

ORPHEUS 1

BEULAH: Where's the Temple sisters?

DOLLY: Where d'you think?

BEULAH: Snoopin' aroun' upstairs. If Lady catches 'em at it she'll give those two old maids a touch of her tongue! She's not a Dago for nothin'!

DOLLY: Ha, ha, no! You spoke a true word, honey . . . [*Looks out door as car passes.*] Well, I was surprised when I wint up myself!

BEULAH: You wint up you'self?

DOLLY: I did and so did you because I seen you, Beulah.

BEULAH: I never said that I didn't. Curiosity is a human instinct.

DOLLY: They got two separate bedrooms which are not even connectin'. At opposite ends of the hall, and everything is so dingy an' dark up there. Y'know what it seemed like to me? A county jail! I swear to goodness it didn't seem to me like a place for white people to live in!—that's the truth . . .

BEULAH [*darkly*]: Well, I wasn't surprised. Jabe Torrance bought that woman.

DOLLY: Bought her?

BEULAH: Yais, he bought her, when she was a girl of eighteen! He bought her and bought her cheap because she'd been thrown over and her heart was broken by that— [*Jerks head toward a passing car, then continues.*]—that Cutrere boy. . . . *Oh*, what a—*Mmmm*, what a—*beautiful* thing he was. . . . And those two met like you struck two stones together and made a fire!—yes—fire . . .

DOLLY: What?

BEULAH: *Fire—Ha . . .* [*Strikes another match and lights one of the candelabra. Mandolin begins to fade in. The following monologue should be treated frankly as exposition, spoken to audience, almost directly, with a force that commands attention. Dolly does not remain in the playing area, and after the first few sentences, there is no longer any pretense of a duologue*]

—Well, that was a long time ago, before you and Dog moved into Two River County. Although you must have heard of it. Lady's father was a Wop from the old country and when he first come here with a mandolin and a monkey that wore a little green velvet suit, ha ha.

—He picked up dimes and quarters in the saloons—this was before Prohibition. . . .

—People just called him “The Wop,” nobody knew his name, just called him “The Wop,” ha ha ha. . . .

DOLLY [*off, vaguely*]: Anh-hannnh. . . .

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*The women turn to see Carol Cutrere in the archway between the store and the confectionery. She is past thirty and, lacking prettiness, she has an odd, fugitive beauty which is stressed, almost to the point of fantasy, by a style of make-up with which a dancer named Valli has lately made such an impression in the bohemian centers of France and Italy, the face and lips powdered white and the eyes outlined and exaggerated with black pencil and the lids tinted blue. Her family name is the oldest and most distinguished in the county.*

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BEULAH: Somebody don't seem to know that the store is closed.

DOLLY: Beulah?

BEULAH: What?

DOLLY: Can you understand how anybody would deliberately make themselves look fantastic as that?

BEULAH: Some people have to show off, it's a passion with them, anything on earth to get attention.

DOLLY: I sure wouldn't care for that kind of attention. Not me. I wouldn't desire it. . . .

*[During these lines, just loud enough for her to hear them, Carol has crossed to the pay-phone and deposited a coin.]*

CAROL: I want Tulane 0370 in New Orleans. What? Oh. Hold on a minute.

*[Eva Temple is descending the stairs, slowly, as if awed by Carol's appearance, Carol rings open the cashbox and removes some coins; returns to deposit coins in phone.]*

BEULAH: She helped herself to money out of the cashbox.

*[Eva passes Carol like a timid child skirting a lion cage.]*

CAROL: Hello, Dolly.

BEULAH: I'm Beulah.

CAROL: Hello, Beulah.

BEULAH: Hello . . . [*Then in a loud whisper to Beulah and Dolly.*] She took money out of the cashbox.

DOLLY: Oh, she can do as she pleases, she's a Cutrere!

BEULAH: Shoot . . .

DOLLY: What is she doin' barefooted?

BEULAH: The last time she was arrested on the highway, they say that she was naked under her coat.

CAROL [*to operator*]: I'm waiting. [*Then to women.*]—I caught the heel of my slipper in that rotten boardwalk out there and it broke right off. [*Raises slippers in hand.*] They say if you break the heel of your slipper in the morning it means you'll meet the love of your life before dark. But it was already dark when I broke the heel of my slipper. Maybe that means I'll meet the love of my life before daybreak. [*The quality of her voice is curiously clear and childlike. Sister Temple appears on stair landing bearing an old waffle iron.*]

CAROL [*at phone*]: Just keep on ringing, please, he's probably drunk. [*Sister crosses by her as Eva did.*] Sometimes it takes quite a while to get through the living-room furniture. . . .

