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Shave 'em Dry!

A play in Two Acts

By

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The Characters

Lucille Bogan, blues singer

Spenser, a professor

Walter Roland, blues musician

WR Ralway, talent scout and record producer

Arthur Farnsworth, recording engineer

Charlie Breastman, record salesman

Redcrosse Knight, a mime

(THE SETTING AND THE PLAY)

(THE SETTING The action takes place in a recording studio at the offices of the American Record Corporation in New York City on March 5, 1935.)

(The recording studio consists of two rooms. The "Live Room," is where the singers and musicians make recordings. It is the larger space and includes a piano with a piano bench and several chairs and music stands. A tube-shaped microphone hangs from the ceiling. Attached to the wall is a large, box-like loudspeaker, through which the sound engineer and record producer can communicate with the musicians. In addition, green and red light bulbs [to indicate "recording" and to warn musicians they must finish within thirty seconds] are attached to the wall.)

(Stage left and extending downstage is the "Control Room," separated from the "Live Room" by a wall. A long, narrow rectangular window provides visual communication between the two rooms, but the blinds are normally drawn and open only during actual recording. The door that leads to the Control Room can open but is ordinarily closed.)

(The "Control Room," province of the Sound Engineer and Producer, is furnished with a primitive recording console. The partition that constitutes the Stage Left wall of the Control Room may be opened in front of the "live Room" during whole scenes such that the actors can play in a space that extends from Stage Left to Stage Right.)

(Shave 'em Dry! Itself is based on real events and real characters.)

(Although relatively little is known about singer Lucille Bogan [1897-)

(1948] or blues musician Walter Roland [1903-1972], the facts about them set out below do not contradict the historical record. Arthur Farnsworth and WR Ralway are also based on real people, though their names have been changed. While fictionalized in content, the recording session of March 5, 1935, at which the unexpurgated version of "Shave 'em Dry" was secretly recorded, actually took place.)

(The character of Spenser is a confection but Edmund Spenser [1552-1599], to whom he makes frequent allusion, was, of course, the author of *The Faerie Queen*, one of the major and foundational poems in the English language.)

(Finally, words around the murders of Luther Hobart and his wife in 1904 are, save references to animals of the forest, all rooted in historical fact.)

ACT 1

(SCENE ONE Lights come up in the "live room" in the empty recording studio as LUCILLE BOGAN enters through the door center stage. She holds the door open, pauses, looks down and offstage.)

LUCILLE

You coming? It only the seventh floor. Way you huffing and puffing, you sounds like a freight train.

(Lucille is dressed in a beige gown, sequined and flashy. A vampish turban wraps her head. She wears jewelry but carries no handbag.)

Lucille Bogan, in her mid-thirties, is in New York on this March 5, 1935. Her home is the industrial city of Birmingham, Alabama. A seasoned blues singer and "race" recording artist, from 1927 she has journeyed North almost yearly to make records. The daughter of a sharecropper who moved to town, she has a modicum of education and writes her own songs. A few of the fifty or so records she has made were "hits" that sold widely and have been recorded by others. In New York she might have been a well-known black diva and part of Harlem's black glitterati. In Birmingham she is a local celebrity operating in a black underworld cauldron. The sexual, cynical, and whimsical sides to her personality are balanced, and sometimes not balanced, by her life as a wife and mother of a son. Several years ago, her husband divorced her.

(She holds the door open and again calls downstairs.)

LUCILLE (Continued)

Come on now. Walking do you good. Warm out. Spring thaw in the air.

(She lets the door close and enters the studio)

LUCILLE (Continued)

I told you I don't believe in no elevators. They dangerous. I don't have confidence in them. I feels trapped.

(Finally, SPENSER enters through the door. He is red-faced and out of breath.)

(Middle aged and physically worn, Spenser is dressed in a battered)

(suit, raincoat. Bareheaded, he wears glasses. A white man, he carries a battered briefcase.)

(This morning Spenser is still a little drunk -- he doesn't usually drink at all -- and fatigued. But in his present condition he appears as a man in shock.)

LUCILLE (Continued)
There you is. You ain't lost my briefcase?

(He shows her the briefcase.)

LUCILLE (Continued)
Lie it down on the piano there.

(Spenser places the briefcase on the piano and sits down heavily on the piano stool.)

LUCILLE (Continued)
What's the matter? You ain't said a word since we left Harlem. You tired? We been up all night.

(Spenser makes as if he will start to talk, but can't seem to formulate a sentence.)

LUCILLE (Continued)
First you talk like a magpie. You talk all through them scrambled eggs and potatoes at Bickford's. You drank enough black coffee. Don't tell me you want to sleep now. It morning. I told you the best thing was to walk up those stairs with me. I don't believe in them elevators, I told you....What's the matter? You can't talk?

SPENSER
Where are we?

LUCILLE
This here the studio.

SPENSER
Radio?

LUCILLE
No, not radio. In radio your voice fly out into space and never come back, you can't ever hear it again. I don't sing on no radio. Over in Atlanta, man want me to come on WSB and sing something pretty: "Downhearted Blues" or "You are My Sunshine."

(MORE)

LUCILLE (Continued)

But Mambo Boss from Decatur Street own the honky tonks. He told me, "No, you can't go." He don't want me giving away my voice for free. People got to pay for it. This ain't radio. It is shellac.

SPENSER

Oh, God.

(Spenser seems emotionally
overwrought.)

LUCILLE

That what we're here for. To make records. I told you that, you ain't remembering what I told you. You ain't familiar with the records I made because they for the "race," meaning the colored people. You have phonographs in --- where you come from again? Great Falls?

SPENSER

Victrolas.

LUCILLE

That's what I'm talking about. We be making records today. Nobody here just yet. What time is it?

(calling out)

Farnsworth! Arthur! WR!

(Spenser with great effort goes to
take out his watch, but his chain
comes up empty.)

LUCILLE (Continued)

Walter ain't here yet. Walter uptown sleepin' with some high brown even while he got a wife in Pratt City eight months pregnant. I know it after nine o'clock now. People be getting to work.

(Spenser pounds his forehead
repeatedly with the heels of his
hands.)

