

BO

Hear that, Virge? Yahoo! We're gettin' married after all. Cherry's goin' back with me.

CHERIE

(At counter)

Ain't it wonderful when someone so awful turns out t'be so nice? We're gettin' married. I'm goin' to Montana.

(CARL sticks his head through the door and calls impatiently.)

CARL

Hey! All aboard, fer Christ's sake!

(Out. BO grabs VIRGIL now by the arm.)

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 tugs at VIRGIL)

C'mon! Doggone it, we wasted enough time. Let's git goin'.

VIRGIL

Listen, Bo. Now be quiet jest a minute. You gotta hear me, Bo. You don't need me no more. I ain't goin'.

(*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 not 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 wanta go, ya can't make him . . .

BO

But, Cherry, there ain't a reason in the world he shouldn't go. It's plum 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, Virgel

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 honks the horn.*)

BO

(*Managing a quick embrace*)

So long, old boy. So long!

VIRGIL

'Bye, Bo! G'bye!

(*Now, to stave 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, calling their farewells behind them.*)

CHERIE

Bye—bye—bye, everyone! Bye!

(VIRGIL stands at the door, waving good-bye. 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.

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.

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.

ELMA

I guess I'm kinda stupid.

GRACE

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 wanta be a baby forever.

GRACE

Of course you don't. But still, you're a kid, and I don't wanta 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.

BUS STOP

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.

GRACE

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.)

GRACE

We're closing now, Mister.

VIRGIL

(Coming center)
 Any place warm I could stay till eight o'clock?

GRACE

Now that the p'lice 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 wanta be any trouble.

GRACE

There'll be a bus to Kanz 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. The curtain comes down on an empty stage.*)

COPYRIGHT, AS AN UNPUBLISHED WORK,
1954, BY WILLIAM INGE
COPYRIGHT, 1955, BY WILLIAM INGE

All rights, including the right of reproduction in whole or in part, or in any form are reserved under International and Pan-American Copyright Conventions. Published in New York by Random House, Inc., and simultaneously in Toronto, Canada, by Random House of Canada, Limited.

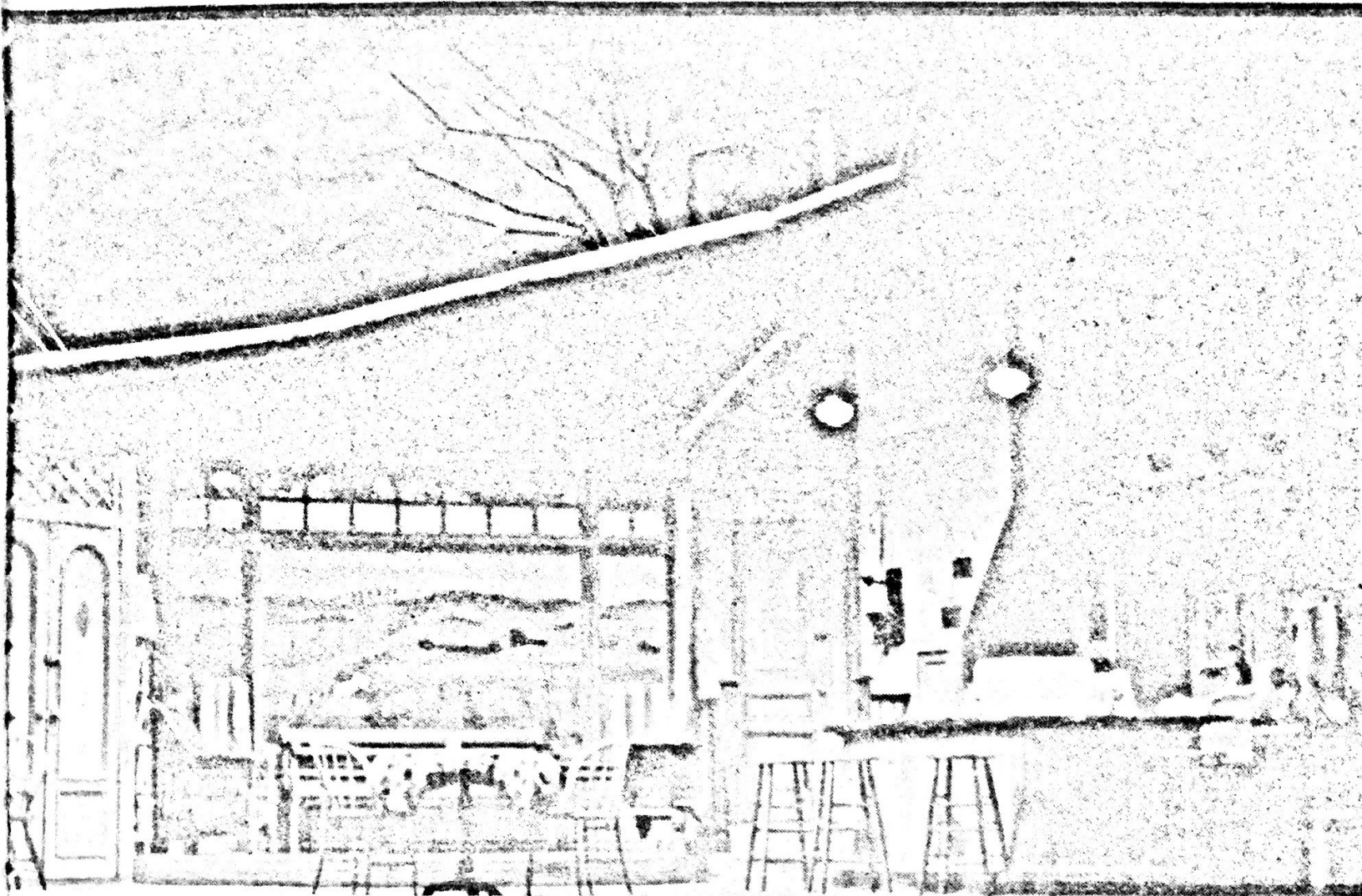
CAUTION: *Professionals and amateurs are hereby warned that BUS STOP being fully protected under the copyright laws of the United States, the British Empire including the Dominion of Canada, and all other countries of the Copyright Union, is subject to royalty. All rights, including professional, amateur, motion picture, recitation, lecturing, public reading, radio and television broadcasting, and the rights of translation into foreign languages, are strictly reserved. Particular emphasis is laid on the question of readings, permission for which must be obtained in writing from the Author's agent. All enquiries should be addressed to the Author's representative, Audrey Wood, MCA Artists Limited, 598 Madison Avenue, New York 22, New York.*

Photographs facing pages 82 and 140 by Zinn-Arthur
Photograph facing page 42 by New York Times

MANUFACTURED IN THE UNITED STATES OF AMERICA

BUS STOP

by WILLIAM INGE



BUS STOP was first presented by Robert Whitehead and Roger L. Stevens at The Music Box, New York City, March 2, 1955, with the following cast:

ELMA DUCKWORTH	Phyllis Love
GRACE	Elaine Stritch
WILL MASTERS	Lou Polan
CHERIE	Kim Stanley
DR. GERALD LYMAN	Anthony Ross
CARL	Patrick McVey
VIRGIL BLESSING	Crahan Denton
BO DECKER	Albert Salmi

Directed by Harold Clurman

Setting by Boris Aronson

Costumes and lighting by Paul Morrison

SCENES

The action of the play takes place in a street-corner restaurant in a small town about thirty miles west of Kansas City.

ACT ONE

A night in early March. 1:00 A.M.

ACT TWO

A few minutes later.

ACT THREE

Early morning. About 5:00 A.M.

ACT ONE

ACT ONE

The entire play is set inside a street-corner restaurant in a small Kansas town about thirty miles west of Kansas City. The restaurant serves also as an occasional rest stop for the bus lines in the area. It is a dingy establishment with few modern improvements: scenic calendars and pretty-girl posters decorate the soiled walls, and illumination comes from two badly shaded light bulbs that hang on dangling cords from the ceiling; in the center are several quartet tables with chairs, for dining; at far left is the counter with six stools before it, running the depth of the setting; behind the counter are the usual restaurant equipment and paraphernalia (coffee percolator, dishes, glasses, electric refrigerator, etc.); on top of the counter are several large plates of doughnuts, sweet rolls, etc. under glass covers. At the far right, close to the outside entrance-door, are a magazine stand and a rack of shelves piled with paper-back novels and books. At back center is an old-fashioned Franklin stove. At the back right is a great window that provides a view of the local scenery. Against the wall, beneath the window, are two long benches meant for waiting passengers. At the back left is the rear door, close to the upper end of the country. Above this door is a dim hand-painted sign, "Rest Rooms in the Rear."

It is one A.M. on a night in early March and a near blizzard is raging outside. Through the window we can see the sweeping wind and flying snow. Inside, in comparison, the scene is warm and cozy, the Franklin stove radiating all the heat of

which it is capable. Two young women, in a hurry, have lost their starched freshness, 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.

When the curtain goes up, ELMA stands far right, looking out the large plate-glass window, awed by the fury of the elements. GRACE is at the telephone.

ELMA

Listen to that wind. March is coming in like a lion. (GRACE jiggles 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 hanging 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.

BUS STOP

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*.

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

(Going behind counter)

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

Well, I got a home to go to, but there ain't anyone in it.

ELMA

Where's your husband now, Grace?

How should I know?

ELMA

Don't you miss him?

GRACE

No!

ELMA

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

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)

'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

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 telephone again)* Now, maybe I can get the operator. *(Jiggles 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) 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

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 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 looks somewhat forbidding.)

WILL

(On entering)

You girls been able to use your phone?

GRACE

No, Will. The operator don't answer.

BUS STOP

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, hanging it, going to the fire to warm his hands*)

The station house's *cold*. Got any fresh coffee?

GRACE

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

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. 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.

GRACE

I guess I'm kinda self-centered, Will. I don't care for cheese m'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 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*

fects, 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, 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.

CHERIE

(Starting again)

I kin stand anything fer twenty minutes.

GRACE

(Stopping her again)

I got news for ya. The bus may be here all night.

CHERIE

(Turning)

What?

GRACE

The highway's blocked. You're gonna have to stay here till it's cleared.

CHERIE

*(Shutting the door, coming to counter, lugging her suitcase.
She is about to cry)*

Criminey! What am I gonna do?

GRACE

(Coming from behind counter, going to front door)

I better go out and tell Carl 'bout the delay.

CHERIE

(Dropping to a stool at the counter)

What am I gonna do? What am I ever gonna do?

ELMA

(In a friendly way)

There's a little hotel down the street.

CHERIE

What ya take me for? A millionaire?

WILL

(Coming to CHERIE with a professional interest)

What's the trouble, Miss?

CHERIE

(Looking at WILL suspiciously)

You a p'liceman?

WILL

I'm the local sheriff.

ELMA

(Feeling some endorsement is called for)

But everyone likes him. Really!

CHERIE

Well . . . I ain't askin' t' have no one arrested.

WILL

Who says I'm gonna arrest anyone? What's your trouble?

CHERIE

I . . . I need protection.

WILL

What from?

CHERIE

There's a man after me. He's a cowboy.

WILL

(*Looking around*)

Where is he?

CHERIE

He's on the bus asleep, him and his buddy. I jumped off the bus the very second it stopped, to make my getaway. But there ain't no place to *get* away to. And he'll be in here purty soon. You just *gotta* make him lemme alone.

WILL

Ya meet him on the bus?

CHERIE

No. I met him in Kansas City. I work at the Blue Dragon night club there, down by the stockyards. *He* come there with the annual rodeo, and him and the resta the cowboys was at the night club ev'ry night. Ev'ry night there was a big fight. The boss says he ain't gonna let the cowboys in when they come back next year.

WILL

Then he followed ya on the bus?

CHERIE

He *put* me on the bus. I'm bein' abducted.

WILL

Abducted! But you took time to pack a suitcase!

CHERIE

I was goin' somewhere else, tryin' to get away from him, but he picked me up and carried me to the bus and put me on it. I din have nothin' to say about it at all.

WILL

Where's he plan on takin' ya?

CHERIE

Says he's got a ranch up in Montana. He says we're gonna git married soon as we get there.

WILL

And yor against it?

CHERIE

I don't wanta go up to some God-forsaken ranch in Montana.

WILL

Well, if this cowboy's really takin' ya against yor will, I s'pose I'll have to stop him from it.

CHERIE

You just don't know this cowboy. He's mean.

WILL

I reckon I kin handle him. You relax now. I'll be around mosta the night. If there's any trouble, I'll put a stop to it.

ELMA

You're safe with Will here. Will is very respected around here. He's never lost a fight.

WILL

What're ya talkin' about, Elma? Of course I've lost a fight . . . once.

ELMA

Grace always said you were *invincible*.

WILL

There ain't no one that's . . . *invincible*. A man's gotta learn that, the sooner the better. A good fighter has gotta know what it is to *get* licked. Thass what makes the difference 'tween a fighter and a *bully*.

CHERIE

(*Shuddering*)

There's gonna be trouble. I kin feel it in my bones.

(*Enter DR. GERALD LYMAN, a man of medium height, about fifty, with a ruddy, boyish face that smilingly defies the facts of his rather scholarly glasses and iron-gray hair. He wears an old tweed suit of good quality underneath a worn Burberry. His clothes are mussed, and he wears no hat, probably having left it somewhere; for he has been drinking and is, at present, very jubilant. He looks over the restaurant approvingly.*)

DR. LYMAN

Ah! "This castle hath a pleasant seat."

