

BO. *(There is nothing to call him for the moment but insolent as he crosses to Will.)* 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.

Will rises, comes L. of Bo.

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...

Virgil puts his guitar down, Bo puts his hat on top of it.

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. Will drifts D.S., looking at Bo.

Yap, I'm the prize bronco-buster, 'n steer-roper, 'n bull-dogger 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.

WILL. You was the last one in, cowboy, and you left the door open. You shoulda 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

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 quit-
tin'... 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.

Bo rises, walks slowly to window.

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 comes D.S., straddles a chair 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.

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

VIRGIL. I coulda married up, too.

BO. Was ya ever in love?

VIRGIL. 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. Y'are?

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

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 cain't 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?

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. Carl leans over counter.

CARL: 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 most a the night. It'd sure be nice to have a nice li'l apartment to go to, someplace 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.

Elma is washing, drying dishes behind counter.

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.

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. (*Sits on stool at counter.*) 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. OK. Make it a ham on rye, then.

GRACE. (*At breadbox.*) I'm sorry, Carl, but we got no rye, either.

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

Elma, at stove, watches.

CARL. (*Turns.*) Look, 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? (*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.

Dr. Lyman signals Elma for more soda.

GRACE. How's fer whole wheat, Carl?

CARL. OK. Make it whole wheat.

Elma gets soda from refrigerator, takes it to Dr. Lyman.

DR. LYMAN. (*To Elma, as she brings him soda.*) Yes, I am free. My third and last wife deserted me several years ago...for a ballplayer.

He chuckles as though it were all a big absurdity. Elma starts back to counter, stops.

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

Grace makes sandwich, gives it and coffee to Carl, stands behind counter talking to him as he eats. Elma sits at Dr. Lyman's table.

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. (*Indicates Cherie.*) And Southern, too, or pretended to be. However, she was kinder

He looks around to make sure everyone has heard him, then goes out front door. Bo has heard and seen him, and suddenly turns from his corner and comes angrily down to Virgil. Dr. Lyman drifts to window and sits.

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

VIRGIL. Where would ya take her, Bo?

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 perfessor?

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 Virgil.

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 jst 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 handkerchief 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.

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 gittin' married."

Bo rises, walks L. Virgil pulls him down to sit.

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

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.

He pours drink.

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.*) Gee! 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.

[REDACTED]. 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. (*Crosses to stove.*) Brrr, it's cold. Virgil, I wish you'd play us another song. I think we all need somethin' to cheer us up.

Elma crosses D.S., around counter.

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?

Cherie runs behind counter, gets suitcase, takes it U. L. and looks for costume.

Elma sweeps U.S. and toward front door R.

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. (*Crosses to R. of Carl.*) One of the highway trucks just stopped by. They say it won't be very long now.

Elma crosses D. R. to sweep near Cherie.

GRACE. I hope so.

WILL. (*With a look around.*) Everything peaceful?

GRACE. Yes, Will.

He studies Bo for a moment, then goes to him.

WILL. 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?

Grace leans on counter.

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.

Virgil crosses D. R. near door.

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 comes D. R., sits at chair R. of C. table.

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

Virgil crosses D.S. L. of R. table.

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. (*Turns*

VIRGIL. Not yet, sheriff. (*Sits at a table.*)

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.

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

Elma is R. with dustpan.

BO. I'll mean it.

WILL. All right then. Go ahead.

Will crosses U. C. Slowly, reluctantly, Bo gets to his feet and awkwardly, like a guilty boy, makes his way over to the counter to Grace. Carl crosses to stove.

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 U. R.

I musta acted like a hoodlum. I apologize.

ELMA. Oh, that's all right.

BO. Thank ya, Miss.

Elma crosses L., empties dustpan in can under sink.

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

She puts broom and dustpan away, sits on stool.

BO. They ain't much. (*Pointing to the sleeping Dr. Lyman.*) Have I gotta wake up the perffessor t'apologize t'him?

Carl drifts toward counter.

ELMA. (*Leaving the window, following Grace.*) Nights like this, I'm
and have a home to go to.

GRACE. (*Washing and drying.*) Well, I got a home to go to, but there

ELMA. (*Putting tops on three sugar bowls on counter.*) Where's your
husband now, Grace?

GRACE. How should I know?

ELMA. (*Crosses R. with two sugars.*) Don't you miss him?

GRACE. No!

ELMA. (*Puts sugars on tables.*) If he came walking in now, wouldn't
you be glad to see him?

GRACE. You ask more questions.

ELMA. I'm just curious about things, Grace.

GRACE. Well, kids your age *are*. I don't know. I'd be happy to see
him, I guess, if I knew he wasn't gonna stay very long.

ELMA. (*Crossing back to U.S. end of counter.*) Don't you get lone-
some, Grace, when you're not working down here?

GRACE. Sure I do. If I didn't have this restaurant to keep me busy,
I'd prob'ly go nuts. Sometimes, at night, after I empty the garbage
and lock the doors and turn out the lights, I get kind of a sick feelin',
'cause I sure don't look forward to walkin' up those stairs and lettin'
myself into an empty apartment.

ELMA. Gee, if you feel that way, why don't you write your husband
and tell him to come back?

Grace thinks a moment, leans on D.S. end of counter.

GRACE. '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!

Grace goes to U. L. telephone again. Elma goes to sink, dries

glasses which she puts D.S. on counter.

Now, maybe I can get the operator. (*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. Weekends especially.

ELMA. You know, I dreaded the job at first.

GRACE. (*Kidding her.*) Why? Thought you wouldn't have time for all your boyfriends?

Elma looks a little sour. Grace gets rag from sink, wipes counter.

Maybe you'd have more boyfriends if you didn't make such good grades. Boys feel kind of embarrassed if they feel a girl is smarter than they are.

ELMA. What should I do? Flunk my courses?

GRACE. (*Puts rag on sink.*) I should say not. You're a good kid and ya got good sense. I wish someone coulda reasoned with *me* when I was your age. But I was a headstrong brat, had to have my own way. I had my own way all right, and here I am now, a grass widow runnin' a restaurant, and I'll prob'ly die in this little town and they'll bury me out by the backhouse.

Will 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.

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.