LUCILLE (Continued)

Stop knockin' your head. What you doin' that for?

(Spenser stops and covers his face
with his hands.)

SPENSER

Should I go?

LUCILLE

Go? We just got here? Where you want to go?

SPENSER

I don't know.

LUCILLE

You can go if you feel however you feel. I don't needs you. You think I needs you. Uptown I asked you, "Walk with me," but you can go now. We here. In the ordinary way of things, WR'd fetch me from the hotel in a taxi. But this time he didn't send no telegram or no Checker cab neither. Must be the Depression. I just had his letter with the day to be here on it. He always stay at the Hotel Piccadilly so I done telephoned there but he ain't registered. So you good enough to 'company me from Harlem. But you can go. Where in the damnation is Walter? He supposed to be here. It past nine o'clock, I know that. What wrong with you, Spenser? You gonna tell me?

(Spenser takes his hands from his face.)

SPENSER

Seems like just moments ago I was having a cocktail at the Astor Bar. A man told me I must see Harlem before I die. He described it in detail like it was a land of milk and honey. He provided me an address that, it seems, did not exist.

LUCILLE

That right, Spenser, you was had by a Murphy man. You lucky you didn't find that address. They mighta beat you silly and taken your money.

SPENSER

Yet he told me in detail how to get to Jungle Alley and there on West 133rd Street, at Harry's Clam House --

(Spenser shakes his head and covers his face.)

LUCILLE

That where you was, all right. Sitting on a stool at the bar.

SPENSER

And I didn't know you from Eve, nor you, I from Adam.

LUCILLE

I'm just waiting for Walter -- and Ralway -- and Farnsworth. Where is everybody? What Adam and Eve? What you talking about?

(Lucille sits on the piano bench.)

SPENSER

Then as we sat there, there ambled over as huge a damsel as I ever saw.

LUCILLE

Damsel? What you talking about?

SPENSER

And she laid a hand upon your hand. Asked if you wanted to sing a number, and you said no.

LUCILLE

That was Gladys Bentley. I likes her well enough. She a expert singer herself. Dresses up in a tuxedo and hat. She work the crowd every night. She a B.D. woman.

SPENSER

What's a B.D. woman?

LUCILLE

Bull dagger.

(Spenser repeats the words with singular pleasure:)

SPENSER

Bull dagger.

LUCILLE

Don't you know nothing? You saw how big she was. Rollin' over she'd crush me like a penny on a railroad track.

SPENSER

So with me behind you and, pointing, said -- how did you put it? -- "That my husband."

LUCILLE

Had to say something.

SPENSER

You took your hand from beneath hers and laid it upon mine. She said, "Gladys to meet you." I said, "We'd better be going." She pecked you on the cheek.

LUCILLE

Goosed me, too.

SPENSER

We went out.

LUCILLE

We got to walkin' and being as you never been to Harlem I took you uptown and then we ---

SPENSER

Stop! You agreed we weren't going to talk about that!

LUCILLE

I didn't say nothing.

SPENSER

You did. You promised. My brain burns when I think of it. Do not make me! Do not! Do not make me!

LUCILLE

All right then. Calm down. Anyways, spring come early this year. We walked downtown.

SPENSER

We had your flask and I drank more than I ought.

LUCILLE

Harlem make me feel good. Land of Darkness! I can walk the sidewalks at night and look up at the stars in the sky, and sing without getting in no squeeze with the police. Here in the middle of Broadway, with all them cars honking by, those towers tall and handsome. Eighteenth Street be the only place I can do *that* in Birmingham. The buildings so low, the streets so mean.

SPENSER

Birmingham? What Birmingham?

LUCILLE

Alabama. What other Birmingham is there? Once I lived in Chicago and it weren't half so bright. Here in New York I can eat breakfast at Bickford's. That what we did. They serves basted eggs, any time day or night. Waitress give me a dirty look, I give it right back. You see her give me a look?

SPENSER

I saw her.

(Prompted by Spenser's hangdog expression, Lucille goes to him and places a hand on his forehead.)

LUCILLE

I gave it right back. You got a fever?

SPENSER

No, I --- perhaps I should leave. Should I be going?

(Entering quietly as they talk:
WALTER ROLAND.)

(Dressed nattily in a suit and tie, brimmed hat at a slant, hands in pockets, a slender blade. He is a couple of years younger than Lucille. Proficient on both guitar and piano, today he will play only the latter. Charming, canny, a self-taught musician. He was, like Lucille, born on a farm and raised in town. He is bemused and confused by the larger world, with provocative, soft, and sardonic facets to his personality.)

WALTER

Don't know 'bout you but I just got here. Hey there, pretty baby.

(Lucille turns to Walter and they embrace. She ends the embrace with a reproachful shove.)

LUCILLE

You was supposed to be here ten minutes ago. You late. You know I don't allow lateness.

(Walter notices Spenser.)

LUCILLE (Continued)

This here Spenser.

(Walter extends a hand to Spenser.)

WALTER

Walter Roland, how do you do, sir?

SPENSER

Spenser.

WALTER

Where Farnsworth and WR? Ain't they here yet? You got no reason to chew me out if the bosses ain't here.

SPENSER

Lucille, I should be going.

LUCILLE

(to Walter)

You supposed to be here at nine.

(Spenser starts off but Lucille grabs hold of his sleeve and pulls sharply him beside her.)

I was busy.

WALTER

LUCILLE

(to Spenser)
Where you going?
(to Walter)
You was busy all right. Climbin' the leg of some heifer.

WALTER

Not a bit of it. If you must know. I was becoming a *member*.
In very good standing. Very excellent standing.

LUCILLE

A member of what?

(He withdraws a card from his inside
breast pocket and hands it to
Lucille with a flourish.)

LUCILLE (Continued)

(reading the card)
Walter Roland...Communist Party of the United States of
America. C-P-U-S-A.

WALTER

Two o'clock this morning I paid one month's dues, twenty-five
cents on account of me not having a regular job.

LUCILLE

You a fool.

WALTER

Charlotte McNary North signed me up. She weren't no heifer,
let me tell you.

