to the hips.*

Scene 1

Rosa works at her station. Trudi and Esther face each other.

TRUDI. You're too thin.

ESTHER. Forgive me.

TRUDI. My customers. They tip the scales. You'll only depress them.

ESTHER. I'll try my very best to please them.

TRUDI. The point is. I do need help.

ESTHER. And here I am.

TRUDI. I see that.

ESTHER. "Help wanted," on the door. I stepped inside.

TRUDI. (*Studying her.*) My husband passed away. Three months ago.

ESTHER. I am so sorry.

TRUDI. He did the books. I sold the dresses.

ESTHER. It must be very hard, alone.

TRUDI. I have survived.

ESTHER. Yes. That's the main thing.

TRUDI. (*Quickly.*) Here we don't ask questions. Where. When. How. We start with today. The present tense.

ESTHER. ... All right.

TRUDI. In America. We look ahead. We don't look back.

ESTHER. I see.

TRUDI. It's a salesgirl's wage. No more. No less.

ESTHER. I'm grateful for it.

TRUDI. We work Saturdays, too. Are you willing?

ESTHER. I am.

TRUDI. Ten to seven, six days a week. On *Sunday*, you rest.

ESTHER. I understand.

TRUDI. And we speak English here.

ESTHER. I am prepared.

TRUDI. You've worked in sales?

ESTHER. Well ... *no*.

TRUDI. No. I wouldn't have thought so.

ESTHER. (*Excitedly.*) The fact is —

TRUDI. *No.* (*Finger to lips.*) Leave it. *Now*, you are a salesgirl. That's all. That's it. (*Stepping out into the center of the shop.*) A customer enters. You wait. Three seconds. One ... two ... three. You move forward. (*She is moving through the paces. Esther follows and imitates her.*) "May I help you?" you ask.

ESTHER. (*Trying it.*) "May I help you?"

TRUDI. They'll want something. That's why they're here. A party dress. A dress for dancing. A birthday, a funeral, a wedding. A new season arrives. A new job comes along. A uniform needs replacing. We get a lot of office girls. They'll want a suit. Or stockings. A big selling item. The housewives come for house dresses. The maids on Fifth, Irish girls. Paid on Friday. Love a night out. A special dress. Like what they see in magazines. They want glamour. (*Moving to the racks.*) You'll need a size. To which you'll lead them. You stand back. Two paces. (*She does so. Esther imitates.*) One. Two. You give

THE GLAMOUR HOUSE

by Lydia Stryk

1M, 4W

It is 1947. In the glamorous world of Trudi Stein's dress shop on Manhattan's Upper East Side, everything is cloaked in silence — until the arrival of an enigmatic new salesgirl, Esther Bayer, a young immigrant from Germany, whose very presence fills the joyless establishment with energy, laughter, and life. What ensues is a mysterious, obsessive relationship that culminates in revelation.

“Playwright Lydia Stryk displays an extraordinary talent for the medium. Her dialogue has an astonishing rhythm, a cadence that lets characterization flow naturally ... THE GLAMOUR HOUSE doesn't have a wasted moment. ... But what Stryk is best at is constructing a feeling of dread and of making the audience want more ... [She] slowly metes out the revelations in this compelling and touching drama, keeping us intimately involved ... This is the kind of drama that's certain to be performed for years to come. It has all the right ingredients of a classic.”

—**Windy City Times (Chicago)**

“Lydia Stryk is a master of the turn of phrase and taut dialogue ... but what makes [THE GLAMOUR HOUSE] remarkable besides the language is [her] ability to create characters, her understanding of how women interact with one another. It's a very contemporary play but nonetheless an interesting period piece.”

—**Chicago Public Radio**

“Lydia Stryk's winning THE GLAMOUR HOUSE is populated by richly crafted characters [and] offers a wonderful window into ... women's desire. It certainly has all the sheen and glamour an audience might seek.”

—**Chicago Tribune**

Also by Lydia Stryk
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