

SIDE 'E' CHERIE, ELMA

CARL. What happened? Did the mice get it?
 GRACE. None of your wise remarks.

CARL. O.K. Make it a ham on rye, then.
 GRACE. (At breadbox.) I'm sorry, Carl, but we got no rye, either.

DR. LYMAN. (Chiming in, from his table.) I can vouch for that, sir. I just asked for rye, myself, and was refused. (Elma, at stove, watches.)

CARL. (Turns.) Look, Master, don't ya think ya oughta lay off that stuff till ya get home and meet the missus?

DR. LYMAN. The missus, did you say? (He laughs.) I have no missus, sir. I'm free. I can travel the universe, with no one to await my arrival anywhere.

CARL. (Sits on stool at counter. To Grace, bidding for a little sympathy.) That's all I ever get on my bus, drunks and hoodlums. (Dr. Lyman signals Elma for more soda.)

GRACE. How's fer whole wheat, Carl?

CARL. O.K. Make it whole wheat. (Elma gets soda from refrigerator, takes it to Dr. Lyman.)

DR. LYMAN. (To Elma, as she brings him more soda.) Yes, I am free. My third and last wife deserted me several years ago . . . for a ballplayer. (He chuckles as though it were all a big absurdity.)

ELMA. (Starts back to counter, stops. A little astounded.) Your third? (Grace makes sandwich, gives it and coffee to Carl, stands behind counter talking to him as he eats.)

DR. LYMAN. (Elma sits at his table.) Yes, my third! Getting married is a careless habit I've fallen into. Sometime, really, I must give it all up. Oh, but she was pretty! Blonde, like the young lady over there. (He indicates Cherie.) And southern, too, or pretended to be. However, she was kinder than the others when we parted. She didn't care about money. All she wanted was to find new marital bliss with her ballplayer, so I never had to pay her alimony . . . as if I could. (He chuckles, sighs and recalls another.) My second wife was a different type entirely. But she was very pretty, too. I have always exercised the most excellent taste, if not the best judgment. She was a student of mine, when I was teaching at an eastern university. Alas! she sued me for divorce on the grounds that I was incontinent and always drunk. (Elma rises, starts L.) I didn't have

a chance to resign from that position. (Exit Dr. Lyman, who manages to chuckle about it.)

CHERIE. (From the counter.) Hey! how much are them doughnuts? (She is counting the coins in her purse.)

ELMA. (Leaving Dr. Lyman, hurrying back to counter.) I'll make you a special price, two for a nickel.

CHERIE. O.K.

DR. LYMAN. (Musingly he begins to recite as though for his own enjoyment.)

"That time of year thou may'st in me behold
 When yellow leaves, or none, or few, do hang
 Upon those boughs —"

CHERIE. (She shivers, Elma hands her doughnuts on a plate, Cherie gives Elma money and crosses to stove.) I never was so cold in my life.

ELMA. Do you honestly work in a night club?

CHERIE. (Brightening with this recognition.) Sure! I'm a chanteuse. I call myself Cherie.

ELMA. That's French, isn't it?

CHERIE. I dunno. I jest seen the name once and it kinda appealed 't me.

ELMA. It's French. It means "dear one." Is that all the name you use?

CHERIE. (Sits at a table.) Sure. Thass all the name ya need. Like Hildegarde. She's a chanteuse, too.

ELMA. (Crosses to Cherie with coffee.) Chanteuse means singer.

CHERIE. How come you know so much? (Grace sits at counter with Carl.)

ELMA. I'm taking French in high school.

CHERIE. Oh! (A reflective pause.) I never got as far as high school. See, I was the oldest girl left in the family after my sister Violet ran away. I had two more sisters, both younger'n me, and five brothers, most of 'em older. Was they mean! Anyway, I had to quit school when I was twelve, to stay home and take care a the house and do the cookin'. I'm a real good cook. Honest!

ELMA. (Sits L. of Cherie at table.) Did you study singing?

CHERIE. (Shaking her head.) Huh-uh. Jest picked it up listenin' to the radio, seen' movies, tryin' to put over my songs as good as them people did.

ELMA. How did you get started in the night club?