DOLLY: —She a *sight*?

BEULAH: Uh-huh!

CAROL: Bertie?—Carol! —Hi, doll! Did you trip over something? I heard a crash. Well, I'm leaving right now, I'm already on the highway and everything's fixed, I've got my allowance back on condition that I remain forever away from Two River County! I had to blackmail them a little. I came to dinner with my eyes made up and my little black sequin jacket and Betsy Boo, my brother's wife, said, "Carol, you going out to a fancy dress ball?" I said, "Oh, no, I'm just going jooking tonight up and down the Dixie Highway between here and Memphis like I used to when I lived here." Why, honey, she flew so fast you couldn't see her passing and came back in with the ink still wet on the check!

BEULAH: What she looking for?

DOLLY: Ask her.

BEULAH [*advancing*]: What're you looking for, Carol?

CAROL: Cartridges for my revolver.

DOLLY: She don't have a license to carry a pistol.

BEULAH: She don't have a license to drive a car.

CAROL: When I stop for someone I want to be sure it's someone I want to stop for.

ORPHEUS 3

CAROL: What're you fixing?

VAL: Belt buckle.

CAROL: Boys like you are always fixing something. Could you fix my slipper?

VAL: What's wrong with your slipper?

CAROL: Why are you pretending not to remember me?

VAL: It's hard to remember someone you never met.

CAROL: Then why'd you look so startled when you saw me?

VAL: Did I?

CAROL: I thought for a moment you'd run back out the door.

VAL: The sight of a woman can make me walk in a hurry but I don't think it's ever made me run. —You're standing in my light.

CAROL [*moving aside slightly*]: Oh, excuse me. Better?

VAL: Thanks. . . .

CAROL: Are you afraid I'll snitch?

VAL: Do what?

CAROL: Snitch? I wouldn't; I'm not a snitch. But I can prove that I know you if I have to. It was New Year's Eve in New Orleans.

VAL: I need a small pair of pliers. . . .

CAROL: You had on that jacket and a snake ring with a ruby eye.

VAL: I never had a snake ring with a ruby eye.

CAROL: A snake ring with an emerald eye?

VAL: I never had a snake ring with any kind of an eye. . . . [*Begins to whistle softly, his face averted.*]

CAROL [*smiling gently*]: Then maybe it was a dragon ring with an emerald eye or a diamond or a ruby eye. You told us that it was a gift from a lady osteopath that you'd met somewhere in your travels and that any time you were broke you'd wire this lady osteopath collect, and no matter how far you were or how long it was since you'd seen her, she'd send you a money order for twenty- five dollars with the same sweet message each time. "I love you. When will you come back?"

VAL: Why are you so anxious to prove I know you?

CAROL: Because I want to know you better and better! I'd like to go out jooking with you tonight.

VAL: What's jooking?

CAROL: Oh, don't you know what that is? That's where you get in a car and drink a little and drive a little and stop and dance a little to a juke box and then you drink a little more and drive a

little more and stop and dance a little more to a juke box and then you stop dancing and you just drink and drive and then you stop driving and just drink, and then, finally, you stop drinking. . . .

VAL: —What do you do, then?

CAROL: That depends on the weather and who you're jooking with. If it's a clear night you spread a blanket among the memorial stones on Cypress Hill, which is the local bone orchard, but if it's not a fair night, and this one certainly isn't, why, usually then you go to the Idlewild cabins between here and Sunset on the Dixie Highway. . . .

VAL: —That's about what I figured. But I don't go that route. Heavy drinking and smoking the weed and shacking with strangers is okay for kids in their twenties but this is my thirtieth birthday and I'm all through with that route. [*Looks up with dark eyes.*] I'm not young any more.

CAROL: You're young at thirty—I hope so! I'm twenty-nine!

VAL: Naw, you're not young at thirty if you've been on a god-dam party since you were fifteen!



*A couple of hours later that night. Through the great window the landscape is faintly luminous under a scudding moonlit sky. Outside a girl's laughter, Carol's, rings out high and clear and is followed by the sound of a motor, rapidly going off.*

*Val enters the store before the car sound quite fades out and while a dog is still barking at it somewhere along the highway. He says "Christ" under his breath, goes to the buffet table and scrubs lipstick stain off his mouth and face with a paper napkin, picks up his guitar, which he had left on a counter.*

*Footsteps descending: Lady appears on the landing in a flannel robe, shivering in the cold air; she snaps her fingers impatiently for the old dog, Bella, who comes limping down beside her. She doesn't see Val, seated on the shadowy counter, and she goes directly to the phone near the stairs. Her manner is desperate, her voice harsh and shrill.*

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LADY: Ge' me the drugstore, will you? I know the drugstore's closed, this is Mrs. Torrance, my store's closed, too, but I got a sick man here, just back from the hospital, yeah, yeah, an emergency, wake up Mr. Dubinsky, keep ringing till he answers, it's an emergency! [*Pause: she mutters under her breath:*] —*Porca la miserial!* —I wish I was dead, dead, dead. . . .

