

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 front door swings open, some of the snow flying inside, and Cherie, a young blonde girl of about twenty, enters as though driven. She wears no hat, and her hair, despite one brilliant bobby pin, blows wild about her face. She is pretty in a fragile, girlish way. She runs immediately to the counter to solicit the attention of Grace and Elma. She lugs along an enormous 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 makeup has been applied under the influence of having seen too many movies. Her lipstick creates a voluptuous pair of lips that aren't her own, and her eyebrows also form a somewhat arbitrary line. But despite all these defects, her prettiness still is apparent, and she has the appeal of a tender little bird. Her origin is the Ozarks and her speech is Southern.*

CHERIE. (Anxious, direct.) Is there someplace 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 door U. L., starting for it.) I'll hide in the powder room. If a tall, lanky cowboy comes in here, you kin just tell him I disappeared.

GRACE. (Her voice stopping Cherie at the door.) Hey, you can't hide out there. It's cold. You'll freeze your...

CHERIE. (Having opened the door, seeing it is an outside toilet.) Oh! It's outside.

GRACE. This is just a country town.

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 shuts the door, coming to counter, lugging her suitcase. She is about to cry.*

CHERIE. Criminey! What am I gonna do?

*Grace comes from behind counter, gets coat, and goes to front door.*

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

*Grace goes out front door.*

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 diff'rence 'tween a fighter and a *bully*.

*Will goes U. R., gets magazine from rack and sits on bench by window.*

CHERIE. (*Shuddering.*) There's gonna be trouble. I kin feel it in my bones.