

SIDE 'B' WILL, GRACE & ELMA

widow runnin' a restaurant, and I'll probly 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, clumpy oxford shoes, and a heavy mackinaw. He looks 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. Due 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, banging 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. (U. S. of counter.) I guess I'm kinda self-centered, Will. I don't care for cheese n'self, so I never think 'r 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.

~~STOP 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 saw suitcase that is worn and battered. Her clothes, considering her situation, are absurd: a skimpy jacket of tarnished metal cloth edged with not luxurious fur, a dress of sequins and net, and gilded sandals that expose brightly enamelled 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. (Having opened the door, seeing it is an outside toilet.) Oh! It's outside.~~

~~GRACE. This is just a country town.~~