

Charles Jack Martin

all turn to look at her.) But ... everything has its price. (*Marie glares at her.*)

CHARLES. This profession of yours — always roaming from town to town — it's hardly the life for newlyweds.

JACK. True, sir. However, I've managed to save a few coins to establish a stabler trade.

CHARLES. Namely?

JACK. Bread-baking.

CHARLES. (*Beat.*) Bread-baking?

MARIE. We've plans to open a shop in Paris.

CHARLES. (*Dead serious.*) Bread-baking's not a casual enterprise. Not a trade to be dabbled in.

MARIE. Oh, Jack was apprenticed for a time.

JACK. Yes sir, and make one hell of a raisin loaf. BUT — who can afford to apprentice these days?

MARTIN. I hope you're a better baker than minstrel.

JACK. You try juggling, with one eye sometime.

CHARLES. How, may I ask, did you lose it?

JACK. Occupational hazard — an old routine.

CHARLES. Juggling?

JACK. Knives. (*The monks all wince.*) I ... don't do that one any more.

MARTIN. Maybe you should consider a pilgrimage. I hear they're having luck in Bernay. (*Charles shoots Martin a look.*)

JACK. (*His bitterness showing through.*) I prayed years for two good eyes.

CHARLES. What was the result?

JACK. Two bad knees.

MARIE. Jack ...

MARTIN. Maybe your faith wasn't strong enough.

JACK. As long as my penny landed in the plate, they didn't seem to mind.

PEASANT WOMAN. Boy, that's the truth.

MARIE. Let's do another song.

CHARLES. Thank you —

MARIE. "Sad sings the lonesome mourning dove ..." (*She gestures for Jack to sing.*)

CHARLES. (*To Marie.*) You're free to go back to the village.

PEASANT WOMAN. Wait a minute —

JACK. There's more to the act ...

MARIE. Jack, sing the response.

CHARLES. We'd like to speak with your husband alone.

PEASANT WOMAN. You can speak to her alone, if you like.

CHARLES. That won't be —

PEASANT WOMAN. I'm her mother, and I see nothing wrong with it.

MARTIN. That's quite apparent.

PEASANT WOMAN. She's worked with the clergy before.

MARIE. They said no.

CHARLES. Jack will suffice. (*Peasant Woman looks from Jack to Charles and back.*)

PEASANT WOMAN. To each his own. (*She exits; Marie follows, taking one last look back and catching Jack's eye. After a moment.*)

CHARLES. Your wife has unusual grace for a local girl. Where did you meet her?

JACK. Playing the fair in Dijon.

MARTIN. Is she really your wife?

JACK. In all eyes but those of the church and the law. (*Adding quickly.*) But we're to be married shortly — as soon as we're set with the bakery.

CHARLES. Ah yes, the bakery. (*Charles rises.*) I once knew a baker in this town — a simple man who loved his children and revered his profession like a priest his vows. Until one year, because of a drought, the price of grain went through the roof. So the baker had his young son and daughter throw in handfuls of sawdust to stretch the flour.

JACK. Sawdust? (*Charles nods.*) Interesting choice.

CHARLES. However, when the drought was over, it didn't stop. Instead, the sawdust started to increase, until those peasants were eating more wood than wheat. And it looked as though this might go on forever ... until one morning the vicar sat down to his bread and milk and wound up with a splinter in his lip.

JACK. Ouch.

CHARLES. Ouch. They locked the baker in the pillory with a loaf of his own bread strung around his neck. Then flogged him till he bled like an animal. His children ran away to renounce the

merchant world for good.
 JACK. I'll make a note of that: "No sawdust."
 CHARLES. That baker was my father.
 JACK. (*Beat.*) I can see how that might make a boy want to change careers.
 MARTIN. My father was a butcher — you don't want to know.
 JACK. And the moral of this story is...?
 CHARLES. "Bread of deceit is sweet to a man; but afterwards his mouth shall be filled with gravel."
 JACK. Genesis?
 MARTIN. Proverbs.
 JACK. (*Snapping his fingers.*) Proverbs, right. I always mess up the "begats" too. Well, I appreciate the Bible verses and the baking tips; but you didn't hire me to save my soul or improve my bread. So how about I tell a story now, hmm? (*He starts pulling props and costume pieces out of his bag.*) I've got fables, I've got yarns — (*Suggestively.*) with or without the moral...
 MARTIN. Maybe later.
 JACK. I can even do "The Priest and the Pig" as an epic poem. (*He pops a set of pig's ears on his head.*)
 CHARLES. How about riddles?
 JACK. Riddles? Certainly, riddles are a specialty: puzzlers, chucklers, teasers, pleasers...
 CHARLES. Then answer me this riddle: Why might a minstrel have thirty gold pieces?
 JACK. Beg pardon?
 MARTIN. One ear must be deaf as well. (*He stands and approaches Jack.*) He said what would a simple player be doing with thirty gold pieces?
 JACK. (*Anticipating a punch line.*) I don't know, what would a simple player —
 CHARLES. That string around your neck — it's not a cross.
 JACK. You know, there are much funnier riddles...
 CHARLES. Could it be a purse?
 JACK. Here's one: What did the prostitute say to the bishop?
 MARTIN. Let's see it.
 JACK. No, but you're close. She said, "Is that a miter in your cassock, or —"

CHARLES. Why don't you show us what's in your purse?
 JACK. If you're through with my services, gentlemen, I think I should — (*He starts packing his bags.*)
 MARTIN. Open it up.
 JACK. A poor man's pennies are his own to count.
 CHARLES. We don't want your pennies. We're looking for gold.
 JACK. Then you've got the wrong man...
 MARTIN. You'd swear to that?
 JACK. I've already told / you —
 CHARLES. Then swear it on the saint. Swear on Saint Foy that you weren't paid thirty gold pieces for delivering her imposter.
 JACK. I don't know what you're —
 CHARLES. Just swear to that. (*Charles steps aside to give Jack clear access to the altar. Martin and Olf follow suit.*) Go ahead.
 JACK. Just swear.
 CHARLES. That's right. (*Jack hesitates briefly, then crosses to the altar and gingerly places his right hand on the bones, his left in the air.*)
 OLF. Right hand.
 CHARLES. Thank you, Brother Olf. (*To Jack.*) Right hand, please. (*Jack switches hands, hesitates, starts to speak, stops, and moves quickly away from the altar.*)
 JACK. This is ridiculous.
 MARTIN. Can't do it, can you?
 JACK. (*Barely holding it together.*) If I had thirty gold pieces, gentlemen, do you think I'd waste my day in church? I've squandered too many others on priests and promises that never paid off. Now I'm sorry I don't have what you were hoping for, but maybe that makes us even. (*He crouches down, packing his bags.*)
 CHARLES. (*Beat.*) "Behold the wicked man conceives evil, and is pregnant with mischief, and brings forth lies." (*He signals to Martin.*)
 JACK. You can quote all the proverbs you want...
 CHARLES. "He makes a pit, digging it out..." (*Martin crosses behind Jack.*)
 JACK. But you can't get blood from a stone.
 CHARLES. "And falls into the hole which he has made."
 JACK. Besides — (*Martin grabs the drastring around Jack's neck and pulls it taut, lifting Jack off his haunches. Jack grabs at the string that's choking him until Martin releases the tension and Jack relin-*