

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. (*Chuckles, sighs, and recalls another.*) My second wife was a different type entirely. But she was very pretty, too. I have always exercised the most excellent taste, if not the best judgment. She was a student of mine, when I was teaching at an Eastern university. Alas! she sued me for divorce on the grounds that I was incontinent and always drunk.

Elma rises, starts L.

I didn't have a chance to resign from that position. (*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. (*Hurrying back to counter.*) I'll make you a special price, two for a nickel.

CHERIE. OK.

Musingly Dr. Lyman begins to recite, as though for his own enjoyment.

DR. LYMAN.

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

Cherie shivers, Elma hands her doughnuts on a plate. Cherie gives Elma money and crosses to stove.

CHERIE. I never was so cold in my life.

ELMA. Do you honestly work in a night club?

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

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

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

CHERIE. How come *you* know so much?

Grace sits at counter with Carl.

ELMA. I'm taking French in high school.

CHERIE. Oh!

A reflective pause.

I never got as far as high school. See, I was the oldest girl left in the 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. (*Sitting L. of Cherie at table.*) 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?

Dr. Lyman is reading a book.

CHERIE. (*With an acceptance of nature's catastrophes.*) No. Joplin's a *big* town. I lived 'bout a hundred miles from there, in River Gulch, a 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, till the amateur contest opened.

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

A fleeting look of disillusionment comes over Cherie's face.

CHERIE. Well...it ain't all roses.

Leaving Grace for the moment, Carl crosses to Will, gets his coat.

CARL. You gonna be here awhile, Will?

WILL. I reckon.

Elma rises, crosses to below counter.

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

WILL. I'll do my best.

CARL. Tell ya somethin' else, Will.

Carl looks at Dr. Lyman cautiously, as though he didn't want to be overheard by him, then moves very close 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.

Carl starts off.

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

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

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

WILL. In this blizzard? You gone crazy?

Elma is doing dishes behind the counter.

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

Grace clears dishes from counter.

WILL. Ya do?