(Walter sits down at the piano and
starts to play one of his pulsating
signature rhythms.)

WALTER (Continued)

(singing)
*She got some great big legs, she's got them whoppin'
thighs/She got some great big legs, powerful thighs/And every
time she leave me, you know it makes me cry.*

LUCILLE

You tellin' me you was 'cruited by a gal from the Communist
Party?

WALTER

We started vertical but just slipped down the wall till we
was lovin' eagles on a half. You might say I was 'cruited
horizontal.

LUCILLE

(handing back card)

Better burn this 'fore we get back to Birmingham. KKK will hang you high.

WALTER

Lucille, listen up. Charlotte told me we ain't gettin' paid near enough for this here recording session. Twelve-dollars fifty cents a song, she just laughed. *Laughed*. She said we ought to join the union.

LUCILLE

Ain't no musicianer's union in Birmingham.

WALTER

One here in New York, it don't make no difference if you white or colored.

LUCILLE

We don't live in New York, Walter.

WALTER

We record in New York.

LUCILLE

One time a year. And she say it don't make no difference, white or colored? You believe that?

WALTER

Well, I don't know but she told me we sure need a manager. She say, "Look at Ralph Peer." He making *millions* off the backs of us musicians.

LUCILLE

We ain't being recorded by Ralph Peer. We got WR and Farnsworth and they be claiming poverty.

WALTER

They ain't poor.

LUCILLE

I know that, Walter.

WALTER

Charlotte added it up on paper. We don't get but a pittance what they get. Even if a record sell for twenty-five cents.

LUCILLE

Did this woman ball you or send you to college?

WALTER

Big lot of both.

(MORE)

WALTER (Continued)

In Russia they got Moscow, and Moscow got the Kremlin and Comrade Lenin lyin' in his black coffin on Red Square with the cobblestone streets lined in gold ingots from way down in Transbaikalia.

LUCILLE

Walter, you just full of it.

WALTER

Charlotte said we need a manager, preferably an ofay like the one runs Louis Armstrong.

(Men's voices OFF.)

LUCILLE

Shhhhh! What kind of communist you think WR is?

WALTER

No kind. The no kind.

LUCILLE

Damn right.

SPENSER

I better leave. Lucille---

LUCILLE

Just you stay put, Spenser. And let me do the talking.

(Two men enter the studio. ARTHUR FARNSWORTH, in his mid-thirties, is an immigrant Englishman. He is neatly dressed in suit and tie and carries a thermos of coffee and a bag lunch. He is a talent supervisor who will also serve as this session's recording engineer. Raised on a farm in Surrey, he has an empathic feeling for music - though hillbilly is his forte. For black music his taste is rather humdrum. But he records all kinds of downhome American music.)

(WR RALWAY is tall, middle-aged, clean-shaven. He is a Southern white man, born and bred in the back country, ever advancing in the world. Imposing. Dressed in a double-breasted suit and a cowboy hat.)

(He is a talent scout who, like Farnsworth, works with both white hillbilly artists and blues singers. He proudly counts Gene Autry as among his finds. As a businessman he is given to sharp practices. He has talent in dealing with people but is liable to rage when challenged.)

RALWAY

Hello, Lucille, darlin'.

(Opening his arms, doffing his hat, he draws her to him and bears hugs her.)

LUCILLE

Hello, WR.

RALWAY

You lookin' dandy. Moreso every year.

(Farnsworth extends a handshake to Walter.)

FARNSWORTH

Walter, good to have you back.

WALTER

Glad to be back, sir.

(Ralway shakes Walter's hand in turn, as Farnsworth embraces Lucille.)

FARNSWORTH

(to Lucille)

Your songs all rehearsed and ready?

(Ralway looks from Spenser to Lucille, confused.)

LUCILLE

That Spenser.

RALWAY

How do you do, sir? And you are with?

LUCILLE

He my manager.

SPENSER

No, I am --

LUCILLE

My manager. Spenser is -- my manager.

RALWAY

(doubtful)

Sure, Lucille. Mr. Spenser. Always right as rain to have someone looking out for your interests. Pleased to meet you, sir. You know, of course, that the American Record Corporation has a legal and binding contract with Mrs. Bogan.

SPENSER

I did--

LUCILLE

He know all about it. And he going to enforce the terms.

(Farnsworth gets between Ralway and Lucille and draws her aside, speaks quietly.)

FARNSWORTH

Lucille, that special version, that song, the one we were talking about --

(But as Ralway starts to enter the control room, Lucille darts after him.)

LUCILLE

'Scuse me, Mr. Ralway. Want to talk about the name.

RALWAY

Oh, your money. Lest I forgot.

(He ostentatiously withdraws and envelope from his pocket and places it in Lucille's hand.)

RALWAY (Continued)

For you and Walter, it's all there.

(Lucille hands the envelope to Spenser.)

LUCILLE

Put that in my case, Spenser.

(Spenser seems bewildered but then realizes: Her briefcase.)

LUCILLE (Continued)

It something else, Mr. Ralway.

RALWAY

We want to start directly, Lucille. What is it?

LUCILLE

It's my name on the records, WR. You still putting the name "Bessie Jackson" on the records. No need for that. I ain't under contract to Brunswick no more. We did that to keep lawyers from coming after you. Ain't necessary no more.

RALWAY

Well, Lucille, that may be. But gall damnit, I don't want to change horses middle of the creek. Bessie Jackson is a good name.

LUCILLE

So is Lucille Bogan. People remember "They Ain't Walkin' No More." They know it was me who sang "Whiskey-Selling Woman."

RALWAY

Well, we did all right with "Baking Powder Blues" and "Pig Iron Sally." I chose "Bessie" because of Bessie Smith, and "Jackson" for Jim Jackson. Those two are the monsters, Lucille. Best-est-selling, most popular-est blues singers of all time. Name of Bessie Jackson puts people in mind of 'em and they say, "I'm going to buy that record."

LUCILLE

Put my real name back on my records, WR. Lucille Bogan.

RALWAY

I'll see what I can do.