VAL [*quietly*]: No, you don't, lady.

[*She gasps, turning and seeing him, without leaving the phone, she rings the cashbox open and snatches out something.*]

LADY: What're you doin' here? You know this store is closed!

VAL: I seen a light was still on and the door was open so I come back to—

LADY: You see what I got in my hand? [*Raises revolver above level of counter.*]

VAL: You going to shoot me?

LADY: You better believe it if you don't get out of here, mister!

VAL: That's all right, Lady, I just come back to pick up my guitar.

LADY: To pick up your guitar?

[*He lifts it gravely.*]

—Huh. . . .

VAL: Mizz Talbott brought me here. I was here when you got back from Memphis, don't you remember?

LADY: —Aw. Aw, yeah. . . . You been here all this time?

VAL: No. I went out and come back.

LADY [*into the phone*]: I told you to keep ringing till he answers! Go on, keep ringing, keep ringing! [*Then to Val:*] You went out and come back?

VAL: Yeah.

LADY: What for?

VAL: You know that girl that was here?

LADY: Carol Cutrere?

VAL: She said she had car trouble and could I fix it.

LADY: —Did you fix it?

VAL: She didn't have no car trouble, that wasn't her trouble, oh, she had trouble, all right, but *that* wasn't it. . . .

LADY: What was her trouble?

VAL: She made a mistake about me.

LADY: What mistake?

VAL: She thought I had a sign “Male at Stud” hung on me.

LADY: She thought you—? [*Into phone suddenly:*] Oh, Mr. Dubinsky, I’m sorry to wake you up but I just brought my husband back from the Memphis hospital and I left my box of Luminal tablets in the—I got to have some! I ain’t slep’ for three nights, I’m going to pieces, you hear me, I’m going to pieces, I ain’t slept in three nights, I got to have some tonight. Now you look here, if you want to keep my trade, you send me over some tablets. Then bring them yourself, God damn it, excuse my French! Because I’m going to pieces right this minute! [*Hangs up violently.*] —*Mannage la miseria!* —Christ. . . . I’m shivering! —It’s cold as a goddam ice plant in this store, I don’t know why, it never seems to hold heat, the ceiling’s too high or something, it don’t hold heat at all. —Now what do you want? I got to go upstairs.

VAL: Here. Put this on you. [*He removes his jacket and hands it to her. She doesn’t take it at once, stares at him questioningly and then slowly takes the jacket in her hands and examines it, running her fingers curiously over the snakeskin.*]

LADY: What is this stuff this thing’s made of? It looks like it was snakeskin.

VAL: Yeah, well, that’s what it is.

LADY: What’re you doing with a snakeskin jacket?

VAL: It’s a sort of a trademark; people call me Snakeskin.

LADY: Who calls you Snakeskin?

VAL: Oh, in the bars, the sort of places I work in—but I’ve quit that. I’m through with that stuff now. . . .

LADY: You’re a—entertainer?

VAL: I sing and play the guitar.

LADY: —Aw? [*She puts the jacket on as if to explore it.*] It feels warm all right.

VAL: It's warm from my body, I guess. . . .

LADY: You must be a warm-blooded boy. . . .

VAL: That's right. . . .

LADY: Well, what in God's name are you lookin' for around here?

VAL: —Work.

LADY: Boys like you don't work.

VAL: What d'you mean by boys like me?

LADY: Ones that play th' guitar and go around talkin' about how warm they are. . . .

VAL: You don't believe me?

LADY: I have no reason to doubt you, but what about it? VAL:

—Why—nothing. . . .

[*Lady laughs softly and suddenly; Val smiles slowly and warmly.*]

LADY: You're a peculiar somebody all right, you sure are! How did you get around here?

VAL: I was driving through here last night and an axle broke on my car, that stopped me here, and I went to the county jail for a place to sleep out of the rain. Mizz Talbott took me in and give me a cot in the lockup and said if I hung around till you got back that you might give me a job in the store to help out since your husband was tooken sick.