CHERIE

(To ELMA)

Could I hide my suitcase behind the counter, so's he won't see it when he comes in? I ain't gonna say anything to him at all 'bout not goin' on to Montana with him. I'm just gonna let 'im think I'm goin' 'til the bus pulls out and he finds I ain't on it. Thass th' only thing I know t' do.

ELMA

(Taking the suitcase and putting it behind counter)

Oh, you needn't worry with Will here.

CHERIE

Think so? (She studies WILL) Looks kinda like Moses, don't he?

ELMA

He is a very religious man. Would you believe it? He's a deacon in the Congregational Church.

CHERIE

(Just because she happens to think of it)

My folks was Holy Rollers. Will ya gimme a cup of coffee, please? Lotsa cream.

(ELMA draws a cup of coffee for her. Then CARL, the bus driver, comes in, followed by GRACE. CARL is a hefty man, loud and hearty, who looks very natty in his uniform.)

WILL

(Calling to him from across the room)

Howdy, Carl! You bring this wind?

CARL

(Hollering back)

No! It brought me!

(This greeting probably has passed between them a dozen times, but they still relish it as new.)

GRACE

Aren't you the comedian?

CARL

The wind is doin' ninety miles an hour. The bus is doin' twenty. What's *your* guess about the roads, Will?

WILL

They got the highway gang out. It may take a few hours.

CARL

Telephone lines down, too?

WILL

Yah. But they're workin' on 'em.

(DR. LYMAN, having got his extremities warmed at the fire, seeks CARL privately to make certain clarifications.)

DR. LYMAN

Driver, it seems to me we are still in the state of Kansas. Is that right?

CARL

What do ya mean, *still*? You been in the state of Kansas about a half hour.

DR. LYMAN

But I don't understand. I was told, when I left Kansas City, that I would be across the state line immediately. And now I find . . .

CARL

(*Eying DR. LYMAN suspiciously*)

You was kinda anxious to get across that state line, too, wasn't you, Jack?

DR. LYMAN

(*Startled*)

Why . . . what ever do you mean?

CARL

Nothin'. Anyway, you're across the line now. In case you didn't know it, Kansas City is in *Missouri*.

DR. LYMAN

Are you joking?

CARL

There's a Kansas City, Kansas, too, but *you* got on in Kansas City, Missouri. That's the trouble with you Easterners. You don't know anything about any of the country west of the Hudson River.

DR. LYMAN

Come, come now. Don't scold.

GRACE

(As CARL gets out of his heavy coat)

Carl, let me hang up your coat fer ya, while you get warm at the stove.

(DR. LYMAN's eyes brighten when he sees ELMA, and he bows before her like a cavalier.)

DR. LYMAN

"Nymph in thy orisons, be all my sins remembered!"

ELMA

(Smiling)

I'm sorry your bus is held up.

DR. LYMAN

Oohh! Is that a nice way to greet me?

ELMA

(Confused)

I mean . . .

DR. LYMAN

After my loving greeting, all you can think of to say is, "I'm sorry your bus is held up." Well, I'm not. I would much rather sit here looking into the innocent blue of your eyes than continue riding on that monotonous bus.

ELMA

Don't you have to get somewhere?

DR. LYMAN

I have a ticket in my pocket to Denver, but I don't have to get there. I never have to get *anywhere*. I travel around from one town to another just to prove to myself that I'm *free*.

ELMA

The bus probably won't get into Denver for another day.

DR. LYMAN

Ah, well! What is our next stop?

ELMA

Topeka.

DR. LYMAN

Topeka? Oh, yes! that's where the famous hospital is, isn't it?

ELMA

The Menninger Clinic? Yes, it's a very famous place. Lots of movie stars go there for nervous breakdowns and things.

DR. LYMAN

(Wryly)

Does the town offer anything else in the way of diversion?

ELMA

It's the capital of Kansas. It's almost as big as Kansas City. They have a university and a museum, and sometimes symphony concerts and plays. I go over there every Sunday to visit my married sister.

DR. LYMAN

Aren't there any Indian tribes around here that have war dances?

ELMA

(*Laughing*)

No, silly! We're very civilized.

DR. LYMAN

I'll make my own judgment about that. Meanwhile, you may fix me a double shot of rye whiskey . . . on the rocks.

ELMA

I'm sorry, sir. We don't sell drinks.

DR. LYMAN

You don't sell drinks?

ELMA

Not intoxicating drinks. No, sir.

DR. LYMAN

Alas!

ELMA

We have fresh coffee, homemade pies and cakes, all kinds of sandwiches . . .

DR. LYMAN

No, my girl. You're not going to sober me up with your dainties. I am prepared for such emergencies. (*Draws a pint bottle of whiskey from his overcoat pocket*) You may give me a bottle of your finest lemon soda.

ELMA

(Whispering)

You'd better not let Will see you do that. You're not supposed to.

DR. LYMAN

Who is *he*, the sheriff?

ELMA

Yes. Lots of people do spike their drinks here and we never say anything, but Will would have to make you stop if *he* saw you.

DR. LYMAN

I shall be *most* cautious. I promise.

(She sets the bottle of soda before him as he smiles at her benignly. He pours some soda in a glass, then some whiskey, and ambles over to a table, far right, sitting down with his drink before him. WILL moves over to CARL, who's at the end of the counter chiding GRACE, where the two of them have been standing, talking in very personal voices that can't be overheard.)

WILL

I sure don't envy ya, Carl, drivin' in weather like this.

CARL

(Making it sound like a personal observation)

Yah! March is comin' in like a lion.

WILL

This all the passengers ya got?

CARL

There's a coupla crazy cowboys rolled up in the back seat, asleep. I thought I woke 'em, but I guess I didn't.

WILL

Shouldn't you go out and do it now?

CARL

I'd jest as soon they stayed where they're at. One of 'em's a real troublemaker. You know the kind, first time off a ranch and wild as a bronco. He's been on the make fer this li'l blonde down here . . .

(Indicates CHERIE.)

WILL

She was tellin' me.

CARL

I've had a good mind to put him off the bus, the way he's been actin'. I say, there's a time and place for ev'rything.

WILL

That bus may get snowbound purty soon.

CARL

I'll go wake 'em in a minute, Will. Just lemme have a li'l time here. (WILL sizes up the situation as CARL returns his attention to GRACE, then WILL picks up a copy of the Kansas City Star, sitting down close to the fire to read) Ya know what, Grace? This is the first time you and I ever had more'n twenty minutes t'gether.

GRACE

(Coyly)

So what?

CARL

Oh, I dunno. I'll prob'ly be here mosta the night. It'd sure be nice to have a nice li'l apartment to go to, some place to sit and listen to the radio, with a good lookin' woman . . . somethin' like you . . . to talk with . . . maybe have a few beers.

GRACE

That wouldn't be a hint or anything, would it?

CARL

(Faking innocence)

Why? Do you have an apartment like that, Grace?

GRACE

Yes, I do. But I never told *you* about it. Did that ornery Dobson fella tell you I had an apartment over the restaurant?

CARL

(In a query)

Dobson? Dobson? I can't seem to remember anyone named Dobson.

GRACE

You know him better'n *I* do. He comes through twice a week with the Southwest Bus. He told me you and him meet in Topeka sometimes and paint the town.

BUS STOP

CARL

Dobson? Oh, yah, I know Dobson. Vern Dobson. A prince of a fella.

GRACE

Well, if he's been gabbin' to you about my apartment, I can tell ya he's oney been up there *once*, when he come in here with his hand cut, and I took him up there to bandage it. Now that's the oney time he was ever up there. On my word of honor.

CARL

Oh, Vern Dobson speaks very highly of you, Grace. Very highly.

GRACE

Well . . . he better. Now, what ya gonna have?

CARL

Make it a ham and cheese on rye.

GRACE

I'm sorry, Carl. We got no cheese.

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.

CARL

Look, Mister, 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

(To GRACE, bidding for a little sympathy)
That's all I ever get on my bus, drunks and hoodlums.

GRACE

How's fer whole wheat, Carl?

CARL

O.K. Make it whole wheat.

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

*(A little astounded)*Your *third*?

DR. LYMAN

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. I didn't have a chance to resign from that position.

(Still he 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.



BUS STOP

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

(Shivering, she goes to the stove)

I never was so cold in my life.

ELMA

(Setting the doughnuts before her)

Do you honestly work in a night club?

CHERIE

(Brightening with this recognition)

Sure! I'm a *chanteuse*. I call m'self *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?

BUS STOP

CHERIE

Sure. Thass all the name ya need. Like Hildegarde. She's a *chanteuse*, too.

ELMA

Chanteuse means singer.

CHERIE

How come *you* know so much?

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 fam'ly 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

Did you *study* singing?

CHERIE

(*Shaking her head*)

Huh-uh. Jest picked it up listenin' to the radio, seein' movies, tryin' to put over my songs as good as them people did.

ELMA

How did you get started in the night club?

CHERIE

I won a amateur contest. Down in Joplin, Missouri. I won the second prize there . . . a coupla 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?

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 li'l 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)
You gonna be here a while, Will?

WILL

I reckon.

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?

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.

WILL

Ya do?

CARL

Yah. Fer hours. That's just the kinda fella I am.
(He saunters out now, whistling to show his non-chalance.)

WILL

(To GRACE)

Imagine! Goin' out fer a walk, a night like this.

GRACE

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

CHERIE

(Leaning 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?

ELMA

No. Cross my heart.

(DR. LYMAN is suddenly reminded of another poem, which he begins to recite in full voice.)

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?

ELMA

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

DR. LYMAN

(Leaving table, returning to counter)

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 convocation one day.

DR. LYMAN

Ah! I wish I had been there to see.

(CHERIE feels called upon to explain her own position in regard to Shakespeare, as ELMA resumes work behind counter.)

CHERIE

Where I went to school, we din read no Shakespeare 'til the ninth grade. In the ninth grade everyone read *Julius Caesar*. I oney got as far as the eighth. I seen Marlon Brando in the movie, though. I sure do like that Marlon Brando.

DR. LYMAN

(Now that CHERIE has called attention to herself)
Madam, where is thy Lochinvar?

CHERIE

(Giggling)

I don't understand anything you say, but I just love the way you say it.

DR. LYMAN

And I . . . understand *everything* I say . . . but privately despise the way I say it.

CHERIE

(Giggling)

That's so cute. (*A memory returns*) I had a very nice friend once that recited poetry.

DR. LYMAN

(*With spoofing seriousness*)

Whatever could have happened to him?

CHERIE

I dunno. He left town. His name was Mr. Everett Brubaker. He sold second-hand cars at the corner of Eighth and Wyandotte. He had a lovely Pontiac car-with-the-top-down. He talked nice, but I guess he really wasn't any nicer'n any of the others.

DR. LYMAN

The others?

CHERIE

Well . . . ya meet quite a few men in the place I worked at, the Blue Dragon night club, out by the stockyards. Ever hear of it?

DR. LYMAN

No, and I deeply regret the fact.

CHERIE

You're just sayin' that. An educated man like you, you wouldn't have no use fer the Blue Dragon.

DR. LYMAN

(With a dubious look)

I wouldn't?

(The front door swings open again and the two cowboys, BO DECKER and VIRGIL BLESSING enter. Their appearance now is rumpledly picturesque and they both could pass, at first glance, for outlaws. BO is in his early twenties, is tall and slim and good looking in an outdoors way. Now he is very unkempt. He wears faded jeans that cling to his legs like shedding skin; his boots, worn under his jeans are scuffed and dusty; and the Stetson on the back of his head is worn and tattered. Over a faded denim shirt he wears a shiny horsehide jacket, and around his neck is tied a bandana. VIRGIL is a man in his forties who seems to regard BO in an almost parental way. A big man, corpulent and slow moving, he seems almost an adjunct of BO. Dressed similarly to BO, perhaps a trifle more tidy, he carries a guitar in a case and keeps a bag of Bull Durham in his shirt pocket, out of which he rolls frequent cigarettes. Both men are still trying to wake up from their snooze, but BO is quick to recognize CHERIE. Neither cowboy has thought to shut the door behind them and the others begin to shiver.)

BUS STOP

BO

(In a full voice accustomed to speaking in an open field)
Hey! Why din anyone wake us up? Virg'n I mighta froze out there.

GRACE

Hey! Shut the door.

BO

(Calling across the room)

Cherry! how come you get off the bus, 'thout lettin' me know? That any way to treat the man you're gonna marry?

WILL

(Lifting his eyes from the paper)

Shut the door, cowboy!

(BO doesn't even hear WILL, but strides across the room to CHERIE, who is huddled over the counter as though hoping he might overlook her. VIRGIL, still rubbing sleep out of his eyes, lingers open-mouthed in the open doorway.)

BO

Thass no way to treat a fella, Cherry, to slip off the bus like ya wanted to get rid of him, maybe. And come in here and eat by yourself. I thought we'd have a li'l snack t'gether. Sometimes, I don't understand you, Cherry.

CHERIE

Fer the hunderth time, my name ain't *Cherry*.

BO

I cain't say it the way you do. What's wrong with Cherry?

CHERIE

It's kinda embarrassin'.

WILL

(In a firmer, louder voice)

Cowboy, will you have the decency to shut that door!

(VIRGIL now responds immediately and quickly closes the door as BO turns to WILL.)