LUCILLE

And another thing. I see you selling some records with the labels that don't got my name underneath the titles, 'tween the p'rentheses. That show I wrote the song. Ain't nothing there. I want that back too.

RALWAY

A decision upper management took with respect to the race and hillbilly artists on the dimestore labels we press. I didn't have anything to do with that. These are three-for-a-dollar records, Lucille. Some sell for twenty-five cents.

LUCILLE

Well, you can get it changed. I want it changed.

RALWAY

Don't get on your high horse, Lucille. I'll do what I can. That's a promise. Meantime, let's try to get through this session. We have a lot of work to do. Did you bring your songs all the words written down like I asked you to?

(Lucille stares him down, still angry.)

LUCILLE

Spenser, my briefcase.

(Spenser is startled by the request, but quickly hands her the briefcase. Louise withdraws a single sheet of paper and hands it to Ralway.)

RALWAY

This...Just this list of songs? Just the titles? Not what I asked for. You can write down the words for all of them you're recording today, that would be tops. I want tops, Lucille.

(Farnsworth intrudes, sensing tension. Looks over Ralway's shoulder.)

FARNSWORTH

I see you brought the song list. That's great, Lucille. We better get started. WR and I have to set up in the control room. Let's go, WR.

RALWAY

I want the lyrics to the songs. We'll get your compositions to the copyright people.

FARNSWORTH

We'll sort matters out later.

RALWAY

I expect some good singing, Lucille.

(Farnsworth moves WR toward the control room, then moves back to Lucille, speaking confidentially.)

FARNSWORTH

The question of the special recording. The party version of -- you know.

LUCILLE

"Shave 'em Dry."

FARNSWORTH

That's right. Remember when you recorded last year, you told me about the other version. Remember? You whispered the words? We said next time --

LUCILLE
I know what we said. That cost extra.

FARNSWORTH
Oh, sure, of course. No doubt about that, Lucille. We'll work it out.

LUCILLE
And I wants copies of my own. Want twenty of them.

FARNSWORTH
Twenty sounds like a lot, Lucille. I don't know if I can.

LUCILLE
You better if you want it.

FARNSWORTH
I'll discuss it with the forces that be. .

(From his coat pocket he withdraws a half-pint of gin, which he gives to Lucille. Lucille hands it without looking to Spenser. Spenser hands it off to Walter, who takes a slug.)

FARNSWORTH (Continued)
We'll be ready shortly.

(Farnsworth goes into the control room.)

(Lucille takes her briefcase from Spenser, withdraws the envelope, and starts counting the money.)

WALTER
WR don't change his spots, do he?

LUCILLE
Treatin' me like I'm some kind of Jammy-come-lately. Like I don't know what he's up to.

SPENSER
What is he up to, Lucille?

LUCILLE
You my manager and you don't know?

WALTER
That's what managers are for.

SPENSER
I've just been your manager for five minutes.

LUCILLE

Lot of good you done.

SPENSER

What can I do?

LUCILLE

Look. Number one, the man don't pay me enough money. Number two, he don't put my name on the record but call me Bessie Jackson. I didn't tell him to do that. When my first records come out on Banner and Oriole records and all them other labels, I told him straight up and down. He said, "We had to do that, you still with Brunswick." I said, "No, I ain't, not a bit, that was 1930." He said, "Well, Bessie Jackson is a good name" and all that bull shit about Bessie Smith and Jim Jackson. You agree with me, don't you, Walter?

WALTER

How'd you like it, Spenser, if a man took away your name and gave you another?

SPENSER

For me, that's a long story.

LUCILLE

Maybe for you, but it cut and dry for me. I wants my name back. Number three, he trying to steal my songs. See, I'm not one of your vaudeville singers. Don't nobody write my songs for me but me. I write my songs. Did you hear him talk about how he wants me to write out the words? Then what he gonna do? He gonna type 'em up and file 'em at the copyright office with his own damned name on them.

WALTER

WR famous for doing that. We seen it with our own eyes with "The Death of Mother Jones." You can see it on the record. Ralway is in the p'rentheses. Gene Autry sung it, nobody composed it. Gene Autry was in the studio same day as us, and he was fuming. "Who said Ralway wrote that song?"

LUCILLE

That right. He was mad.

WALTER

Even Mother Jones, she still upset about it.

LUCILLE

Shut up, Walter. Don't be funny. Ralway put his name on other people's songs. He don't even have to go to the copyright office in Washington DC. He can do it by mail, just write down the words and fill out a form. Then he got them mechanical rights and the song rights and we get nothing because he control them.

WALTER

It's stealing.

LUCILLE

You my manager, Spenser.

(Lucille finishes counting the money and hands Walter his share. She takes a ten dollar bill and stuffs it in Spenser's breast pocket.)

LUCILLE (Continued)

Earn your keep. Go talk to him.

(Spenser takes out the bill and looks at it.)

SPENSER

I can't accept this. Lucille, I'm not really your manager. It wouldn't be right.

LUCILLE

You white but you not my manager? Well, that's good. Then get the fuck out of here.

SPENSER

After all we -- last night.

LUCILLE

You keep saying you don't want to talk about that.

WALTER

Talk about what?

SPENSER

I don't -- no! But --

LUCILLE

But what?

(Spenser dithers, conflicted.)

SPENSER

All right. Goodbye, Lucille. Walter, Goodbye.

(He moves off, dejected, leaving the studio.)

WALTER

What is with that man?

LUCILLE

Oh, I don't know, Walter. He met me uptown last night.

(MORE)

LUCILLE (Continued)

I think he was looking for womens and got scared. Seem like a Murphy man steered him to Harlem but he didn't find the address so he didn't get robbed and beat half to death. He went to Gladys Bentley's and we got to talking and walking and then I used him to 'company me downtown so I don't have no trouble. He got a strange way of speechifying and looking at you. I don't know....Hey, let's us rehearse "Stew Meat" That's on the list. Do the intro.

(Walter gets set to play.)

WALTER

Come in on four.

LUCILLE

No, I come in early.

(Walter starts to pump the keys.)

LUCILLE (Continued)

(singing)

A man say I had something, look like new/He want me to credit him for some of my stew/Say he's goin' up the river, try to sell his sack--

(As she sings the first bars, the door to the studio opens. Spenser returns.)

