

SIDE 'A' ELMMA & GRACE

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. Then 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.

STREET
SIDE 'A'

ELMA. (U. R., drying a glass.) Listen to that wind. March is coming in like a lion. (Grace fiddles 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 banging 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?

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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. (Fiddles 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. But I was a headstrong brat, had to have my own way. I had my own way all right, and here I am now, a grass

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~~STOP SIDE 'A'~~

widow runnin' a restaurant, and I'll prob'ly die in this little town and they'll bury me out by the backhouse. (Will, the sheriff, comes in the front door, wind and snow flying through the door with him. He is a huge, saturnine man, well over six feet, who has a thick black beard and a scar on his forehead. He wears a battered black hat, clumsy overshoes, and a heavy mackinaw. He is somewhat forbidding.)

WILL. (On entering.) You girls been able to use your phone?

GRACE. No, Will. The operator don't answer.

WILL. That means all the lines are down. 'Bout time fer the Topeka bus, ain't it?

GRACE. Duh now.

WILL. You're gonna have to hold 'em here, don't know how long. The highway's blocked 'tween here and Topeka. May be all night gettin' it cleared.

GRACE. I was afraid a that.

WILL. They got the highway gang workin' on it now and the telephone company's tryin' to get the lines back up. March is comin' in like a lion, all right.

GRACE. Yah.

WILL. (Taking off his mackinaw, hanging it, going to the fire to warm his hands.) The station house's cold. Got any fresh coffee?

GRACE. (Goes to coffee urn.) It just went through, Will. Fresh as ya could want it.

WILL. (Goes to counter.) A storm like this makes me mad. (Grace laughs at his remark and gives him a cup of coffee.) It does. It makes me mad. It's just like all the elements had lost their reason.

GRACE. (Stands behind counter near Will.) Nothin' you can do about a wind like that.

WILL. Maybe it's just 'cause I'm a sheriff, but I like to see things in order.

GRACE. Let the wind blow! I just pray to God to leave a roof over my head. That's about all a person can do. (The sound of the bus is heard outside, its great motor coming to a stop.)

WILL. Here it is.

GRACE. Better fill some water glasses, Elma. (Elma gets water pitcher, fills glasses.) Remember, the doughnuts are left over from yesterday but it'll be all right to serve 'em. We got everything for sandwiches but cheese. We got no cheese.

WILL. You never got cheese, Grace. (Rises, crosses R.)

GRACE. (T. S. of counter.) I guess I'm kinda self-centered, Will. I don't care for cheese n'self, so I never think t' order it for someone else.

ELMA. Gee, I'm glad I'm not traveling on the bus tonight.

GRACE. I wonder who's drivin' tonight. This is Carl's night, isn't it?

ELMA. I think so.

GRACE. Yes it is. (Obviously the idea of Carl pleases her. She nudges Elma confidentially.) Remember, honey, I always serve Carl.

ELMA. Sure, Grace. (The front door swings open, some of the snow flying inside, and Cherie, a young blonde girl of about twenty, enters as though driven. She wears no hat, and her hair, despite one brilliant bobby pin, blows wild about her face. She is pretty in a fragile, girlish way. She runs immediately to the counter to solicit the attention of Grace and Elma. She lugs along an enormous straw suitcase that is worn and battered. Her clothes, considering her situation, are absurd: a skimpy jacket of tarnished metal cloth edged with not luxuriant fur, a dress of sequins and net, and gilded sandals that expose brightly enameled toes. Also, her make-up has been applied under the influence of having seen too many movies. Her lipstick creates a voluptuous pair of lips that aren't her own, and her eyebrows also form a somewhat arbitrary line. But despite all these defects, her prettiness still is apparent, and she has the appeal of a tender little bird. Her origin is the Ozarks (and her speech is Southern.)

CHERIE. (Anxious, direct.) Is there some place I kin hide?

GRACE. (Taken aback.) What?

CHERIE. There's a man on that bus . . . I wanta hide.

GRACE. (Stumped.) Well, gee . . . I dunno.

CHERIE. (Seeing the sign above the rear door U. L., starting for it.) I'll hide in the powder room. If a tall, lanky cowboy comes in here, you kin just tell him I disappeared.

GRACE. (Her voice stopping Cherie at the door.) Hey, you can't hide out there. It's cold. You'll freeze your . . .

CHERIE. (Flourishing opened the door, seeing it is an outside toilet.) Oh! It's outside.

GRACE. This is just a country town.