BO

(There is nothing to call him for the moment but insolent)

Why, what's the matter with you, Mister? You afraid of a little fresh air? *(WILL glowers but BO is not fazed)* Why man, ya oughta breathe real deep and git yor lungs full of it. Thass the trouble with you city people. You git soft.

VIRGIL

(Whispering)

He's the sheriff, Bo.

BO

(In full voice, for WILL's benefit)

S'posin' he *is* the sheriff! What's that matter t' *me*? That don't give him the right t' insult my manners, does it? No man ever had to tell *me* what t' do, did he, Virge? Did he?

VIRGIL

No. No. But there allus comes a time, Bo, when . . .

BUS STOP

BO

(Ignoring VIRGIL, speaking out for the benefit of all)

My name's Bo Decker. I'm twenty-one years old and own me m'own ranch up in Timber Hill, Montana, where I got a herd a fine Hereford cattle and a dozen horses, and the finest sheep and hogs and chickens anywhere in the country. And I jest come back from a rodeo where I won 'bout ev'ry prize there *was*, din I, Virge? *(Joshingly, he elbows VIRGIL in the ribs)* Yap, I'm the prize bronco-buster, 'n steer-roper, 'n bulldogger, anywhere 'round. I won 'em all. And what's more, had my picture taken by *Life* magazine. *(Confronting WILL)* So I'd appreciate your talkin' to me with a little respect in yor voice, Mister, and not go hollerin' orders to me from across the room like I was some no-count servant.

(WILL is flabbergasted.)

CHERIE

(Privately to ELMA)

Did ya ever see anybody like him?

WILL

(Finally finds his voice and uses it, after a struggle with himself to sound just and impartial)

You was the last one in, cowboy, and you left the door open. You shoul'da closed it, I don't care *who* y'are. That's all I'm saying.

BO

Door's closed now. What ya arguin' 'bout? *(Leaving a hushed and somewhat awed audience, BO strides over to the counter and drops to a stool)* Seems like we're gonna be here a while, Virge. How's fer some grub?

VIRGIL

(Remaining by magazine counter)

Not yet, Bo. I'm chewin' t'backy.

BO

(Slapping a thigh)

Thass ole Virge for ya. Allus happy long's he's got a wad a t'backy in his mouth. Wall, I'm gonna have me a li'l snack. *(To ELMA)* Miss, gimme 'bout three hamburgers.

ELMA

Three? How do you want them?

BO

I want 'em *raw*.

(CHERIE makes a sick face. DR. LYMAN quietly withdraws, taking his drink over to the window.)

ELMA

Honest?

BO

It's the only way t'eat 'em, raw, with a thick slice a onion and some pickalili.

ELMA

(Hesitant)

Well . . . if you're sure you're not joking.

BO

(His voice holding ELMA on her way to refrigerator)
Jest a minute, Miss. That ain't all. I'd also like me some

BUS STOP

ham and eggs . . . and some potaty salad . . . and a piece a pie. I ain't so pertikler what *kinda* pie it is, so long as it's got that murang on top of it.

ELMA

We have lemon and choc'late. They both have meringue.

BO

(Thinking it over)

Lemon'n choc'late. I like 'em both. I dunno which I'd ruther have. *(Ponders a moment)* I'll have 'em *both*, Miss.

(CHERIE makes another sick face.)

ELMA

Both?

BO

Yep! 'N set a quart a milk beside me. I'm still a *growin'* boy. *(ELMA starts preparations as BO turns to CHERIE)* Travelin' allus picks up my appetite. That all you havin', jest a measly doughnut?

CHERIE

I ain't hungry.

BO

Why not?

CHERIE

I jest ain't.

BO

Ya oughta be.

Well—I ain't!

BO

Wait till I get ya up to the Susie-Q. I'll fatten ya up. I bet in two weeks time, ya won't recognize yorself. (*Now he puts a bearlike arm around her, drawing her close to him for a snuggle, kissing her on the cheek*) But doggone, I love ya, Cherry, jest the way ya are. Yor about the cutest li'l piece I ever did see. And man! when I walked into that night club place and hear you singin' my favorite song, standin' before that orkester lookin' like a angel, I told myself then and there, she's fer *me*. I ain't gonna leave this place without her. And now I got ya, ain't I, Cherry?

CHERIE

(*Trying to avoid his embrace*)

Bo . . . there's people here . . . they're lookin' . . .
(*And she's right. They are.*)

BO

What if they are? It's no crime to show a li'l affection, is it? 'Specially, when we're gonna git married. It's no crime I ever heard of.

(*He squeezes her harder now and forces a loud, smacking kiss on the lips. CHERIE twists loose of him and turns away.*)

CHERIE

Bo! fer cryin' out loud, lemme *be*!

BO

Cherry, thass no way to talk to yor husband.

CHERIE

That's all ya done since we left Kanz City, is maul me.

BO

Oh, is zat so? (*This is a deep-cutting insult*) Wall, I certainly ain't one to *pester* any woman with my affections. I never had to *beg* no woman to make love to me. (*Calling over his shoulder to VIRGIL*) Did I, Virge? I never had to coax no woman to make love to me, *did* I?

VIRGIL

(*In a voice that sounds more and more restrained*)

No . . . no . . .

BO

(*Still in full voice*)

No! Ev'rywhere I go, I got all the wimmin I want, don't I, Virge? I gotta fight 'em to keep 'em off me, don't I, Virge?

(*VIRGIL is saved from having to make a response as ELMA presents BO with his hamburgers.*)

ELMA

Here are the hamburgers. The ham and eggs will take a little longer.

BO

O.K. These'll gimme a start.

(*GRACE rubs her forehead with a feigned expression of pain.*)

GRACE

Elma, honey, I got the darndest headache.

ELMA

I'm sorry, Grace.

GRACE

Can you look after things a while?

ELMA

Sure.

GRACE

'Cause the only thing for me to do is go upstairs and lie down a while. That's the only thing gonna do me any good at all.

WILL

(From his chair)

What's the matter, Grace?

GRACE

(At the rear door)

I got a headache, Will, that's just drivin' me *wild*.

WILL

That so?

(GRACE goes out.)

DR. LYMAN

(To ELMA)

You are now the Mistress of the Inn.

ELMA

You haven't told me anything about your first wife.

DR. LYMAN

Now, how could I have omitted her?

ELMA

What was *she* like?

DR. LYMAN

(Still in the highest of spirits)

Oh . . . she was the loveliest of them all. I do believe she was. We had such an idyllic honeymoon together, a golden month of sunshine and romance, in Bermuda. She sued me for divorce later, on the grounds of mental cruelty, and persuaded the judge that she should have my house and my motorcar, and an alimony that I still find it difficult to pay, for she never chose to marry again. She found that for all she wanted out of marriage, she didn't have to marry. *(He chuckles)* Ah, but perhaps I am being unkind.

(ELMA is a little mystified by the humor with which he always tells of his difficulties. BO now leans over the counter and interrupts.)

BO

Miss, was you waitin' fer me to lay them eggs?

ELMA

(Hurrying to stove)

Oh, I'm sorry. They're ready now.

(BO jumps up, grabs a plate and glides over the counter for ELMA to serve him from the stove.)

BO

Them hamburgers was just a horse d'oovery. (He grins with appreciation of this word. ELMA fills his plate) Thank ya, Miss. (He starts back for the stool but trips over *CHERIE's* suitcase on the way) *Daggone!* (He looks down to see what has stopped him. *CHERIE* holds a rigid silence. BO brings his face slowly up, looking at *CHERIE* suspiciously) Cherry! (She says nothing) Cherry, what'd ya wanta bring yor suitcase in here fer? (She still says nothing) Cherry, I'm askin' ya a civil question. What'd ya bring yor suitcase in fer? Tell me?

CHERIE

(Frightened)

I . . . I . . . now don't you come near me, Bo.

BO

(Shaking *CHERIE* by the shoulders)

Tell me! What's yor suitcase doin' there b'hind the counter? What were ya tryin' to do, fool me? Was you plannin' to git away from me? That what you been sittin' here plannin' t'do?

CHERIE

(Finding it hard to speak while he is shaking her)

Bo . . . lemme be . . . take your hands off me, Bo Decker.

BO

Tell me, Cherry. Tell me.

(Now *WILL* intercedes, coming up to BO, laying a hand on his shoulder.)

WILL

Leave the little lady alone, cowboy.

BO

(Turning on WILL fiercely)

Mister, ya got no right interferin' 'tween me and my feeancy.

WILL

Mebbe she's yor feeancy and maybe she ain't. Anyway, ya ain't gonna abuse her while *I'm* here. Unnerstand?

BO

Abuse her?

WILL

(To CHERIE)

I think you better tell him now, Miss, jest how you feel about things.

(BO looks at CHERIE with puzzled wonder.)

CHERIE

(Finding it impossible to say)

I . . . I . . .

BO

What's this critter tryin' to say, Cherry?

CHERIE

Well . . . I . . .

WILL

You better tell him, Miss.

CHERIE

Now, Bo, don't git mad.

BO

I'll git mad if I feel like it. What you two got planned?

CHERIE

Bo, I don't wanta go up to Montana and marry ya.

BO

Ya do, too.

CHERIE

I do not!

BO

Anyways, you'll come to like it in time. I *promised* ya would. Now we been through all that b'fore.

CHERIE

But, Bo . . . I ain't goin'.

BO

(A loud blast of protest)

What?

CHERIE

I ain't goin'. The sheriff here said he'd help me. He ain't gonna let you take me any farther. I'm stayin' here and take the next bus back to Kanz City.

BO

(Grabbing her by the shoulders to reassure himself of her)
You ain't gonna do nothin' of the kind.

BUS STOP

CHERIE

Yes, I am, Bo. You gotta b'lieve me. I ain't goin' with ya.
That's final.

BO

(In a most personal voice, baffled)

But Cherry . . . we was familiar with each other.

CHERIE

That don't mean ya gotta marry me.

BO

(Shocked at her)

Why . . . I oughta take you across my knee and blister
yer li'l bottom.

CHERIE

(More frightened)

Don't you touch me.

BO

(To WILL)

You can't pay no tension to what she says, Mister.
Womenfolk don't know their own minds. Never did.

(Back to CHERIE.)

CHERIE

Don't you come near me!

BO

Yor gonna follow me back to Timber Hill and marry up.
You just think you wouldn't like it now 'cause ya never
been there and the whole idea's kinda strange. But you'll

BUS STOP

get over them feelin's. In no time at all, yor gonna be happy as a mudhen. I ain't takin' no fer an answer. By God, yor comin' along.

(He grabs her forcefully to him, as WILL interferes again, pulling the two apart.)

WILL

You're not takin' her with ya if she don't wanta go. Can't you get that through your skull? Now leave her be.

(BO stands looking at WILL with sullen hatred. CHERIE trembles. VIRGIL stands far right looking apprehensive.)

BO

(Confronts WILL threateningly)

This ain't no biznes of yors.

WILL

It's *my* business when the little lady comes t'me wantin' protection.

BO

Is that right, Cherry? Did you go to the sheriff askin' fer pertection?

CHERIE

(Meekly)

. . . yes, I guess I did.

BO

(Bellowing out again)

Why? What'd ya need pertection for . . . from a man that wants to *marry* ya?

CHERIE

(Shuddering)

. . . 'cause . . .

BO

(Bellowing angrily)

'Cause *why?* I said I *loved* ya, din I?

CHERIE

(About to cry)

I know ya did.

BO

(Confronting WILL with a feeling of angry unjustness)

See there? I told her I loved her and I wanta marry her. And with a world fulla crazy people goin' 'round killin' each other, *you* ain't got nothin' better t'do than stand here tryin' to keep me from it.

WILL

Yor overlookin' jest one thing, cowboy.

BO

(With gruff impatience)

Yor so smart. Tell me what I'm overlookin'.

WILL

Yor overlookin' the simple but important fack that the little lady don't love *you*.

(BO now is trapped into silence. He can say nothing, and one can tell that WILL has named a fact that BO did not intend to face. VIRGIL watches him alertly.)

and is about to. VIRGIL hurries to BO's side, holding
his arms as though to restrain him.)

VIRGIL

(Pacifyingly)

Now, Bo. Take it easy, Bo. Don't blow your lid. He's the
sheriff, Bo. Hold yor temper.

BO

(To VIRGIL)

That polecat bastard! He said she din love me.

VIRGIL

(Trying to draw him away from the scene)

Pay no 'tention, Bo. Come on over here and sit down. Ya
gotta think things over, Bo.

BO

(Twisting loose from VIRGIL's hold)

Lemme be, Virge.

WILL

Ask the li'l lady, if ya don't b'lieve *me*. Ask her if she
loves ya.

BO

I won't ask her nothin' of the kind.

WILL

All right then, take my word for it.

BUS STOP

BO

I wouldn't take yor word for a cloudy day. I'm tellin' ya, she loves me. And *I* oughta know.

(CHERIE flees to the counter, sobbing.)

WILL

Wall . . . she ain't gettin' back on the bus with ya. We'll leave it at that. So you better take my advice and sit down with yor friend there, and have a quiet game a pinochle till the bus gets on its way and takes you with it.

VIRGIL

Do like he tells ya, Bo. I think mebbe ya got the li'l lady all wrong, anyway.

BO

(A defender of womanhood)

Don't you say nothin' against her, Virge.