(Walter stops playing. He and Lucille stare at Spenser.)

(Spenser sits down heavily in the chair as LIGHTS GO DOWN.)

(SCENE TWO *Lights up in Control Room. This room, which now extends across stage, is shallow with a long window that looks onto downstage, but the curtains are drawn. The machinery is primitive, consisting only of a console with a few knobs and switches, and a microphone for communicating with the Live Room. Next to it sits a large turntable contraption and a small pile of round blank matrixes.*)

(*Farnsworth is fiddling at the console while, at a flat desk next to him, Ralway is engaged in paperwork.*)

FARNSWORTH

Happen to listen to Aces last night? Hear what Jane said?

RALWAY

Naw, not last night.

FARNSWORTH

She said, "I am completely uninhabited."

RALWAY

Completely uninhab--

(They chuckle together.)

FARNSWORTH

That Jane. "Time wounds all heels." I'm "up at the crank of dawn."

RALWAY

Too bad we can't do that on records. On radio you can do comedy. But records, play 'em once, twice, they're not funny any more.

FARNSWORTH

That's the beauty of music. I met Jane Ace once, when the show was still broadcasting out of Chicago. Very friendly, a pretty pair she had, too.

RALWAY

Now NBC put the Aces on at the same time as Amos 'n' Andy. I got to listen to those boys. Keeping up with concerns of the race is business for me.

FARNSWORTH

They're not Negroes. Amos and Andy. They're white actors.

RALWAY

But they've got their finger on the pulse of the colored.

FARNSWORTH

You really think so? I don't suppose they banter about the Harlem boycotts.

RALWAY

What you talking about?

FARNSWORTH

Have you heard of the Citizen's League for Fair Play? Not on Amos & Andy, I'll wager.

RALWAY

You talking about a bunch of communists pumping up racial hatred, talking good niggers out of their common sense.

FARNSWORTH

Communists? I don't think we need worry about them.

RALWAY

Black folks listen to Amos & Andy more than they do Harlem Bolsheviks.

(Farnsworth evinces frustration with the control panel.)

FARNSWORTH

We've got a problem with the machine, WR. The speed is off.

RALWAY

Speakin' of black devils, did you see the way she talked to me?

FARNSWORTH

That's Lucille. You know her as well as I do. Quite direct, isn't she? Look, I wanted to talk to you --

RALWAY

(Interrupting)

She wouldn't talk to me like that if we were down in Atlanta. Or Birmingham. Down there she's Mr. this and Suh that. Bring her up to New York, and suddenly I'm WR. She's talking to me like she's Amelia Earhart and I'm a blue-tailed fly. Somebody ought to bring her down to earth.

FARNSWORTH

Must be that Harlem air, WR.

RALWAY

And that white man with her, Spenser. He's not really her manager. Is he?

FARNSWORTH

He did seem a bit on the quiet side.

RALWAY

I'd like to know the nature of their relationship. He might be her pimp, do you think?

FARNSWORTH

I do not. This machine is a problem. I've checked the tubes, the belt.

RALWAY

He's just planking her, do you think?

(Farnsworth tosses down his
screwdriver.)

FARNSWORTH

How should I know? Are we here to talk about Lucille Bogan's sex life or to make her records?

RALWAY

She's always singing about whores and prostitution.

FARNSWORTH

What does that prove?

RALWAY

I know these people. I know Lucille better than you do. Longer, too. I know some of the dirt. Her husband Nazareth divorced her when she had a sex affair with that piano player, Ezell.

FARNSWORTH

Will Ezell? She and he recorded together before she partnered with Walter. Will did play the man about town. I didn't know that.

RALWAY

You don't spend any time down South, Farnsworth. Her husband Nazareth was a singer too, but he gave it up to work on the railroad to support Lucille. He wasn't any too happy when she fell for this Ezell. She denied it, he divorced her. When she was still a kid, they had a child, too. Nazareth Jr. Must be a teenager now.

FARNSWORTH

You know a lot about her.

RALWAY

I'm a man of the people.

FARNSWORTH

You're a regular Huey Long.

RALWAY

They fascinate me, these colored. I put up with her talking to me like that. I should kick myself. Damn, it's not as if her records are selling like Eskimo Pies.

FARNSWORTH

Nor anybody else's. You and I are lucky to be making these records, if you ask me.

RALWAY

These colored, you put them on shellac, sell their crap for twenty-five cents, and they think they own you.

(Farnsworth leaves the machine and goes to the desk where Ralway is seated.)

FARNSWORTH

Sorry, old chap. My screwdriver's in the drawer there.

(Ralway turns face down the paper he's working on and bellies away from the desk. Farnsworth opens the drawer, takes out a screwdriver. With a sudden movement, he turns over the paper. Farnsworth tries to stop him.)

FARNSWORTH (Continued)

What's this?

RALWAY

Mind your own beeswax.

(Farnsworth snatches the paper and holds it away while reading it and fending off Ralway.)

RALWAY (Continued)

Gimme that back.

FARNSWORTH

(reading)

"My Man is Boogan Me." Words and Music by...WR Ralway.

(He lets Ralway snatch back the paper.)

FARNSWORTH (Continued)

That's her song. I don't believe this. Penny thievery.

RALWAY

Watch your words, pal. Pennies make bucks and bucks build staircases to Eldorado.

FARNSWORTH

A back staircase, if you ask me. If I understand aright, you're copying the words from one sheet to another and the only change is that your name goes where hers used to be. Words and music by. You already share with her on paper the mechanical rights, not that she'll ever see a dime. Now you want the composition rights, too.

RALWAY

If it weren't for my signing her to American Record Corporation, she would be selling her black ass on Eighteenth Street in Birmingham.

FARNSWORTH

Why do this?

RALWAY

Two cents beats one cent. And if one day she had another hit, you know what that could mean. Look at Ralph Peer. He's rich and he has us all murdered.

FARNSWORTH

I saw what you did with that Gene Autry song. He didn't write that Mother Jones ditty, neither did you. But you sure put your name on it.