LADY: —Uh-huh. Well—she was wrong about that. . . . If I took on help here it would have to be local help, I couldn't hire no stranger with a—snakeskin jacket and a guitar . . . and that runs a temperature as high as a dog's! [*Throws back her head in another soft, sudden laugh and starts to take off the jacket.*]

VAL: Keep it on.

LADY: No, I got to go up now and you had better be going . . .

VAL: I got nowhere to go.

LADY: Well, everyone's got a problem and that's yours.

VAL: —What nationality are you?

LADY: Why do you ask me that?

VAL: You seem to be like a foreigner.

LADY: I'm the daughter of a Wop bootlegger burned to death in his orchard! —Take your jacket. . . .

VAL: What was that you said about your father?

LADY: Why?

VAL: —A “Wop bootlegger”?

LADY: —They burned him to death in his orchard! What about it? The story's well known around here. [*Jabe knocks on ceiling.*] I got to go up, I'm being called for.

ORPHEUS 5

LADY: Did you walk around in front of her that way?

VAL [*at counter*]: What way?

LADY: Slew-foot, slew-foot!

[*He regards her closely with good-humored perplexity.*]

Did you stand in front of her like that? That close? In that, that—*position*?

VAL: What position?

LADY: Ev'rything you do is suggestive!

VAL: Suggestive of what?

LADY: Of what you said you was through with—somethin'—*Oh, shoot, you know what I mean.* —Why'd ya think I give you a plain, dark business suit to work in?

VAL [*sadly*]: Un-hun. . . . [*Sighs and removes his blue jacket.*]

LADY: Now what're you takin' that off for?

VAL: I'm giving the suit back to you. I'll change my pants in the closet. [*Gives her the jacket and crosses into alcove.*]

LADY: Hey! I'm sorry! You hear me? I didn't sleep well last

night. Hey! I said I'm sorry! You hear me? [*She enters alcove and returns immediately with Val's guitar and crosses downstage. He follows.*]

VAL: Le' me have my guitar, Lady. You find too many faults with me and I tried to do good.

LADY: I told you I'm sorry. You want me to get down and lick the dust off your shoes?

VAL: Just give me back my guitar.

LADY: I ain't dissatisfied with you. I'm pleased with you, sincerely!

VAL: You sure don't show it.

LADY: My nerves are all shot to pieces. [*Extends hand to him.*] Shake.

VAL: You mean I ain't fired, so I don't have to quit? [*They shake hands like two men. She hands him guitar—then silence falls between them.*]

LADY: You see, we don't know each other, we're, we're—just gettin'—acquainted.

VAL: That's right, like a couple of animals sniffin' around each other. . . .

[*The image embarrasses her. He crosses to counter, leans over and puts guitar behind it.*]

LADY: Well, not exactly like that, but—!

VAL: We don't know each other. How do people get to know each other? I used to think they did it by touch.

LADY: By what?

VAL: By touch, by touchin' each other.

LADY [*moving up and sitting on shoe-fitting chair which has been moved to right window*]: Oh, you mean by close—contact!

VAL: But later it seemed like that made them more strangers than ever, uhh, huh, more strangers than ever. . . .

LADY: Then how d'you think they get to know each other?

VAL [*sitting on counter*]: Well, in answer to your last question, I would say this: Nobody ever gets to know *no body!* We're all of us sentenced to solitary confinement inside our own skins, for life! You understand me, Lady? —I'm tellin' you it's the truth, we got to face it, we're under a lifelong sentence to solitary confinement inside our own lonely skins for as long as we live on this earth!

LADY [*rising and crossing to him*]: Oh, no, I'm not a big optimist but I cannot agree with something as sad as that statement!



*As Val finishes the song, Lady descends the stair. He rises and turns on a green-shaded light bulb.*

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VAL [*to Lady*]: You been up there a long time.

LADY: —I gave him morphine. He must be out of his mind. He says such awful things to me. He says I want him to die.

VAL: You sure you don't?

LADY: I don't want no one to die. Death's terrible, Val. [*Pause. She wanders to right front window. He takes his guitar and crosses to the door.*] You gotta go now?

VAL: I'm late.

LADY: Late for what? You got a date with somebody?

VAL: —No. . . .

LADY: Then stay a while. Play something. I'm all unstrung. . . . [*He crosses back and leans against counter; the guitar is barely audible, under the speeches.*] I made a terrible fool of myself down here today with—

VAL: —That girl's brother?

LADY: Yes, I—threw away——pride. . . .

VAL: His sister said she'd come here to give me a warning. I wonder what of?

LADY [*sitting in shoe-fitting chair*]: —I said things to him I should of been too proud to say. . . .