VIRGIL

I *ain't* sayin' nothin' *against* her. I jest see no reason why you should marry a gal that says she don't love ya. That's all. And I kinda doubt she's as good a gal as you think she is. Now come on over here and sit down.

BO

(Turns restlessly from VIRGIL)

I don't feel like sittin'.

(Instead, he paces up to the big window, standing there looking out, his back to the audience.)

ELMA

(From behind counter, to VIRGIL)

What shall I do with the ham and eggs?

VIRGIL

Just put 'em on the stove and keep 'em warm, Miss. He'll have 'em a li'l later.

WILL

(To CHERIE)

I don't think you'll be bothered any more, Miss. If y'are, my station's right across the road. You kin holler.

CHERIE

(Dabbing at her eyes)

Thank you very much, I'm sure.

WILL

Are you gonna be all right, Elma?

ELMA

(Surprised at the question)

Why yes, Will!

(WILL just looks at DR. LYMAN who, we can tell, is made to feel a little uncomfortable.)

WILL

I'll look in a little later.

ELMA

O.K., Will.

(WILL goes to the door, takes a final look at BO, then goes out.)

DR. LYMAN

I don't know why, but . . . I always seem to relax more easily . . . when a sheriff leaves the room.

(He chuckles bravely.)

ELMA

I think it's awfully unfair that people dislike Will just because he's a sheriff.

DR. LYMAN

But you see, my dear, he stands as a symbol of authority, the most dreaded figure of our time. Policemen, teachers, lawyers, judges, doctors, and I suppose, even tax collectors . . . we take it for granted that they are going to punish us for something we didn't do . . . or did do.

ELMA

But you said you were a teacher once.

DR. LYMAN

But not a successful one. I could never stay in one place very long at a time. And I hated having anyone *over me*, like deans and presidents and department heads. I never was a man who could take *orders* . . . from *anyone* . . . *without* feeling resentment. Right or wrong, I have always insisted on having my own way.

(BO walks slowly down from his corner retreat, seeking VIRGIL, who is taking his guitar out of its case. BO speaks hesitantly in a low voice.)

BO

What am I gonna do, Virge?

Bo, ya jest gotta quit dependin on me so much. I don't know what to tell ya to do, except to sit down and be peaceful.

BO

I—I can't be peaceful.

VIRGIL

All right then, pace around like a panther and be miserable.

BO

(To himself)

I—I jest can't believe it!

VIRGIL

What can't ya believe?

BO

(Now he becomes embarrassed)

Oh . . . nothin'.

VIRGIL

If ya got anything on your chest, Bo, it's best to get it off.

BO

Well, I . . . I just never realized . . . a gal might not . . . love me.

Curtain

ACT TWO

ACT TWO

Only a few minutes have elapsed since the close of ACT ONE. Our characters now are patiently trying to pass the time as best they can. VIRGIL has taken out his guitar and, after tuning it, begun to play a soft, melancholy cowboy ballad. He keeps his music an almost unnoticeable part of the background. BO lingers in the corner up right, a picture of troubled dejection. CHERIE has found a movie magazine which she sits at one of the tables and reads. DR. LYMAN continues sitting at the bar, sipping his drink and courting ELMA, although ELMA does not realize she is being courted. She is immensely entertained by him.

ELMA

. . . and where else did you teach?

DR. LYMAN

My last position was at one of those revolting little progressive colleges in the East, where they offer a curriculum of what they call *functional* education. Educators, I am sure, have despaired of ever teaching students *anything*, so they have decided the second-best thing to do is to *understand* them. Every day there would be a meeting of everyone on the entire faculty, with whom the students ever came into any contact, from the President down to the chambermaids, and we would put our collective heads together to try to figure out why little Jane or little Mary was not getting out

of her classes what she *should*. The suggestion that perhaps she wasn't studying was too simple, and if you implied that she simply did not have the brains for a college education, you were being undemocratic.

ELMA

You must have disapproved of that college.

DR. LYMAN

My dear girl, I have disapproved of my entire life.

ELMA

Really?

DR. LYMAN

Yes, but I suppose I couldn't resist living it over again.
(There is a touch of sadness about him now.)

ELMA

Did you resign from that position?

DR. LYMAN

One day I decided I had had enough. I walked blithely into the Dean's office and said, "Sir! I graduated *Magna Cum Laude* from the University of Chicago, I studied at Oxford on a Rhodes Scholarship, and returned to take my Ph.D. at Harvard, receiving it with highest honors. I think I have the right to expect my students to try to understand *me*."

ELMA

(Very amused)

What did he say?

BUS STOP

DR. LYMAN

Oh, I didn't wait for a response. I walked out of the door and went to the railroad station, where I got a ticket for the farthest place I could think of, which happened to be Las Vegas. And I have been traveling ever since. It's a merry way to go to pot.

(He chuckles.)

ELMA

I had thought *I* might teach one day, but you don't make it sound very attractive.

DR. LYMAN

Ah, suit yourself. Don't let me influence you one way or the other. *(ELMA smiles and DR. LYMAN gives in to the sudden compulsion of clasping her hand)* You're a lovely young girl.

ELMA

(Very surprised)

Why . . . thank you, Dr. Lyman.

DR. LYMAN

(Clears his throat and makes a fresh approach)

Did you tell me you plan to go to Topeka tomorrow?

ELMA

(Looking at clock)

You mean *today*. Yes. I have a ticket to hear the Kansas City Symphony. They come to Topeka every year to give a concert.

DR. LYMAN

(Feeling his way)

You say . . . you stay with your sister there?

ELMA

Yes, then I take an early morning bus back here, in time for school Monday. Then after school, I come here to work for Grace.

DR. LYMAN

(Obviously he is angling for something)

Didn't you say there was a university in Topeka?

ELMA

Yes. Washburn University.

DR. LYMAN

Washburn University—of course! You know, it just occurs to me that I should stop there to check some references on a piece of research I'm engaged on.

ELMA

Oh, I've been to Washburn library lots of times.

DR. LYMAN

You have? *(He shows some cunning, but obviously ELMA does not see it)* Perhaps you would take me there!

ELMA

(Hesitant)

Well, I . . .

BUS STOP

DR. LYMAN

I'll arrive in Topeka before you do, then meet your bus . . .

ELMA

If you really want me to.

DR. LYMAN

You can take me to the library, then perhaps we could have dinner together, and perhaps you would permit me to take you to the symphony.

ELMA

(Overjoyed)

Are you serious?

DR. LYMAN

Why, of course I'm serious. Why do you ask?

ELMA

I don't know. Usually, older people are too busy to take notice of kids. I'd just love to.

DR. LYMAN

Then I may depend on it that I have an engagement?

ELMA

Yes. Oh, that'll be lots of fun. I can't wait.

DR. LYMAN

But, my dear . . . let's not tell anyone of our plans, shall we?

ELMA

Why not?

DR. LYMAN

You see . . . I have been married, and I am somewhat older than you, though perhaps not quite as old as you might take me to be . . . anyway, people might not understand.

ELMA

Oh!

DR. LYMAN

So let's keep our plans to ourselves. Promise?

ELMA

O.K. If you think best.

DR. LYMAN

I think it best.

(VIRGIL has finished playing a ballad and CHERIE applauds.)

CHERIE

That was real purty, Virgil.

VIRGIL

Thank ya, Miss.

(From his corner, BO has seen the moment's intimacy between them. He winces. CHERIE goes over to the counter and speaks to ELMA.)

CHERIE

Isn't there some other way of me gettin' back to Kanz City?

ELMA

I'm sorry. The bus comes through here from Topeka, and it can't get through, either, until the road's cleared.

CHERIE

I was jest gettin' sorta restless.

(She sits at center table and lights a cigarette. Suddenly, the front door swings open and WILL appears carrying a thermos jug.)

WILL

(Crossing to counter)

Elma, fill this up for me, like a good girl.

ELMA

Sure, Will.

(Takes thermos from him and starts to fill it at urn.)

WILL

I'm goin' down the highway a bit to see how the men are gettin' on. Thought they'd enjoy some hot coffee.

ELMA

Good idea, Will.

WILL

(With a look around)

Everyone behavin'?

ELMA

Of course.

WILL

(Puzzled)

Grace not down yet?

ELMA

No.

WILL

I didn't see Carl any place outside. Suppose somethin' coulda happened to him?

ELMA

I wouldn't worry about him, Will.

WILL

I s'pose he can take care of himself. (ELMA hands him thermos) Thank you, Elma. (He pays her, then starts back out, saying for the benefit primarily of BO and DR. LYMAN) Oh, Elma. If anyone should be wantin' me, I won't be gone very long.

(He looks around to make sure everyone has heard him, then goes out. BO has heard and seen him, and suddenly turns from his corner and comes angrily down to VIRGIL.)

BO

That dang sheriff! If it wasn't fer him, I'd git Cherry now and . . . I . . .

VIRGIL

Where would ya take her, Bo?

BUS STOP

BO

There's a justice a the peace down the street. You can see his sign from the window.

VIRGIL

Bo, ya cain't *force* a gal to marry ya. Ya jest cain't do it. That sheriff's a stern man and he'd shoot ya in a minute if he saw it was his duty. Now why don't ya go over to the counter and have yourself a drink . . . like the perffessor?

BO

I never did drink and I ain't gonna let no woman drive me to it.

VIRGIL

Ya don't drink. Ya don't smoke or chew. Ya oughta have *some* bad habits to rely on when things with women go wrong.

(BO thinks for a moment then sits opposite VIRGE.)

BO

Virge. I hate to sound like some pitiable weaklin' of a man, but there's been times the last few months, I been so lonesome, I . . . I jest didn't know what t'do with m'self.

VIRGIL

It's no disgrace to feel that way, Bo.

BO

How 'bout you, Virge? Don't you ever git lonesome, too?

VIRGIL

A long time ago, I gave up romancin' and decided I was just gonna take bein' lonesome for granted.

BO

I wish I could do that, but I cain't.

(They now sit in silence. CHERIE, at the counter, lifts her damp eyes to ELMA, seeking a confidante.)

CHERIE

Mebbe I'm a sap.

ELMA

Why do you say that?

CHERIE

I dunno why I *don't* go off to Montana and marry him. I might be a lot better off'n I am now.

ELMA

He says he *loves* you.

CHERIE

He dunno what love is.

ELMA

What makes you say that?

CHERIE

All he wants is a girl to throw his arms around and hug and kiss, that's all. The resta the time, he don't even know I exist.

BUS STOP

ELMA

What made you decide to marry him in the first place?

CHERIE

(Giving ELMA a wise look)

Ya ain't very experienced, are ya?

ELMA

I guess not.

CHERIE

I never *did* decide to marry him. Everything was goin' fine till he brought up *that* subjeck. Bo come in one night when I was singin' "That Old Black Magic." It's one a my best numbers. And he liked it so much, he jumped up on a chair and yelled like a Indian, and put his fingers in his mouth and whistled like a steam engine. Natur'ly, it made me feel good. Most a the customers at the Blue Dragon was too drunk to pay any attention to my songs.

ELMA

And you liked him?

CHERIE

Well . . . I thought he was awful *cute*.
(She shows a mischievous smile.)

ELMA

I think he looks a little like Burt Lancaster, don't you?

CHERIE

... Mebbe. Anyway . . . I'd never seen a cowboy before. Oh, I'd seen 'em in movies, a course, but never in the *flesh* . . . Anyway, he's so darn healthy lookin', I don't mind admittin', I was attracted, right from the start.

ELMA

You were?

CHERIE

But it was only what ya might call a *sexual* attraction.

ELMA

Oh!

CHERIE

The very next mornin', he wakes up and hollers, "Yippee! We're gettin' married." I honestly thought he was crazy. But when I tried to reason with him, he wouldn't listen to a word. He stayed by my side all day long, like a shadow. At night, a course, he had to go back to the rodeo, but he was back to the Blue Dragon as soon as the rodeo was over, in time fer the midnight show. If any other fella claimed t'have a date with me, Bo'd beat him up.

ELMA

And you never told him you'd marry him?

CHERIE

No! He kep tellin' me all week, he and Virge'd be by the night the rodeo ended, and they'd pick me up and we'd all

start back to Montana t'gether. I knew that if I was around the Blue Dragon that night, that's what'd happen. So I decided to beat it. One a the other girls at the Blue Dragon lived on a farm 'cross the river in Kansas. She said I could stay with her. So I went to the Blue Dragon last night and just sang fer the first show. Then I told 'em I was quittin' . . . I'd been wantin' to find another job anyway . . . and I picked up my share of the kitty . . . but darn it, I had to go and tell 'em I was takin' the midnight bus. They had to go and tell Bo, a course, when he come in a li'l after eleven. He paid 'em five dollars to find out. So I went down to the bus station and hadn't even got my ticket, when here come Bo and Virge. He jest steps up to the ticket window and says, "Three tickets to Montana!" I din know what to say. Then he dragged me onto the bus and I been on it ever since. And somewhere deep down inside me, I gotta funny feelin' I'm gonna end up in Montana.

(She sits now in troubled contemplation as ELMA resumes her work. On the other side of the stage, BO, after a period of gestation, begins to question VIRGIL.)

BO

Tell me somethin', Virge. We been t'gether since my folks died, and I allus wondered if mebbe I din spoil yer chances a settlin' down.

VIRGIL

(Laughs)

No, you never, Bo. I used to tell myself ya did, but I just wanted an excuse.