(Farnsworth goes back to working on the console.)

RALWAY

It was some damned coal miner in Colorado, who wrote that, sure. That's where it comes from. Who the hell knows who wrote it? We'll never know. I put my name on it, sure. Somebody had ought to. Why not me?

FARNSWORTH

And Lucille?

RALWAY

I fix her spelling. The copyright office wants right spelling

FARNSWORTH

You're joking.

RALWAY

What am I going to get out of it? Unless it's a big hit? Which you know damn well it's not going to be.

FARNSWORTH

Are you taking me for a fool, WR? We both know that any song she records could soar to the top. If not for her, for somebody else. And that would put two cents in your pocket, every record sold. Nothing into hers.

RALWAY

This is business, Farnsworth. You do what you can. Who ever thought that Bessie Smith would sell a million with a little piano tune? "Gulf Coast Blues"? Who'd ever thought Leroy Carr, with "How Long, How Long"? I wished I had a piece of that. I did get to him couple of years later, too, with "Barrelhouse Woman." Someday, son, I'm going to come up with another big hit, a million seller. You don't think I'm going to let these people have that money. They wouldn't know what to do with it, anyway. It would be a waste.

FARNSWORTH

This machine has to get fixed before we can record.

RALWAY

Depression the way it is, who knows if the record business will ever bounce back? Every record made until 1929 was guaranteed to sell four thousand copies. Today, with the economy, one thousand is lucky. Radio may take records over completely. Then where will these jungle-bunnies be?

(Farnsworth puts down his
screwdriver.)

FARNSWORTH

Look here, WR. I don't care what you call Negroes when you are with your Southern confederates. Run them down if you must. But lay off with language like that. Save it for your barber and the boys at the Blarney Stone.

RALWAY

You're the monkey, Farnsworth. See-no hear-no, speak-no evil. That's the trouble with you Northerners.

FARNSWORTH

I was born in England. As you well know.

RALWAY

You ain't a Southerner just the same. Down South we keep the bottom rail on the bottom. Up North you have the same trouble but you don't see it. You want to be self-righteous. Boycotts in Harlem. Pretty soon they'll have riots. The Communists will be in on it. They'll burn the city down.

FARNSWORTH

You're completely alarmist.

RALWAY

You never go to Harlem. The only place you see them is here in the studio. I pound the pavement, boycott or no. Meet our so-called "artists." Talk with them, buy them a whiskey, listen to their tunes.

FARNSWORTH

Steal a few songs.

RALWAY

Very funny.

FARNSWORTH

Look, I listen to them, too. I try to understand them so we can work together to put out what the people want. I prefer hillbillies, it's true. But Negroes have a lot of music and a buying public.

RALWAY

You are noble. Don't bore the crap out of me.

FARNSWORTH

This machine is fucked. Fucked. Tell Lucille it's going to be a little while.

(As Ralway moves to the microphone and switches a lever, lights in the Control Room go down.)

(SCENE THREE *As lights come up in the studio, Ralway's voice comes over the loudspeaker.*)

RALWAY

We got a little problem here. Take a few minutes to fix.

(Lucille and Walter hover around Spenser, who is seated on the piano bench. Walter is visibly irritated.)

WALTER

Lucille, I don't believe my ears. You take this man *where?* Not to Madame Suarez?

LUCILLE

No. Hazel Valentine.

WALTER

Hazel Valentine? The 101 Ranch? That's worse. And anyhow you didn't ask me to come along? I'm stayin' at the same hotel as you.

LUCILLE

You was busy out ballin' communist women.

(Spenser sits hunched over, his face in his hands.)

WALTER

While you takin' white men to buffet flats. What would your husband say? What would Nazareth say?

LUCILLE

Leave Naz'reth out of this! Leave him out. Don't touch him.

WALTER

Ain't you had enough trouble already with that man?

(Lucille gets fighting mad.)

LUCILLE

You stay out of my trouble. I ain't asked you to it. Me and him back together. It ain't the same. But Naz'reth let me live.

WALTER

He jealous enough to divorce you. When you went with Will.

LUCILLE

You leave it be, Walter Roland. I live with Naz'reth. We done made it up and you knows it.

(MORE)

LUCILLE (Continued)

Don't tell me nothing about Will Ezell. This morning ain't the time for none of your impudence. Not with me. Naz'reth got over that. We a family. Naz'reth Jr. going to school and he takin' up music.

WALTER

All right, calm down, Lucille. So what'd you do then taking this man to Hazel Valentine's ranch? You obviously got the man all upset.

LUCILLE

How I to know how he was going to react? Every time in New York I stop down by some little buffet flat or other. Sometime there will be music and peoples ask me to sing, so I accommodate them. Sometime just for supper.

WALTER

These days nobody goes to a buffet flat for supper.

LUCILLE

How do you know?

WALTER

You ever ate in one? Lunch in a buffet flat would be mighty damn hairy.

LUCILLE

You can get a snack. You can get chittlins.

WALTER

But that ain't what got Spenser here upset. Wasn't no chittlins. It was the people and what they was doing to each other.

SPENSER

Yes!

WALTER

What did you have goin' on in the 101? You walked all the way up to Hazel Valentine's's on 140th Street?

LUCILLE

Was a beautiful night. And I wasn't worried. Got a white man by my side. See, Spenser -- look at me.

(Spenser holds his head in his hands and makes intermittent efforts to join the conversation.)

SPENSER

It's all right.

WALTER

Obviously it ain't, or you wouldn't be sitting there all edgy like you about to kick like a Georgia mule.

SPENSER

A Georgia mule?

LUCILLE

I knew Spenser wasn't after me. That was in his look. I know when a man got a peter-meter running. He have a look, he got a smell, his nostrils get big. But Spenser here, he want to protect me, that's all. A woman can always use protection. Can't she?

(to Spenser)

You done told me.

SPENSER

Yes, of course she can. We must be loyal to the God of love. It's all right. I just detest greatly thinking about that. Yet I cannot disemploy it from my mind's eye.

WALTER

What'd he see at Hazel Valentine's?

LUCILLE

Wasn't anything but normal. We just went from room to room, watching and had a little to drink.