START
 SIDE 'E'
 CHERIE, ELMA

STOP
SIDE 'E'

CHERIE. I won a amateur contest. Down in Joplin, Missouri. I won the second prize there . . . a couple boys won first prize . . . they juggled milk bottles . . . I don't think that's fair, do you? To make an artistic performer compete with jugglers and knife-throwers and people like that?

ELMA. No, I don't.

CHERIE. Anyway, second prize was good enough to get me to Kanz City t'enter the contest there. It was a real big contest and I didn't win any prize at all, but it got me the job at the Blue Dragon.

ELMA. Is that where you're from, Joplin? (Dr. Lyman is reading a book.)

CHERIE. (With an acceptance of nature's catastrophes.) No. Joplin's a big town. I lived 'bout a hundred miles from there, in River Gulch, a fit town in the Ozarks. I lived there till the floods come, three years ago this spring and washed us all away.

ELMA. Gee, that's too bad.

CHERIE. I dunno where any a my folks are now, 'cept my baby sister Nan. We all just separated when the floods come and I took Nan into Joplin with me. She got a job as a waitress and I went to work in Liggett's drug store, 'til the amateur contest opened.

ELMA. It must be fun working in a night club.

CHERIE. (A fleeting look of disillusionment comes over her face.) Well . . . it ain't all roses.

CARL. (Leaving Grace for the moment, crosses to Will, gets his coat.) You gonna be here a while, Will?

WILL. I reckon. (Elma rises, crosses to below counter.)

CARL. I'm gonna send them cowboys in here now, and leave you to look after 'em.

WILL. I'll do my best.

CARL. Tell ya somethin' else, Will. (Carl looks at Dr. Lyman cautiously, as though he didn't want to be overheard by him, then moves very closely to Will and whispers something in his ear. Will looks very surprised.)

WILL. I'll be jiggered.

CARL. So, ya better keep an eye on him, too. (Starts off.)

WILL. Ain't you comin' back, Carl?

CARL. (Obviously he is faking, and a look between him and Grace tells us something is up between them. He winks at her and

stretches.) To tell the truth, Will, I git so darn stiff, sittin' at the wheel all day, I thought I'd go out fer a long walk.

WILL. In this blizzard? You gone crazy? (Elma is doing dishes behind the counter.)

CARL. No. That's just the kinda fella I am, Will. I like to go fer long walks in the rain and snow. Freshens a fella up. Sometimes I walk fer hours. (Grace clears dishes from counter.)

WILL. Ya do?

CARL. Yah. Fer hours. That's just the kinda fella I am. (He saunters out R. new, whistling to show his nonchalant.)

WILL. (Rises, crosses L. to counter. To Grace.) Imagine! Coin' out fer a walk, a night like this.

GRACE. Well, it's really very good for one, Will. It really is.

CHERIE. (Crosses L. to counter carrying coffee and doughnuts, sits on stool and leans over counter to talk to Elma privately.) He said he was gonna wake him up. Then he'll be in here pretty soon. You won't let on I said anything 'bout him, will ya? (Will sits near stove, reads newspaper.)

ELMA. No. Cross my heart. (Dr. Lyman is suddenly reminded of another poem, which he begins to recite in full voice as he rises.)

DR. LYMAN.

"Shall I compare thee to a Summer's day?
Thou art more lovely and more temperate:
Rough winds do shake the darling buds of May,
And Summer's lease hath all too short a date."

ELMA. (Still behind counter, she hears Dr. Lyman, smiles fondly, and calls to him across room.) Why, that's one of my favorite sonnets.

DR. LYMAN. It is? Do you read Shakespeare? (Grace crosses to Dr. Lyman's table, which she clears, taking dishes back to counter. Dr. Lyman is at counter.)

ELMA. I studied him at school, in English class. I loved the sonnets. I memorized some of them myself.

DR. LYMAN. (Sits on stool.) I used to know them all, by heart. And many of the plays I could recite in their entirety. I often did, for the entertainment and the annoyance of my friends. (He and Elma laugh together.)

ELMA. Last fall I memorized the Balcony Scene from Romeo and Juliet. A boy in class played Romeo and we presented it for con-vocation one day.