BUS STOP

BO

But you been lookin' after me since I was ten.

VIRGIL

I coulda married up, too.

BO

Was ya ever in love?

VIRGE

Oncet. B'fore I went to work on your daddy's ranch.

BO

What happened?

VIRGIL

Nuthin'.

BO

Ya ask her to marry ya?

VIRGIL

Nope.

BO

Why not?

VIRGIL

Well . . . there comes a time in every fella's life, Bo, when he's gotta give up his own ways . . .

BO

How ya mean?

VIRGIL

Well, I was allus kinda uncomfortable around this gal, 'cause she was sweet and kinda refined. I was allus scared I'd say or do somethin' wrong.

BO

I know how ya mean.

VIRGIL

It was cowardly of me, I s'pose, but ev'ry time I'd get back from courtin' her, and come back to the bunkhouse where my buddies was sittin' around talkin', or playin' cards, or listenin' to music, I'd jest relax and feel m'self so much at home, I din wanta give it up.

BO

Yah! Gals can scare a fella.

VIRGIL

Now I'm kinda ashamed.

BO

Yare?

VIRGIL

Yes I am, Bo. A fella can't live his whole life dependin' on buddies.

(BO takes another reflective pause, then asks directly.)

BO

Why don't she like me, Virge?

VIRGIL

(Hesitant)

Well . . .

BO

Tell me the truth.

VIRGIL

Mebbe ya don't go about it right.

BO

What do I do wrong?

VIRGIL

Sometimes ya sound a li'l bullheaded and mean.

BO

I do?

VIRGIL

Yah.

BO

How's a fella s'posed to act?

VIRGIL

I'm no authority, Bo, but it seems t'me you should be a little more gallant.

BO

Gall—? Gallant? I'm as gallant as I know how to be. You hear the way Hank and Orville talk at the ranch, when they get back from sojournin' in town, 'bout their women.

VIRGIL

They like to brag, Bo. Ya caint b'lieve ev'rything Hank and Orville say.

BO

Is there any reason a gal wouldn't go fer *me*, soon as she would fer Hank or Orville?

VIRGIL

They're a li'l older'n you. They learned a li'l more. They can be *gallant* with gals . . . when they *wanta* be.

BO

I ain't gonna *pertend*.

VIRGIL

I caint blame ya.

BO

But a gal *oughta* like me. I kin read and write, I'm kinda tidy, and I got good manners, don't I?

VIRGIL

I'm no judge, Bo. I'm used to ya.

BO

And I'm tall and strong. Ain't that what girls like? And if I do say so, my'self, I'm purty good lookin'.

VIRGIL

Yah.

BO

When I get spruced up, I'm just as good lookin' a fella as a gal might hope to see.

VIRGIL

I know ya are, Bo.

BO

(Suddenly seized with anger at the injustice of it all)
Then hellfire and damnation! Why don't she go back to the ranch with me?

(His hands in his hip pockets, he begins pacing, returning to his corner like a panther, where he stands with his back to the others, watching the snow fly outside the window.)

ELMA

(Having observed BO's disquiet)

Gee, if you only loved him!

CHERIE

That'd solve ev'rything, wouldn't it? But I don't. So I jest can't see m'self goin' to some God-forsaken ranch in Montana where I'd never see no one but him and a lotta cows.

ELMA

No. If you don't love him, it'd be awfully lonely.

CHERIE

I dunno why I keep expectin' m'self to fall in love with someone, but I do.

ELMA

I know I expect to, some day.

CHERIE

I'm beginnin' to seriously wonder if there *is* the kinda love I have in mind.

ELMA

What's that?

CHERIE

Well . . . I dunno. I'm oney nineteen, but I been goin' with guys since I was fourteen.

ELMA

(Astounded)

Honest?

CHERIE

Honey, I almost married a cousin a mine when I was fourteen, but Pappy wouldn't have it.

ELMA

I never heard of anyone marrying so young.

CHERIE

Down in the Ozarks, we don't waste much time. Anyway, I'm awful glad I never married my cousin Malcolm, 'cause he turned out real bad, like Pappy predicted. But I sure was crazy 'bout him at the time. And I been losin' my head 'bout some guy ever since. But Bo's the first one wanted to marry

me, since Cousin Malcolm. And natur'ly, I'd like to get married and raise a fam'ly and all them things but . . .

ELMA

But you've *never* been in love?

CHERIE

Mebbe I have and din know it. Thass what I mean. Mebbe I don't know what love is. Mebbe I'm expectin' it t'be somethin' it ain't. I jest feel that, regardless how crazy ya are 'bout some guy, ya gotta feel . . . and it's hard to put into words, but . . . ya gotta feel he *respects* ya. Yah, thass what I means.

ELMA

(*Not impudent*)

I should think so.

CHERIE

I want a guy I can look up to and respect, but I don't want one that'll browbeat me. And I want a guy who can be sweet to me but I don't wanta be treated like a baby. I . . . I just gotta feel that . . . whoever I marry . . . has some real regard for me, apart from all the lovin' and sex. Know what I mean?

ELMA

(*Busily digesting all this*)

I think so. What are you going to do when you get back to Kansas City?

CHERIE

I dunno.—There's a hillbilly program on one a the radio stations there. I might git a job on it. If I don't, I'll prob'ly git me a job in Liggett's or Walgreen's. Then after a while, I'll prob'ly marry some guy, whether I think I love him or not. Who'm I to keep insistin' I should fall in love? You hear all about love when yor a kid and jest take it for granted that such a thing really exists. Maybe ya have to find out fer yorself it don't. Maybe everyone's afraid to tell ya.

ELMA

(Glum)

Maybe you're right . . . but I hope not.

CHERIE

(After squirming a little on the stool)

Gee, I hate to go out to that cold powder room, but I guess I better not put it off any longer.

(CHERIE hurries out the rear door as DR. LYMAN sits again at the counter, having returned from the bookshelves in time to overhear the last of CHERIE's conversation. He muses for a few moments, gloomily, then speaks to ELMA out of his unconscious reflections.)

DR. LYMAN

How defiantly we pursue love, like it was an inheritance due, that we had to wrangle about with angry relatives in order to get our share.

ELMA

You shouldn't complain. You've had three wives.

DR. LYMAN

Don't shame me. I loved them all . . . with passion. (*An afterthought*) At least I *thought* I did . . . for a while.
(*He still chuckles about it as though it were a great irony.*)

ELMA

I'm sorry if I sounded sarcastic, Dr. Lyman. I didn't mean to be.

DR. LYMAN

Don't apologize. I'm too egotistical ever to take offense at anything people *say*.

ELMA

You're not egotistical at all.

DR. LYMAN

Oh believe me. The greatest egos are those which are too egotistical to show just how egotistical they are.

ELMA

I'm sort of idealistic about things. I like to think that people fall in love and stay that way, forever and ever.

DR. LYMAN

Maybe we have lost the ability. Maybe Man has passed the stage in his evolution wherein love is possible. Maybe life will continue to become so terrifyingly complex that man's anxiety about his mere survival will render him too miserly to give of himself in any true relation.

ELMA

You're talking over my head. *Anyone* can fall in love, I always thought . . . and . . .

DR. LYMAN

But two people, *really* in love, must give up something of themselves.

ELMA

(Trying to follow)

Yes.

DR. LYMAN

That is the gift that men are afraid to make. Sometimes they keep it in their bosoms forever, where it withers and dies. Then they never know love, only its facsimiles, which they seek over and over again in meaningless repetition.

ELMA

(A little depressed)

Geel! How did we get onto this subject?

DR. LYMAN

(Laughs heartily with sudden release, grabbing ELMA'S hand)

Ah, my dear! Pay no attention to me, for whether there is such a thing as love, we can always . . . *(Lifts his drink)* . . . pretend there is. Let us talk instead of our forthcoming trip to Topeka. Will you wear your prettiest dress?

ELMA

Of course. If it turns out to be a nice day, I'll wear a new dress Mother got me for spring. It's a soft rose color with a little lace collar.

DR. LYMAN

Ah, you'll look lovely, *lovely*. I know you will. I hope it doesn't embarrass you for me to speak these endearments . . .

ELMA

No . . . it doesn't embarrass me.

DR. LYMAN

I'm glad. Just think of me as a fatherly old fool, will you? And not be troubled if I take such rapturous delight in your sweetness, and youth, and innocence? For these are qualities I seek to warm my heart as I seek a fire to warm my hands.

ELMA

Now I *am* kind of embarrassed. I don't know what to say.

DR. LYMAN

Then say nothing, or nudge *me* and I'll talk endlessly about the most trivial matters.

(*They laugh together as CHERIE comes back in, shivering.*)

CHERIE

Brrr, it's cold. Virgil, I wish you'd play us another song. I think we all need somethin' to cheer us up.

BUS STOP

VIRGIL

I'll make a deal with ya. I'll play if you'll sing.

ELMA

(A bright idea comes to her)

Let's have a floor show! *(Her suggestion comes as a surprise and there is silence while all consider it)* Everyone here can do something!

DR. LYMAN

A brilliant idea, straight from Chaucer. You must read Juliet for me.

ELMA

(Not hearing DR. LYMAN, running to VIRGIL)

Will you play for us, Virgil?

VIRGIL

I don't play operry music or jitterbug.

ELMA

Just play anything you want to play. *(To BO)* Will you take part? *(Stubbornly, BO just turns the other way)* Please! It won't be fun unless we all do something.

VIRGIL

G'wan, Bo.

BO

I never was no play-actor, Miss.

VIRGIL

Ya kin say the Gettysburg Address.

BO

(Gruffly)

I ain't gonna say it now.

VIRGIL

Then why don't ya do your rope tricks? Yer rope's out on the bus. I could get it for ya easy enough.

ELMA

Oh, please! Rope tricks would be lots of fun.

BO

(Emphatically)

No! I ain't gonna get up before a lotta strangers and make a fool a m'self.

VIRGIL

(To ELMA)

I guess he means it, Miss.

ELMA

Shucks!

VIRGIL

(Quietly to BO)

I don't see why ya couldn't a co-operated a little, Bo.

BO

I got too much on my mind to worry about doin' stunts.

ELMA

(To CHERIE)

You'll sing a song for us, won't you, Cherie?

CHERIE

I will fer a piece a pie and another cup a coffee.

ELMA

Sure.

(CHERIE hurries to VIRGIL.)

CHERIE

Virgil, kin you play "That Ole Black Magic"?

VIRGIL

You start me out and I think I can pick out the chords.

(CHERIE sits by his side as they work out their number together. ELMA hurries to DR. LYMAN.)

ELMA

And you'll read poetry for us, won't you?

DR. LYMAN

(Already assuming his character)

Why, I intend to play Romeo opposite your Juliet.

ELMA

Gee, I don't know if I can remember the lines.

DR. LYMAN

(Handing her a volume he has taken off the shelves)
 Sometimes one can find Shakespeare on these shelves
 among the many lurid novels of juvenile delinquents. Here
 it is, *Four Tragedies of Shakespeare*, with my compliments.
*(They begin to go over the scene together as BO, re-
 sentful of the closeness between CHERIE and VIRGIL,
 goes to them belligerently.)*

BO

(To CHERIE)

Thass my seat.

ELMA

(Taking book from DR. LYMAN)

If I read it over a few times, it'll come back. Do you know
 the Balcony Scene?

CHERIE

(Jumping to her feet)

You kin have it.

(Hurries to ELMA, at counter.)

DR. LYMAN

My dear, I know the entire play by heart. I can recite it
 backwards.

CHERIE

(To ELMA)

I got a costume with me. Where can I change?

BUS STOP

ELMA

Behind the counter. There's a mirror over the sink.

(CHERIE darts behind the counter, digging into her suitcase.)

BO

(To VIRGIL)

She shines up to *you* like a kitten to milk.

ELMA

Gee, costumes and everything.

(She resumes her study with DR. LYMAN.)

VIRGIL

(Trying to make a joke of it)

Kin I help it if I'm so darn attractive to women? (Unfortunately BO cannot take this as a joke, as VIRGIL intended. VIRGIL perceives he is deeply hurt) Shucks, Bo, it don't mean nothin'.

BO

Maybe it don't mean nothin' to *you*.

VIRGIL

She was bein' nice to me cause I was playin' my guitar, Bo. Guitar music's kinda tender and girls seem to like it.

BO

Tender?

VIRGIL

Yah, Bo! Girls like things t' be *tender*.

They do!

VIRGIL

Sure they do, Bo.

BO

A fella gets "tender," then someone comes along and makes a sap outa him.

VIRGIL

Sometimes, Bo, but not always. You just gotta take a chance.

BO

Well . . . I allus tried t' be a *decent* sorta fella, but I don't know if I'm *tender*.

VIRGIL

I think ya are, Bo. You know how ya feel about deer-huntin'. Ya never could do it. Ya couldn't any more *shoot* one a them sweet li'l deers with the sad eyes than ya could jump into boilin' oil.

BO

Are you makin' fun of me?

VIRGIL

(*Impatient with him*)

No, I'm not makin' fun of ya, Bo. I'm just tryin' to show ya that you got a tender side to your nature, same as any-
one else.

BO

I s'pose I do.

VIRGIL

A course ya do.

BO

(With a sudden feeling of injustice)

Then how come Cherry don't come over and talk sweet to me, like she does to you?

VIRGIL

Ya got a tender side, Bo, but ya don't know how to show it.