SPENSER

It was *not* normal.

WALTER

Now he talking.

LUCILLE

You had Sewing Machine Bertha. She good with a cat o' nine tails.

WALTER

By Jesus.

LUCILLE

Then there was Amos and Andy, but not what you hears on the radio. Amos was the wife.

WALTER

And was Willy the Candle there?

LUCILLE

Yes, he was, and we saw him sit on a big white one the way he does, you know, until it disappeared.

WALTER

Did that upset you, Spenser? Willy the Candle?

SPENSER

No. I have seen worse. Rather, it was the lust, the pervasive lust.

WALTER

Sure thing. Man with a taper lust up his ass. That is pervasive.

LUCILLE

Walter, will you please? We trying to have a serious conversation here. I see this man all edgy like this, he going over the top, you see him sweating. It make me nervous. Now Spenser, look here, you say it was the lustfulness and sin going on. Is you religious somehow? You don't look so pious.

SPENSER

No, it is not religion. It is love.

LUCILLE

Love?

WALTER

Love?

SPENSER

Pervasive of my dreams, prodigious producer of doubts, rankling fears, joy and woe. I would be a willing slave and driven mad by its absence.

LUCILLE

Absence of love?

WALTER

Willing slaves always rubs me the wrong way.

LUCILLE

Now look, Spenser, we trying to help. You want to take my hand. Here, take my hand in your'n.

(She reaches out and takes his hand.
He immediately evinces relief and
heaves a great sigh.)

LUCILLE (Continued)

Spenser, your hand is very hot. It like fire.

SPENSER

I feel as if I have a fever. Fatigue grips my bones.

LUCILLE

I don't even know who you is, and why would I care but you walked all the way down here with me and now everybody upset because you upset. We got recording to do here and we needs a good atmosphere. Light and jolly. Smile.

(Spenser tries to smile.)

LUCILLE (Continued)

Where you come from, anyway? You got a strange speech about you. Where you from?

SPENSER

Boston.

WALTER

Oh, there you go. That explain it. Lucille, what you trying to do? Why we need to know where he hail from? He a white man from up North. What more you need to know?

LUCILLE

For your information, Boston is where they ban anything having to do with natural functions. Banned in Boston. Is that it, Spenser? You from Boston and you all up on your high horse about flesh and the devil?

SPENSER

No.

LUCILLE

Because if you is, you better go on home now because we can't tolerate that in this here studio this morning.

SPENSER

My father was a butcher.

WALTER

Selling that meat. There you go. You delving into his background, trying to explain him being edgy. How that going to help you?

LUCILLE

Walter, shut up. Spenser, I'm trying my best here, finding out about the roots of your disturbance at you and me dropping into a buffet flat in Harlem at four in the morning, white man and colored woman, wandering from room to room, watching a regular old feast-yo'-eyes of sex acts.

WALTER

You know, in Sweden they have a word for that. *Smorgasbord*.

SPENSER

Smorgasbord!

LUCILLE

Which apparently gave you shock after shock, and how I understands it, you reproach me for it. But what do it matter your father be a butcher? My daddy come off the farm to work in the steel mill. What difference do that make to me?

WALTER

My daddy was a mason. When I play the piano, every key I strike seem like I be laying down a brick.

LUCILLE

I appreciate that, Walter. Would you kindly shut up?

(She lets go of Spenser's hand. He rises from the piano bench.)

SPENSER

I sawed bones before breakfast. My bloody apron went months unwashed. I was ten, eleven years old. My father sailed to America from some tiny shtetl across the ocean, an immigrant in steerage, with new ideas but that didn't stop him from sending me to *Chaidler*. There the rebbe bent me over the chair and beat me for not knowing the year the Temple was destroyed. And for every other infraction you can name.

LUCILLE

What the hell is he talking about?

WALTER

Whups me. I don't know when it was destroyed neither.

SPENSER

Jewish school. I'm talking about when I was a boy.

LUCILLE

You is Jewish?

SPENSER

My parents were immigrants from Odessa, in the Ukraine, in Russia.

WALTER

Russia, huh? Was your daddy a communist?

SPENSER

The way he used to put it: "Not necessarily."

LUCILLE

Where we going here? We saw Sewing Machine Bertha tonight, and her cat o' nine tails That do something for you, Spenser?

SPENSER

It was the lust.

WALTER

The persuasive lust.

(Entering from downstage, CHARLEY BREASTMAN.)

(In this thirties, nattily attired in suit and tie, clean-shaven and pink-cheeked, he carries a briefcase and strides forward, a man with a purpose.)

(He is a dwarf.)

(He stops mid-stage, takes in Lucille, Walter. Disdains to say hello to either of them. But addresses himself directly to Spenser. Offers a hand to shake. A Brooklyn accent.)

BREASTMAN

Charley Breastman. Get this: There was a young Sultan from Cairo/Who said, "Screwing is one thing I do know/A woman is fine/And a sheep is divine/But a camel is Numero Uno"

(Spenser stares.)

BREASTMAN (Continued)

Funny, right? Maybe not. The boys -- are they in?

LUCILLE

They in.

(Breastman enters the control room.)

WALTER

Little prick.

LUCILLE

Walter, let it go.

WALTER

He cutting us.

LUCILLE

He here about the song. Don't get riled.

WALTER

Ah. I see. The song. Who gonna record the song? He a little prick all the same.

LUCILLE

Where was we? Spenser? Your daddy?

SPENSER

My father, yes. Traveled with communists and anarchists. Nights he passed with his labor friends, leaving my mother to peel potatoes for a raft of pirogies.

(MORE)

SPENSER (Continued)

And came home spouting drunk. My two younger brothers and sister he doted upon. I slept in a cold attic with a hot brick at my feet against the Boston winter. I dreamed of running away. Every spring and through the summers long, the circuses came to Boston, and one after another, I dreamed of them day and night.

(Walter sits down at the piano and begins to tickle the keys.)

LUCILLE

So did you? Act upon it?