[*Both are pursuing their own reflections; guitar continues softly.*]

VAL: Once or twice lately I've woke up with a fast heart, shouting something, and had to pick up my guitar to calm myself

down. . . . Somehow or other I can't get used to this place, I don't feel safe in this place, but I—want to stay. . . . [*Stops short; sound of wild baying.*]

LADY: The chain-gang dogs are chasing some runaway convict. . . .

LADY: —Where do you stay?

VAL: —When?

LADY: Nights.

VAL: I stay at the Wildwood cabins on the highway.

LADY: You like it there?

VAL: Uh-huh.

LADY: —Why?

VAL: I got a comfortable bed, a two-burner stove, a shower and icebox there.

LADY: You want to save money?

VAL: I never could in my life.

LADY: You could if you stayed on the place.

VAL: What place?

LADY: This place.

VAL: Whereabouts on this place?

LADY [*pointing to alcove*]: Back of that curtain.

VAL: —Where they try on clothes?

LADY: There's a cot there. A nurse slept on it when Jabe had his first operation, and there's a washroom down here and I'll get a plumber to put in a hot an' cold shower! I'll—fix it up nice for you. . . . [*She rises, crosses to foot of stairs. Pause. He lets the door shut, staring at her.*]

VAL [*moving downstage center*]: —I—don't like to be—obligated.

LADY: There wouldn't be no obligation, you'd do me a favor. I'd feel safer at night with somebody on the place. I would; it would cost you nothing! And you could save up that money you spend on the cabin. How much? Ten a week? Why, two or three months from now you'd—save enough money to— [*Makes a wide gesture with a short laugh as if startled.*] Go on! Take a look at it! See if it don't suit you! —All right. . . .

That's right, stay there, boy. What did you do before?

[*Pee Wee sits on stairs.*]

VAL: Before—what?

TALBOTT: Before you come here?

VAL: —Traveled and—played. . . .

TALBOTT: Played?

DOG [*advancing to center*]: What?

PEE WEE: With wimmen?

[*DOG laughs.*]

VAL: No. Played guitar—and sang. . . . [*Val touches guitar on counter.*]

TALBOTT: Let me see that guitar.

VAL: Look at it. But don't touch it. I don't let nobody but musicians touch it.

[*Men come close.*]

DOG: What're you smiling for, boy?

PEE WEE: He ain't smiling, his mouth's just twitching like a dead chicken's foot.

[*They laugh.*]

TALBOTT: What is all that writing on the guitar?

VAL: —Names. . . .

TALBOTT: What of?

VAL: Autographs of musicians dead and living.

TALBOTT [*overlapping Nurse's speech*]: Dog! Pee Wee! You all stand back from that counter. Dog, why don't you an' Pee Wee go up an' see Jabe. Leave me straighten this boy out, go on, go on up.

PEE WEE: C'mon, Dawg. . . .

[*They go up. Val remains panting on counter.*]

TALBOTT [*sits in shoe chair at right window. In his manner there is a curious, half-abashed gentleness, when alone with the boy, as if he recognized the purity in him and was, truly, for the moment, ashamed of the sadism implicit in the occurrence*]: Awright, boy. Git on down off th' counter, I ain't gonna touch y'r guitar.

[*Val jumps off counter.*]

But I'm gonna tell you something. They's a certain county I know of which has a big sign at the county line that says, "Nigger,

don't let the sun go down on you in this county." That's all it says, it don't threaten nothing, it just says, "Nigger, don't let the sun go down on you in this county!" [*Chuckles hoarsely. Rises and takes a step toward Val.*] Well, son! You ain't a nigger and this is not that county, but, son, I want you to just imagine that you seen a sign that said to you: "Boy, don't let the sun rise on you in this county." I said "rise," not "go down" because it's too close to sunset for you to git packed an' move on before that. But I think if you value that instrument in your hands as much as you seem to, you'll simplify my job by not allowing the sun tomorrow to rise on you in this county. 'S that understood, now, boy?

[*Val stares at him, expressionless, panting.*]

[*Crossing to door.*] I hope so. I don't like violence. [*He looks back and nods at Val from the door. Then goes outside in the fiery afterglow of the sunset. Dogs bark in the distance. Music fades in: "Dog Howl Blues"—minor—guitar. Pause in which Val remains motionless, cradling guitar in his arms. Then Val's faraway, troubled look is resolved in a slight, abrupt nod of his head. He sweeps back the alcove curtain and enters the alcove and closes the curtain behind him. Lights dim down to indicate a division of scenes.*]