

SIDE 'Q' ELMA, GRACE

BO. C'mon, Virge, y'old raccoon!
VIRGIL. (Demurring.) Now look, Bo . . . listen t'me for a second.
BO. (Who can't listen to anything in his high revelry. One arm is around Cherie, the other hugs at Virgil.) C'mon! Daggone it, we wasted enough time. Let's git goin'.
VIRGIL. (Pulls away.) Listen, Bo. Now be quiet jest a minute. You gotta hear me, Bo. You don't need me no more. I ain't goin'.
BO. (Not believing his ears.) You ain't what?
VIRGIL. I . . . I ain't goin' with ya, Bo.
BO. (Flabbergasted.) Well, what ya know about that?
VIRGIL. It's best I don't, Bo.
BO. Jest one blame catastrophe after another.
VIRGIL. I . . . I got another job in mind, Bo. Where the feed's mighty good, and I'll be lookin' after the cattle. I meant to tell ya 'bout it 'fore this.
BO. Virge, I can't b'lieve you'd leave yor old sidekick. Yor jokin', man.
VIRGIL. No . . . I ain't jokin', Bo. I ain't.
BO. Well, I'll be a . . .
CHERIE. Virgil—I wish you'd come. I liked you . . . 'fore I ever liked Bo.
BO. Ya know Cherry likes ya, Virge. It jest don't make sense, yor not comin'.
VIRGIL. Well . . . I'm doin' the right thing. I know I am.
BO. Who's gonna look after the cattle?
VIRGIL. Hank. Every bit as good as I ever was.
BO. (Very disheartened.) Aw, Virge, I dunno why ya have to pull a stunt like this.
VIRGIL. You better hurry, Bo. That driver's hot gonna wait all day.
BO. (Starting to pull Virgil, to drag him away just as he tried once with Cherie.) Daggone it, yor my buddy, and I ain't gonna let ya go. Yor goin' with Cherry and me 'cause we want ya . . .
VIRGIL. (It's getting very hard for him to control his feelings.) No . . . No . . . lemme be, Bo . . .
CHERIE. (Holding Bo back.) Bo . . . ya can't do it that way . . . ya jest can't . . . if he don't wanna go, ya can't make him . . .

64

BO. But, Cherry, there ain't a reason in the world he shouldn't go. It's plumb crazy.
CHERIE. Well, sometimes people have their own reasons, Bo.
BO. Oh? (He reconsiders.) Well, I just hate to think of gettin' along without old Virge.
VIRGIL. (Laughing.) In a couple weeks . . . ya'll never miss me.
BO. (Disheartened.) Aw, Virge!
VIRGIL. Get along with ya now.
CHERIE. Virgil—(Brightly.) will ya come and visit us, Virgil?
VIRGIL. I'll be up in the summer.
BO. Where ya gonna be, Virge?
VIRGIL. I'll write ya th' address. Don't have time to give it to ya now. Nice place. Mighty nice. Now hurry and get on your bus. (Carl bunks the horn off R.)
BO. (Managing a quick embrace.) So long, old boy. So long!
VIRGIL. Bye, Bo! C'bye! (Now, to shade off any tears, Bo grabs Cherie's hand.)
BO. C'mon, Cherry. Let's make it fast. (Before they are out the door, a thought occurs to Bo. He stops, takes off his leather jacket and helps Cherie into it. He has been gallant. Then he picks up her suitcase and they go out the front door, calling their farewells behind them.)
CHERIE. 'Bye—'bye, everyone! 'Bye! (Virgil stands at the door, waving good-bye. Elma runs to window. His eyes look a little moist. In a moment, the bus's motor is heard to start up. Then the bus leaves.)
GRACE. (From behind counter.) Mister, we gotta close this place up now, if Elma and me're gonna get any rest. We won't be open again till eight o'clock when the day girl comes on. The next bus through is to Albuquerque, at eight forty-five. (Elma returns to counter.)
VIRGIL. Albuquerque? I guess that's as good a place as any. (He remains by the front entrance, looking out on the frosty morning. Elma and Grace continue their work behind the counter.)
ELMA. Poor Dr. Lyman!
GRACE. Say, did you hear what Carl told me about that guy?
ELMA. No. What was it, Grace?
GRACE. Well, according to Carl, they run him outa Kanz City.
ELMA. I don't believe it.