BO

(Weighing the verdict)

I don't!

VIRGIL

No, ya just don't know how.

BO

How does a person go about showin' his tender side, Virge?

VIRGIL

Well . . . I dunno as I can tell ya.

(ELMA comes over to them ready to start the show.)

ELMA

Will you go first, Virgil?

It's all right by me.

ELMA

O.K. Then I'll act as Master of the Ceremonies. (*Center-stage, to her audience*) Ladies and Gentlemen! Grace's Diner tonight presents its gala floor show of celebrated artists from all over the world! (*VIRGIL plays an introductory chord*) The first number on our show tonight is that musical cowboy, Mr. Virgil—(*She pauses and VIRGIL supplies her with his last name*)—Virgil Blessing, who will entertain you with his guitar.

(*Applause. ELMA retires to the back of the room with DR. LYMAN. VIRGIL begins to play. During his playing, BO is drawn over to the counter where he tries to further himself with CHERIE, who is behind the counter, dressing.*)

BO

(*Innocently*)

I think you got me all wrong, Cherry.

CHERIE

Don't you come back here. I'm dressing.

BO

Cherry . . . I think you misjudged me.

CHERIE

Be quiet. The show's started.

BO

Cherry, I'm really a very *tender* person. You jest don't know. I'm so tenderhearted I don't go deer-huntin'. Cause I jest couldn't kill them "sweet li'l deers with the sad eyes." Ask Virge.

CHERIE

I ain't int'rested.

BO

Ya ain't?

CHERIE

No. And furthermore I think you're a louse fer comin' over here and talkin' while yor friend is tryin' to play the guitar.

BO

Ya talk like ya thought more a Virge than yo da a me.

CHERIE

Would ya go away and lemme alone?

BO

(A final resort)

Cherry, did I tell ya 'bout my color-television set with the twenty-four-inch screen?

CHERIE

One million times! Now go 'way.

(ELMA begins to make a shushing noise to quiet BO. Finally BO dejectedly returns to the other side of the room, where VIRGIL is just finishing his number. BO sits down in the midst of VIRGIL's applause.)

CHERIE

That was wonderful, Virge!

DR. LYMAN

Brilliant!

ELMA

Swell! Play us another!

(Together)

VIRGIL

No more just now. I'm ready to see the rest of ya do somethin'.

BO

(To VIRGIL)

A lot *she* cares how tender I am!

ELMA

(Coming forth again as Master of Ceremonies)

That was swell, Virgil. (Turns back to DR. LYMAN) Are you ready?

DR. LYMAN

(Preening himself)

I consider myself so.

ELMA

(Taking the book to VIRGIL)

Will you be our prompter?

VIRGIL

It's kinda funny writin', but I'll try.

ELMA

(Back to DR. LYMAN)

Gee, what'll we use for a balcony?

DR. LYMAN

That offers a problem.

(Together they consider whether to use the counter for ELMA to stand on or one of the tables.)

BO

(To VIRGIL)

What is it these folks are gonna do, Virge?

VIRGIL

Romeo and Juliet . . . by Shakespeare!

BO

Shakespeare!

VIRGIL

This Romeo was a great lover, Bo. Watch him and pick up a few pointers.

(CHERIE comes running out from behind the counter now, a dressing gown over her costume, and she sits at one of the tables.)

CHERIE

I'm ready.

(Reading some of the lines from VIRGIL's book)

"But soft . . . what light through . . . yonder window breaks? It is the East . . . and Juliet is the sun . . . Arise, fair . . ."

(He has got this far only with difficulty, stumbling over most of the words. VIRGIL takes the book away from him now.)

VIRGIL

Shh, Bo!

(ELMA comes forth to introduce the act.)

ELMA

Ladies and Gentlemen! you are about to witness a playing of the balcony scene from *Romeo and Juliet*. Dr. Gerald Lyman will portray the part of Romeo, and I'll play Juliet. My name is Elma Duckworth. The scene is the orchard of the Capulets' house in Verona, Italy. This counter is supposed to be a balcony. *(DR. LYMAN helps her onto the table where she stands, waiting for him to begin)* O.K.?

(DR. LYMAN takes a quick reassuring drink from his bottle, then tucks it in his pocket, and comes forward in the great Romantic tradition. He is enjoying himself tremendously. The performance proves to be pure ham, but there is pathos in the fact that he does not seem to be aware of how bad he is. He is a thoroughly selfish performer, too, who reads all his speeches as though they were grand soliloquies, regarding his Juliet as a prop.)

DR. LYMAN

"He jests at scars, that never felt a wound.
But soft! what light through yonder window breaks?
It is the east, and Juliet is the sun!

*(He tries to continue, but ELMA, unmindful of cues
and eager to begin her performance, reads her lines
with compulsion)*

Arise . . . fair sun, and . . . kill the envious. . . ."

ELMA

(At same time as DR. LYMAN)

"O Romeo, Romeo! wherefore art thou, Romeo?
Deny thy father, and refuse thy name:
Or if thou wilt not, be but sworn my love,
And I'll no longer be a Capulet."

DR. LYMAN

"She speaks, yet she says nothing: what of that?
Her eye discourses; I will answer it.
I am too bold—"

BO

(To VIRGIL)

Bold? He's drunk.

VIRGIL

Ssssh!

DR. LYMAN

" . . . 'tis not to me she speaks:
Two of the fairest stars in all the heaven,

Having some business, do entreat her eyes
To twinkle in their spheres till they return."

ELMA

"Ay, me!"

DR. LYMAN

"O! speak again, bright angel; thou art
As glorious to this night, being o'er my head
As is a winged messenger of heaven
Unto the white-upturned . . ."

*(DR. LYMAN continues with this speech, even though
BO talks over him.)*

BO

I don't understand all them words, Virge.

VIRGE

It's *Romeo and Juliet*, for God's sake. Now will you shut
up?

DR. LYMAN

(Continuing uninterrupted)

". . . wondering eyes
Of mortals, that fall back to gaze on him
When he bestrides the lazy-pacing clouds,
And sails upon the bosom of the air."

*(He is getting weary but he is not yet ready to give
up.)*

ELMA

"'Tis but thy name that is my enemy;
Thou art thyself though, not a Montague.

What's a Montague? it is not hand, nor foot,
Nor arm, nor face, or any other part
Belonging to a man. O! be some other name:
What's—"

DR. LYMAN

(Interrupts. Beginning to falter now)

"I take thee at thy word.

Call me but love, and . . . I'll be new baptiz'd;
Henceforth . . . I never . . . will be Romeo."

(It is as though he were finding suddenly a personal meaning in the lines.)

ELMA

"What man art thou, that, thus bescreen'd in night,
So stumblest on my counsel?"

DR. LYMAN

(Beginning to feel that he cannot continue)

"By a name

I know not how to tell thee . . . who I am:

My name, dear saint, is . . . is *hateful* to myself."

(He stops here. For several moments there is a wondering silence. ELMA signals VIRGIL.)

VIRGIL

(Prompting)

"Because it is an enemy to thee."

DR. LYMAN

(Leaving the scene of action, repeating the line dumbly, making his way stumblingly back to the counter)

"My name . . . is hateful . . . to myself . . ."
(ELMA hurries to DR. LYMAN'S side. VIRGIL grabs hold of BO, pulls him back to the floor and shames him.)

ELMA

Dr. Lyman, what's the matter?

DR. LYMAN

My dear . . . let us not continue this meaningless little act!

ELMA

Did I do something wrong?

DR. LYMAN

You couldn't possibly do anything wrong . . . if you tried.

ELMA

I can try to say the lines differently.

DR. LYMAN

Don't. Don't. Just tell your audience that Romeo suddenly is fraught with remorse.

(He drops to a stool, ELMA remaining by him a few moments, uncertainly. BO turns to VIRGIL.)

BO

Virge, if thass the way to make love . . . I'm gonna give up.

ELMA

(To VIRGIL)

I'm afraid he isn't feeling well.

VIRGIL

(To ELMA)

I tried to prompt him.

ELMA

(To herself)

Well, we've only got one more number. (To CHERIE) Are you ready?

CHERIE

Sure.

ELMA

Ladies and Gentlemen, our next number is Mademoiselle Cherie, the international *chanteuse*, direct from the Blue Dragon night club in Kansas City, *Cherie!*

(All applaud as CHERIE comes forth, VIRGIL playing an introduction for her. BO puts his fingers through his teeth and whistles for her.)

CHERIE

(Takes off her robe, whispering to ELMA)

Remember, I don't allow no table service during my numbers.

O.K.

(In the background now, we can observe that DR. LYMAN is drinking heavily from the bottle in his overcoat pocket. CHERIE gets up on one of the tables and begins singing "That Old Black Magic" with a chord accompaniment from VIRGIL. Her rendition of the song is a most dramatic one, that would seem to have been created from CHERIE's observations of numerous torch-singers. But she has appeal, and if she is funny, she doesn't seem to know it. Anyway, she rekindles BO's most fervent love, which he cannot help expressing during her performance.)

BO

(About the middle of the song)

Ain't she beautiful, Virge?

VIRGIL

(Trying to keep his mind on his playing)

Shh, Bo!

BO

I'm gonna git her, Virge.

VIRGE

Sssh!

BO

(Pause. He pays no attention to anyone)

I made up my mind. I told myself I was gonna git me a gal. Thass the only reason I entered that rodeo, and I ain't takin' no fer an answer.

VIRGIL

Bo, will you hush up and lemme be!

BO

Anything I ever wanted in this life, I went out and got and I ain't gonna stop now. I'm gonna git her.

(CHERIE is enraged. She jumps down from her table and slaps BO stingingly on the face.)

CHERIE

You ain't got the manners God gave a monkey.

BO

(Stunned)

Cherry!

CHERIE

. . . and if I was a man, I'd beat the livin' daylights out of ya, and thass what some man's gonna do some day, and when it happens, I hope I'm there to see.

(She flounces back to her dressing room, as BO gapes. By this time DR. LYMAN has drunk himself almost to insensibility, and we see him weaving back and forth on his stool, mumbling almost incoherently.)

DR. LYMAN

"Romeo . . . Romeo . . . wherefore art thou? Wherefore art thou . . . Romeo?"

(He laughs like a loon, falls off the stool and collapses on the floor. ELMA and VIRGIL rush to him. BO remains rooted, glaring at CHERIE with puzzled hurt.)

ELMA

(Deeply concerned)

Dr. Lyman! Dr. Lyman!

VIRGIL

The man's in a purty bad way. Let's get him on the bench.
(ELMA and VIRGIL manage to get DR. LYMAN to his feet as BO glides across the room, scales the counter in a leap and takes CHERIE in his arms.)

BO

I was tellin' Virge I love ya. Ya got no right to come over and slap me.

CHERIE

(Twisting)

Lemme be.

BO

(Picking her up)

We're goin' down and wake up the justice of the peace and you're gonna marry me t'night.

CHERIE

(As he takes her in his arms and transports her to the door, just as ELMA and VIRGIL are helping DR. LYMAN onto the bench)

Help! Virgil, help!

BO

Shut up! I'll make ya a good husband. Ya won't never have nothin' to be sorry about.

CHERIE

(As she is carried to the door)

Help! Sheriff! Help me, someone! Help me!

(The action is now like that of a two-ringed circus for ELMA and VIRGIL, whose attention suddenly is diverted from the plight of DR. LYMAN to the much noisier plight of CHERIE. BO gets her, kicking and protesting, as far as the front door when it suddenly opens and BO finds himself confronted by WILL.)

WILL

Put her down, cowboy!

BO

(Trying to forge ahead)

Git outta my way.

WILL

(Shoving BO back as CHERIE manages to jump loose from his arms)

Yor gonna do as I say.

BO

I ain't gonna have no one interferin' in my ways.

(He makes an immediate lunge at WILL, which WILL is prepared for, coming up with a fist that sends BO back reeling.)

VIRGIL

(Hurrying to BO's side)

Bo, ya cain't do this Bo. Ya cain't pick a fight with the sheriff.

BO

(Slowly getting back to his feet)

By God, Mister, there ain't no man ever got the best a me, and there ain't no man ever gonna.

WILL

I'm ready and willin' to try, cowboy. Come on.

(BO lunges at him again. WILL steps aside and lets BO send his blow into the empty doorway as he propels himself through it, outside. Then WILL follows him out, where the fight continues. VIRGIL immediately follows them, as ELMA and CHERIE hurry to the window to watch.)

CHERIE

I knowed this was gonna happen. I knowed it all along.

ELMA

Gee! I'd better call Grace.

(Starts for the rear door but GRACE comes through it before she gets there. GRACE happens to be wearing a dressing gown.)

GRACE

Hey, what the hell's goin' on?

ELMA

Oh, Grace, they're fighting. Honest! It all happened so suddenly, I . . .

GRACE

(Hurrying to window)

Let's see.

CHERIE

(Leaving the window, not wanting to see any more, going to a chair by one of the tables)

Gee, I never wanted to cause so much trouble t' anyone.

GRACE

Wow! Looks like Will's gettin' the best of him.

ELMA

(At the window, frightened by what she sees)

Oh!

GRACE

Yap, I'll put my money on Will Masters *any* time. Will's got it up here. *(Points to her head)* Lookit that cowboy. He's green. He just swings out wild.

ELMA

(Leaving the window)

I . . . I don't want to watch any more.

GRACE

(A real fight fan, she reports from the window)

God, I love a good fight. C'mon Will—c'mon, Will—give him the old uppercut. That'll do it every time. Oh, oh, what'd I tell you, the cowboy's down. Will's puttin' handcuffs on him now.

(CHERIE sobs softly. ELMA goes to her.)

ELMA

Will'll give him first aid. He always does.

CHERIE

Well . . . you gotta admit. He had it comin'.

GRACE

(Leaving the window now)

I'm glad they got it settled outside. *(Looks around to see if anything needs to be straightened up)* Remember the last time there was a fight in here, I had to put in a new window.

(She goes back up to her apartment, and we become aware once more of DR. LYMAN, who gets up from the bench and weaves his way center.)

DR. LYMAN

It takes strong men and women to love . . . *(About to fall, he grabs the back of a chair for support)* People strong enough inside themselves to love . . . without humiliation. *(He sighs heavily and looks about him with blurred eyes)* People big enough to grow with their love and live inside a whole, wide new dimension. People brave enough to bear the responsibility of *being* loved and not fear it as a burden. *(He sighs again and looks about him wearily)* I . . . I never had the generosity to love, to give my own most private self to another, for I was *weak*. I thought the gift would somehow lessen me. *Mel* *(He laughs wildly and starts for the rear door)* Romeo! Romeo! I am disgusting!

(ELMA hurries after him, stopping him at the door.)

ELMA

Dr. Lyman! Dr. Lyman!

DR. LYMAN

Don't bother, dear girl. Don't ever bother with a foolish old man like me.

ELMA

You're not a foolish old man. I like you more than anyone I've ever known.

DR. LYMAN

I'm flattered, my dear, and pleased, but you're young. In a few years, you will turn . . . from a girl into a woman; a kind, thoughtful, loving, intelligent woman . . . who could only pity me. For I'm a child, a drunken, unruly child, and I've nothing in my heart for a true woman.

(GRACE returns in time to observe the rest of the scene. She is dressed now.)

ELMA

Let me get you something to make you feel better.

DR. LYMAN

No . . . no . . . I shall seek the icy comfort of the rest room.

(He rushes out the rear door.)

GRACE

(Feeling concern for ELMA)

Elma, honey, what's the matter? What was he sayin' to you, Elma?

(Goes to her and they have a quiet talk between themselves as the action continues. GRACE is quite motherly at these times. Now VIRGIL comes hurrying through the front door, going to CHERIE.)

VIRGIL

Miss, would ya help us? The sheriff says if you don't hold charges against Bo, he'll let him out to get back on the bus, if it ever goes.

CHERIE

So he can come back here and start maulin' me again?

VIRGIL

He won't do that no more, Miss. I promise.

CHERIE

You promise! How 'bout him?

VIRGIL

I think you can trust him now.

CHERIE

Thass what I thought before. Nothin' doin'. He grabs ahold of a woman and kisses her . . . like he was Napoleon.

VIRGIL

(Coming very close to speak as intimately as possible)

Miss . . . if he was to know I told ya this, he'd never forgive me, but . . . yor the first woman he ever made love to at all.

CHERIE

Hah! I sure don't b'lieve that.

VIRGIL

It's true, Miss. He's allus been as shy as a rabbit.

CHERIE

(In simple amazement)

My God!

GRACE

(To ELMA)

Just take my advice and don't meet him in Topeka or anywhere else.

ELMA

I won't, Grace, but honest! I don't think he meant any harm. He just drinks a little too much. *(DR. LYMAN returns now through the rear door. ELMA hurries to him)* Dr. Lyman, are you all right?

DR. LYMAN

(On his way to the bench)

I'm an old man, my dear. I feel very weary.

(He stretches out on the bench, lying on his stomach.

He goes almost immediately to sleep. ELMA finds an old jacket and spreads it over his shoulders like a blanket. There is a long silence. ELMA sits by DR. LYMAN attentively. CHERIE is very preoccupied.)

GRACE

Let him sleep it off. It's all you can do.

(Now CARL comes in the rear door. There is a look of

witnessed some revolting insult. He casts a suspicious look at DR. LYMAN, now oblivious to everything, and turns to GRACE.)

CARL

Grace, fer Christ sake! who puked all over the backhouse?

GRACE

Oh, God!

(DR. LYMAN snores serenely.)

CHERIE

(Jumps up suddenly and grabs VIRGIL's jacket off hook)
Come on, Virge. Let's go.

VIRGIL

(Enthused)

I'm awful glad you're gonna help him, Miss.

CHERIE

But if you're tellin' me a fib just to get him out of jail, I'll never forgive ya.

VIRGIL

It's no fib, Miss. You're the first gal he ever made love to at all.

CHERIE

Well, I sure ain't never had that honor before.
(They hurry out together.)

Curtain

ACT THREE

ACT THREE

By this time, it is early morning, about five o'clock. The storm has cleared, and outside the window we see the slow dawning, creeping above the distant hills, revealing a landscape all in peaceful white.

BO, CHERIE and VIRGIL are back now from the sheriff's office. BO has returned to his corner, where he sits as before, with his back to the others, his head low. We can detect, if we study him, that one eye is blackened and one of his hands is bandaged. VIRGIL sits close to him like an attendant. DR. LYMAN is still asleep on one of the benches, snoring loudly. CHERIE tries to sleep at one of the tables. ELMA is clearing the tables and sweeping. The only animated people right now are CARL and GRACE. CARL is at the telephone trying to get the operator, and GRACE is behind the counter.

CARL

(After jiggling the receiver)

Still dead.

(He hangs up.)

GRACE

(Yawns)

I'll be glad when you all get out and I can go to bed. I'm tired.

CARL

(Returning to counter, he sounds a trifle insinuating)
Had enough a me, baby? *(GRACE gives him a look, warning him not to let ELMA overhear)* I'm kinda glad the highway was blocked tonight.

GRACE

(*Coquettishly*)

Yare?

CARL

Gave us a chance to become kinda acquainted, din it?

GRACE

Kinda!

CARL

Just pullin' in here three times a week, then pullin' out again in twenty minutes, I . . . I allus left . . . just wonderin' what you was like, Grace.

GRACE

I always wondered about *you*, too, Carl!

CARL

Ya did?

GRACE

Yah. But ya needn't go blabbing anything to the other drivers.

CARL

(*His honor offended*)

Why, what makes ya think I'd . . . ?

GRACE

Shoot! I know how you men talk when ya get t'gether. Worse'n women.

CARL
Well, not me, Grace.

GRACE

I certainly don't want the other drivers on this route, some of 'em especially, gettin' the idea I'm gonna serve 'em any more'n what they order over the counter.

CARL

Sure. I get ya. (*It occurs to him to feel flattered*) But ya . . . ya kinda liked me . . . din ya, Grace?

GRACE

(*Coquettish again*)

Maybe I did.

CARL

(*Trying to get more of a commitment out of her*)
Yah? Yah?

GRACE

Know what I first liked about ya, Carl? It was your hands. (*She takes one of his hands and plays with it*) I like a man with big hands.

CARL

You got everything, baby.

(*For just a moment, one senses the animal heat in their fleeting attraction. Now WILL comes stalking in through the front door, a man who is completely relaxed with the authority he possesses. He speaks to*

GRACE.)

WILL

One of the highway trucks just stopped by. They say it won't be very long now.

GRACE

I hope so.

WILL

(With a look around)

Everything peaceful?

GRACE

Yes, Will.

WILL

(He studies BO for a moment, then goes to him)

Cowboy, if yor holdin' any grudges against *me*, I think ya oughta ask yourself what you'd'a done in my *place*. I couldn't let ya carry off the li'l lady when she din wanta go, could I? *(BO has no answer. He just avoids WILL's eyes. But WILL is determined to get an answer)* Could I?

BO

I don't feel like talkin', Mister.

WILL

Well, I couldn't. And I think you might also remember that this li'l lady . . . *(CHERIE begins to stir)* if she wanted to . . . could press charges and get you sent to the penitentiary for violation of the Mann Act.

BO

The *what* act?

WILL
The Mann Act. You took a woman over the state line
against her will.

VIRGIL
That'd be a serious charge, Bo.

BO
(*Stands facing WILL*)
I loved her.

WILL
That don't make any difference.

BO
A man's gotta right to the things he loves.

WILL
Not unless he deserves 'em, cowboy.

BO
I'm a hard-workin' man, I own me my own ranch, I got six
thousand dollars in the bank.

WILL
A man don't deserve the things he loves, unless he kin be
a little humble about gettin' em.

BO
I ain't gonna get down on my knees and *beg*.

WILL

Bein' humble ain't the same thing as bein' *wretched*. (BO *doesn't understand*) I had to learn that once, too, cowboy. I wasn't quite as old as you. I stole horses instead of women because you could *sell* horses. One day, I stole a horse off the wrong man, the Rev. Hezekiah Pearson. I never thought I'd get mine from any preacher, but he was very fair. Gave me every chance to put myself clear. But I wouldn't admit the horse was his. Finally, he did what he had to do. He *threshed me* to within a inch of my life. I never forgot. Cause it was the first time in my life, I had to admit I was wrong. I was miserable. Finally, after a few days, I decided the only thing to do was to admit to the man how I felt. Then I felt different about the whole thing. I joined his church, and we was bosom pals till he died a few years ago. (*He turns to VIRGIL*) Has he done what I asked him to?

VIRGIL

Not yet, sheriff.

WILL

(*To BO*)

Why should ya be so scared?

BO

Who says I'm scared?

WILL

Ya gimme yor word, didn't ya?

BO

(*Somewhat resentful*)

I'm gonna do it, if ya'll jest gimme time.

But I warn ya, it ain't gonna do no good unless you really mean it.

BO

I'll mean it.

WILL

All right then. Go ahead.

(Slowly, reluctantly, BO gets to his feet and awkwardly, like a guilty boy, makes his way over to the counter to GRACE.)

BO

Miss, I . . . I wanna apologize.

GRACE

What for?

BO

Fer causin' such a commotion.

GRACE

Ya needn't apologize to *me*, cowboy. I like a good fight. You're welcome at Grace's Diner *any* time. I mean *any* time.

BO

(With an appreciative grin)

Thanks. *(Now he goes to ELMA)* I musta acted like a hoodlum. I apologize.

ELMA

Oh, that's all right

Thank ya, Miss.

ELMA

I'm awfully sorry we never got to see your rope tricks.

BO

They ain't much. (*Pointing to the sleeping DR. LYMAN*)
Have I gotta wake up the perfessor t'apologize t'him?

WILL

You can overlook the perfessor.

(He nods toward CHERIE, whom BO dreads to confront, most of all. He starts toward her but doesn't get very far.)

BO

I cain't do it.

VIRGIL

(Disappointed)

Aw, Bo!

BO

I jest cain't do it.

WILL

Why not?

BO

She'd have no respeck for me now. She saw me beat.

You gave me your promise. You owe that girl an apology,
whether you got beat or not, and you're going to say it to
her or I'm not lettin' you back on the bus.
(BO is in a dilemma. He wipes his brow.)

VIRGIL

G'wan, Bo. G'wan.

BO

Well . . . I . . . I'll try. (He makes his way to her tor-
tuously and finally gets out her name) Cherry!

CHERIE

Yah?

BO

Cherry . . . it wasn't right a me to treat ya the way I
did, draggin' ya onto the bus, tryin' to make ya marry me
whether ya wanted to or not. Ya think ya could ever forgive
me?

CHERIE

(After some consideration)

I guess I been treated worse in my life.

BO

(Taking out his wallet)

Cherry . . . I got ya here and I think I oughta get ya
back in good style. So . . . take this.

(He hands her a bill.)

CHERIE

Did the sheriff make you do this?

BO

(Angrily)

No, by God! He din say nothin' bout my givin' ya money.

WILL

That's *his* idea, Miss. But I think it's a good one.

CHERIE

Ya don't have to gimme this much, Bo.

BO

I want ya to have it.

CHERIE

Thanks. I can sure use it.

BO

And I . . . I wish ya good luck, Cherry . . . Honest I do.

CHERIE

I wish you the same, Bo.

BO

Well . . . I guess I said ev'rything that's to be said, so . . . so long.

CHERIE

(In a tiny voice)

So long.

(Awkward and embarrassed now, BO returns to his corner, and CHERIE sits back down at the table, full of wistful wonder.)

WILL
Now that wasn't so bad, was it, son?

BO

I'd rather break in wild horses than have to do it again.
(WILL laughs heartily, then strolls over to the counter
in a seemingly casual way.)

WILL

How's your headache, Grace?

GRACE

Huh?

WILL

A while back, you said you had a headache.

GRACE

Oh, I feel fine now, Will.

WILL

(He looks at CARL)

You have a nice walk, Carl?

CARL

Yah. Sure.

WILL

Well, I think ya better go upstairs cause someone took
your overshoes and left em outside the door to Grace's
apartment.

(WILL laughs long and heartily, and ELMA cannot

suppress a grin. CARL looks at his feet and realizes his oversight. GRACE is indignant.)

GRACE

Nosy old snoop!

WILL

I'll have me a cup of coffee, Grace, and one a these sweet rolls.

(He selects a roll from the glass dish on counter.)

VIRGIL

Come on over to the counter now, Bo, and have a bite a breakfast.

BO

I ain't hungry, Virge.

VIRGIL

Maybe a cup a coffee?

BO

I couldn't get it down.