65

START
SIDE 'Q'
ELMA, GRACE

GRACE. Honey, Carl got it straight from the detective at the bus terminal.

ELMA. (*Afraid to ask.*) What . . . did Dr. Lyman do?

GRACE. Well, lots of old fogies like him just can't let young girls alone. (*A wondering look comes over Elma's face.*) So, it's a good thing you didn't meet him in Topeka.

ELMA. Do you think . . . he wanted to make love, to me?

GRACE. I don't think he meant to play hopscotch.

ELMA. (*Very moved.*) Gee!

GRACE. Next time any guy comes in here and starts gettin' fresh, you come tell your Aunt Grace. (*Virgil is seated on chair by a table.*)

ELMA. I guess I'm kinda stupid.

GRACE. (*Elma is at C.*) Everyone has gotta learn. (*Looking into refrigerator.*) Now Monday, for sure, I gotta order some cheese.

ELMA. I'll remind you.

GRACE. (*Coming to Elma, apologetically.*) Elma, honey?

ELMA. Yes?

GRACE. I could kill Will Masters for sayin' anything about me and Carl. I didn't want you to know.

ELMA. I don't see why I shouldn't know, Grace. I don't want a baby forever.

GRACE. Of course you don't. But still, you're a kid, and I don't want a set no examples or anything. Do you think you can overlook it and not think bad of me?

ELMA. Sure, Grace.

GRACE. 'Cause I'm a restless sort of woman, and every once in a while, I gotta have me a man, just to keep m'self from gettin' grouchy. (*Elma goes behind counter.*)

ELMA. It's not my business, Grace. (*She stops a moment to consider herself in the mirror, rather pleased.*) Just think, he wanted to make love to me.

GRACE. Now don't start gettin' stuck on yourself.

ELMA. I'm not, Grace. But it's nice to know that someone can feel that way.

GRACE. You're not gonna have any trouble. Just wait'll you get to college and start meeting all those cute boys. (*Grace seems to savor this.*)

ELMA. All right. I'll wait.

66

GRACE. (*Takes apron off.*) You can run along now, honey. All I gotta do is empty the garbage.

ELMA. (*Getting her coat from closet behind counter.*) O.K.

GRACE. G'night!

ELMA. (*Coming from behind counter, slipping into her coat.*)

Good night, Grace. See you Monday. (*Passing Virgil.*) It was

very nice knowing you, Virgil, and I just loved your music.

VIRGIL. Thank you, Miss. G'night. (*Elma goes out front door.*)

GRACE. We're closing now, Mister.

VIRGIL. (*Coming in.*) Any place warm I could stay till eight o'clock?

GRACE. Now that the police station's closed, I don't know where you could go, unless ya wanted to take a chance of wakin' up the man that runs the hotel.

VIRGIL. No—I wouldn't want to be any trouble.

GRACE. There'll be a bus to Kanx City in a few minutes. I'll put the sign out and they'll stop.

VIRGIL. No, thanks. No point a goin' back there.

GRACE. Then I'm sorry, Mister, but you're just left out in the cold. (*She carries a can of garbage out the rear door leaving Virgil for the moment alone.*)

VIRGIL. (*To himself.*) Well . . . that's what happens to some people. (*Quietly, he picks up his guitar and goes out. Grace comes back in, locks back door, snaps wall switch, then yawns and stretches, then sees that the front door is locked. The sun outside is just high enough now to bring a dim light into the restaurant. Grace stops at the rear door and casts her eyes tiredly over the establishment. One senses her aloneness. She sighs, then goes out the door. A cold sweep of morning wind whistles over the countryside. The curtain comes down on an empty stage.*)

STOP SIDE Q

67