VIRGIL

Now what's the matter, Bo? Ya oughta feel purty good. The sheriff let ya go and . . .

BO

I might as well a stayed in the jail.

VIRGIL

Now, what kinda talk is that? The bus'll be leavin' purty soon and we'll be back at the ranch in a coupla days.

BO

I don't care if I never see that dang ranch again.

VIRGIL

Why, Bo, you worked half yor life earnin' the money to build it up.

BO

It's the lonesomest damn place I ever did see.

VIRGIL

Well . . . I never thought so.

BO

It'll be like goin' back to a graveyard.

VIRGIL

Bo . . . I heard Hank and Orville talkin' bout the new school marm, lives over to the Stebbins'. They say she's a looker.

BO

I ain't int'rested in no school marm.

VIRGIL

Give yourself time, Bo. Yor young. You'll find lotsa gals, gals that'll love *you*, too.

BO

I want Cherry.

(And for the first time we observe he is capable of tears.)

VIRGIL

(With a futile shrug of his shoulders)

Aw—Bo—

BO

(Dismissing him)

Go git yorself somethin' t'eat, Virge.

(BO remains in isolated gloom as VIRGIL makes his slow way to the counter. Suddenly the telephone rings. GRACE jumps to answer it.)

GRACE

My God! the lines are up. *(Into the telephone)* Grace's Diner! *(Pause)* It is? *(Pause)* O.K. I'll tell him. *(Hangs up and turns to CARL)* Road's cleared now but you're gonna have to put on your chains 'cause the road's awful slick.

CARL

God damn! *(Gets up and hustles into his overcoat, going center to make his announcement)* Road's clear, folks! Bus'll be ready to leave as soon as I get the chains on. That'll take about twenty minutes . . . *(Stops and looks back at them)* . . . unless someone wants to help me.

(Out. WILL gets up from the counter.)

WILL

I'll help ya, Carl.

(Out. CHERIE makes her way over to BO.)

CHERIE

Bo?

BO

Yah?

CHERIE

I just wanted to tell ya somethin', Bo. It's kinda personal and kinda embarrassin', too, but . . . I ain't the kinda gal you thought I was.

BO

What ya mean, Cherry?

CHERIE

Well, I guess some people'd say I led a real wicked life. I guess I have.

BO

What ya tryin' to tell me?

CHERIE

Well . . . I figgered since ya found me at the Blue Dragon, ya just took it fer granted I'd had other boy friends 'fore you.

BO

Ya had?

CHERIE

Yes, Bo. Quite a few.

BO

Virge'd told me that, but I wouldn't b'lieve him.

CHERIE

Well, it's true. So ya see . . . I ain't the kinda gal ya want at all.

(BO is noncommittal. CHERIE slips back to her table. ELMA makes her way to the bench to rouse DR. LYMAN.)

ELMA

Dr. Lyman! Dr. Lyman!

(He comes to with a jump, staring out wildly about him.)

DR. LYMAN

Where am I? *(Recognizing ELMA)* Oh it's you. *(A great smile appears)* Dear girl. What a sweet awakening!

ELMA

How do you feel?

DR. LYMAN

That's not a polite question. How long have I been asleep here?

ELMA

Oh—a couple of hours.

DR. LYMAN

Sometimes Nature blesses me with a total blackout. I seem to remember absolutely nothing after we started our performance. How were we?

ELMA

Marvelous.

DR. LYMAN

Oh, I'm glad. Now I'll have a cup of that coffee you were trying to force on me last night.

ELMA

All right. Can I fix you something to eat?

DR. LYMAN

No. Nothing to eat.

(He makes a face of repugnance.)

ELMA

Oh, Dr. Lyman, you *must* eat something. Really.

DR. LYMAN

Must I?

ELMA

Oh yes! Please!

DR. LYMAN

Very well, for your sweet sake, I'll have a couple of three-minute eggs, and some toast and orange juice. But I'm doing this for *you*, mind you. Just for you.

(ELMA slips behind the counter to begin his breakfast, as VIRGIL gets up from the counter and goes to BO.)

VIRGIL

I'll go help the driver with his chains, Bo. You stay here and take care a that hand.

(He goes out. BO finds his way again to CHERIE.)

BO

Cherry . . . would I be molestin' ya if I said somethin'?

CHERIE

No . . .

BO

Well . . . since you brought the subject up, you *are* the first gal I ever had anything to do with. (*There is a silence*) By God! I never thought I'd hear m'self sayin' that, but I said it.

CHERIE

I never woulda guessed it, Bo.

BO

Ya see . . . I'd lived all my life on a ranch . . . and I guess I din know much about women . . . cause they're *diffrent* from men.

CHERIE

Well, natur'ly.

BO

Every time I got around one . . . I began to feel kinda scared . . . and I din know how t'act. It was aggravatin'.

CHERIE

Ya wasn't scared with *me*, Bo.

BO

When I come into that night club place, you was singin' . . . and you smiled at me while you was singin', and winked at me a coupla times. Remember?

CHERIE

Yah. I remember.

BO

Well, I guess I'm kinda green, but . . . no gal ever done that to me before, so I thought you was singin' yor songs just fer me.

CHERIE

Ya did kinda attrack me, Bo . . .

BO

Anyway, you was so purty, and ya seemed so kinda warm-hearted and sweet. I . . . I felt like I *could* love ya . . . and I did.

CHERIE

Bo—ya think you really did love me?

BO

Why Cherry! I couldn't be *familiar* . . . with a gal I din love.

(CHERIE is brought almost to tears. Neither she nor BO can find any more words for the moment, and drift away from each other back to their respective places. CARL comes back in, followed by VIRGIL and WILL. CARL has got his overshoes on now. He comes center again to make an announcement.)

CARL

Bus headed west! All aboard! Next stop, Topeka!
(He rejoins GRACE at the counter and, taking a pencil from his pocket, begins making out his report. WILL speaks to BO.)

WILL

How ya feelin' now, cowboy?

BO

I ain't the happiest critter that was ever born.

WILL

Just cause ya ain't happy now don't mean ya ain't gonna be happy t'morrow. Feel like shakin' hands now, cowboy?

BO

(Hesitant)

Well . . .

VIRGIL

Go on, Bo. He's only trying to be friends.

BO

(Offering his hand, still somewhat reluctantly)

I don't mind.

(They shake.)

WILL

I just want you to remember there's no hard feelin's. So long.

BO

S'long.

WILL

I'm goin' home now, Grace. See you Monday.

BUS STOP

GRACE

S'long, Will.

CARL

Thanks for helpin' me, Will. I'll be pullin' out, soon as I make out the reports.

WILL

(Stops at the door and gives a final word to CHERIE)

Montana's not a bad place, Miss.

(He goes out.)

VIRGIL

Nice fella, Bo.

BO

(Concentrating on CHERIE)

Maybe I'll think so some day.

VIRGIL

Well, maybe we better be boardin' the bus, Bo.

(Without even hearing VIRGIL, BO makes his way suddenly over to CHERIE.)

BO

Cherry!

CHERIE

Hi, Bo!

BO

Cherry, I promised not to molest ya, but if you was to give yor permission, it'd be all right. I . . . I'd like to kiss ya g'by.

BUS STOP

CHERIE

Ya would? (BO *nods*) I'd like ya to kiss me, Bo. I really would. (A wide grin cracks open his face and he becomes all hoodlum boy again, about to take her in his arms roughly as he did before, but she stops him) Bo! I think this time when ya kiss me, it oughta be diff'rent.

BO

(Not sure what she means)

Oh!

(He looks around at VIRGIL who turns quickly away, as though admitting his inability to advise his buddy. BO then takes her in his arms cautiously, as though holding a precious object that was still a little strange to him.)

BO

Golly! When ya kiss someone fer serious, it's kinda scarey, ain't it?

CHERIE

Yah! It is.

(Anyway, he kisses her, long and tenderly.)

GRACE

(At the counter)

It don't look like he was molestin' her now.

(BO, after the kiss is ended, is dazed. Uncertain of his feelings, he stampedes across the room to VIRGIL, drawing him to a bench where the two men can confer. The action continues with DR. LYMAN, at the counter, having his breakfast.)

DR. LYMAN

I could tell you with all honesty that this was the most delicious breakfast I've ever eaten, but it wouldn't be much of a compliment because I have eaten very few breakfasts.
(They laugh together.)

ELMA

It's my favorite meal.

(Turns to the refrigerator as he brings bottle out secretly and spikes his coffee.)

DR. LYMAN

(When ELMA returns)

Dear girl, let us give up our little spree, shall we? You don't want to go traipsing over the streets of the State's capital with an old reprobate like me.

ELMA

Whatever you say.

DR. LYMAN

I shall continue my way to Denver. I'm sure it's best.

ELMA

Anyway, I've certainly enjoyed knowing you.

DR. LYMAN

Thank you. Ah! sometimes it is so gratifying to feel that one is doing the "right" thing, I wonder that I don't choose to always.

ELMA

What do you mean?

DR. LYMAN

Oh, I was just rambling. You know, perhaps while I am in the vicinity to Topeka, I should drop in at that hospital and seek some advice.

ELMA

Sometimes their patients come in here. They look perfectly all right to me.

DR. LYMAN

(To himself)

Friends have been hinting for quite a while that I should get psychoanalyzed. *(He chuckles)* I don't know if they had my best interests at heart or their own.

ELMA

Golly. I don't see anything the matter with you.

DR. LYMAN

(A little sadly)

No. Young people never do. *(Now with a return of high spirits)* However, I don't think I care to be psychoanalyzed. I rather cherish myself as I am *(The cavalier again, he takes her hand)* Good-bye, my dear! You were the loveliest Juliet since Miss Jane Cowl.

(Kisses her hand gallantly, then goes for his coat. ELMA comes from behind counter and follows him.)

ELMA

Thank you, Dr. Lyman. I feel it's been an honor to know you. You're the smartest man I've ever met.

DR. LYMAN

The smartest?

ELMA

Really you are.

DR. LYMAN

Oh yes. I'm terribly smart. Wouldn't it have been nice . . . to be intelligent?

(He chuckles, blows a kiss to her, then hurries out the door. ELMA lingers behind, watching him get on the bus.)

CARL

(To GRACE)

Hey, know what I heard about the professor? The detective at the bus terminal in Kanz City is a buddy a mine. He pointed out the professor to me before he got on the bus. Know what he said? He said the p'lice in Kanz City picked the professor up for *loiterin'* round the schools.

GRACE

(Appalled)

Honest?

CARL

Then they checked his record and found he'd been in trouble several times, for gettin' involved with young girls.

GRACE

My God! Did you tell Will?

CARL

Sure, I told him. They ain't *got* anything on the perffessor now, so there's nothin' Will could do. (*ELMA makes her way back to the counter now and hears the rest of what CARL has to say*) What gets *me* is why does he call hisself a doctor? Is he some kinda phony?

ELMA

No, Carl. He's a Doctor of Philosophy.

CARL

What's that?

ELMA

It's the very highest degree there is, for scholarship.

GRACE

Ya'd think he'd have philosophy enough to keep outa trouble.

(*ELMA resumes her work behind the counter now.*)

CARL

(*To GRACE*)

Sorry to see me go, baby?

GRACE

No . . . I told ya, I'm tired.

CARL

(Good-naturedly)

Ya know, sometimes I get to thinkin', what the hell good is marriage, where ya have to put up with the same broad every day, and lookit her in the morning, and try to get along with her when she's got a bad disposition. This way suits me fine.

GRACE

I got no complaints, either. Incidentally, are you married, Carl?

CARL

Now, who said I was married, Grace? Who said it? You just tell me and I'll fix him.

GRACE

Relax! Relax! See ya day after tomorrow.

(She winks at him.)

CARL

(Winks back)

You might get surprised . . . what can happen in twenty minutes. *(Slaps GRACE on the buttocks as a gesture of farewell)* All aboard!

(He hustles out the front door as BO hurries to CHERIE.)

GRACE

(To herself)

He still never said whether he was married.

BO

Cherry?

CHERIE

(A little expectantly)

Yah?

BO

I been talkin' with my buddy, and he thinks I'm virgin
enough fer the two of us.

CHERIE

(Snickers, very amused)

Honest? Did Virgil say that?

BO

Yah . . . and I like ya like ya are, Cherry. So I don't care
how ya got that way.

CHERIE

(Deeply touched)

Oh God, thass the sweetest, tenderest thing that was ever
said to me.

BO

(Feeling awkward)

Cherry . . . it's awful hard for a fella, after he's been
turned down once, to git up enough guts to try again . . .

CHERIE

Ya don't need guts, Bo.

BO

(Not quite sure what she means)

I don't?

CHERIE

It's the last thing in the world ya need.

BO

Well . . . anyway, I jest don't have none now, so I'll . . .
just have to say what I feel in my heart.

CHERIE

Yah?

BO

I still wish you was goin' back to the ranch with me,
more'n anything I know.

CHERIE

Ya do?

BO

Yah. I do.

CHERIE

Why, I'd go anywhere in the world with ya now, Bo. Any-
where at all.

BO

Ya would? Ya would?

(They have a fast embrace. All look.)

GRACE

(Nudging ELMA)

I knew this was gonna happen all the time.

ELMA

Gee, I didn't.

*(Now BO and CHERIE break apart, both running to op-
posite sides of the room, BO to tell VIRGIL; CHERIE,
ELMA.)*