SPENSER

When I was fourteen. A year to the day after my Bar Mitzvah, when I spewed gratitude in front of the neighbors for every welt my father had inflicted. Within days when I lost my gift, a gold stickpin, he beat me within an inch of my life. I took a job selling newspapers and still brought money home. But I learned to read forbidden English, and one night when I came home, my father had a toothache.

WALTER

(singing softly)

My tooths all got loosened.

SPENSER

He handed me a pair of pliers and I was supposed to pull it out. He opened his mouth and showed me the bloody molar. He had tried himself and his mouth and hands were full of gore. My mother was in a fit. All night long he tried to get me to help. He was in such agony that he drank a teaspoonful of whiskey. But he couldn't make me take the pliers. Morning came and he had to go to a tooth-puller. I ran away from home that night.

LUCILLE

You went with the circus?

SPENSER

The Buffalo Bill Show was leaving town, and I went with it. I worked for the hossler and groomed the horses, watered the elephants and the monkeys.

(Walter begins to play.)

WALTER

(singing)

I carried water for the elephant/Back and forth to the well I went/Arms got sore and my back got bent/But I couldn't fill up the elephant.

(As Walter continues playing, the
lights go down in the studio.)

(SCENE FOUR *Lights come up in the Control Room. Farnsworth has put aside his screwdriver while he and Ralway talk with Breastman.*)

BREASTMAN

Is that the singer in question out there?

FARNSWORTH

That's her. Bessie Jackson is the name on her records. Lucille Bogan is her real name.

RALWAY

I'm don't rightly understand what's goin' on here.

FARNSWORTH

WR, I told you we had a proposition to discuss.

RALWAY

You didn't tell me about no proposition.

FARNSWORTH

You weren't listening.

RALWAY

I'm always listening. What is it?

(to Breastman)

By the way, little fella, is your name really Breastman?

BREASTMAN

No, my real name is Coozeville.

FARNSWORTH

When Lucille recorded last year, she waxed a concoction called "Shave Them Dry." Very risqué. Nothing like it. She told me then she had an even stronger version. Hard to believe but she whispered some of it in my ear.

BREASTMAN

Naturally, you thought of me.

FARNSWORTH

Frankly, I did.

BREASTMAN

What did she whisper?

(Farnsworth whispers in Breastman's ear, and he bursts into laughter.)

BREASTMAN (Continued)

That's what I want. Exactly what I can sell.

RALWAY

You going to let me in on it?

(He bends an ear and Farnsworth
whispers in it.)

RALWAY (Continued)

Jesus, Mary, and Josephine.

FARNSWORTH

She says she has a complete song, six or seven verses in all.

RALWAY

You want to record that?

FARNSWORTH

At the end of the day, after the official session.

RALWAY

How will we label the damned master?

FARNSWORTH

I'll take care of it.

RALWAY

You're not going to tell management.

FARNSWORTH

I wasn't planning on it.

RALWAY

(re Breastman)

I've never met Coozeville before. You're new to me, little
fella.

BREASTMAN

Breastman. My name is Breastman.

FARNSWORTH

I can vouch for him.

BREASTMAN

I can vouch for myself, Farnsworth. Look here, Ralway, take
my card.

(hands Ralway a card)

Picture playing cards, comics, too. Art photos, films for
men. Novelties. Does that mean rubbers? Most certainly,
but for the prevention of disease only. If you're diseased,
take two rubbers and call me in the morning.

RALWAY

And records. Party songs.

BREASTMAN

I'm the biggest distributor on the East Coast. I have more outlets than Lon Chaney has faces or Piggly-Wiggly has stores.

FARNSWORTH

So, WR, what do you think?

RALWAY

Well, what's in it for me?

FARNSWORTH

A cut of the action. Same as me. Cash payment of seventy-five dollars and seventy-five copies to dispose of as we please.

BREASTMAN

Where I come from these sell for up to five dollars apiece. And this is 1935.

RALWAY

Down South I could get in real trouble selling anything like that. They would send my keesker to jail.

BREASTMAN

Tell you what I'll do. I'll save you the shoe leather. Let me dispose of your seventy-five copies up North and I'll pay you three dollars apiece.

RALWAY

I thought you said they would bring five dollars easy.

BREASTMAN

In addition to that, I'll let both you gentlemen in on my sales of this title to the jukes.

RALWAY

How in the hell are you going to put a dirty record on a jukebox?

BREASTMAN

It's simple. I press a small number of records that includes your singer's dirty ditty on one side, and a cowboy rendition of "My Old Kentucky Home" on the other. That's the only song title that you see on the box, but the bartender and customers who are in the know gonna know which buttons to press when they put their nickels in the slot. As they will do quite frequently.

RALWAY

How much does that come to?

BREASTMAN

The records will go into the boxes for ten dollars each, that comes to five dollars per side, and you will reap a ten percent benefit, or fifty cents per jukebox insertion.

FARNSWORTH

I'm in. WR?

RALWAY

I'll be committing who knows how many felonies and misdemeanors. But what the hell. All right.

BREASTMAN

One little circle to square here, boys. The song must meet my standards.

FARNSWORTH

Which are very low.

BREASTMAN

Lower than the lowest. Right now I gotta go pick up some pressings for a ditty called "Christmas Balls" and on the flips side, "The Doc Who Put the Dick in Dixie." But those are middling offerings compared to what I want. I'll be back to hear that whore out there sing her nuts off.

FARNSWORTH

She's not a whore.

RALWAY

That's debatable.

FARNSWORTH

Leave off, WR.

BREASTMAN

To me all women are whores. One way or the other. Be seeing you.

(Breastman exits and Farnsworth picks up his screwdriver and goes back to fixing the machine.)

RALWAY

So we'll do it at the end of the day.

FARNSWORTH

Right.

RALWAY

And we won't tell Mr. Yates.

FARNSWORTH

God, no.

RALWAY

Looks like, when I copyright a song you get on your high horse, but when you steal one, that's okay.

(Farnsworth lays down his screwdriver.)

FARNSWORTH

I'm not stealing anything. I doing some work and getting paid for it. Lucille and Walter will make a few pennies more, and you and I will benefit as well.

RALWAY

If Yates knew what you're doing he would hit the ceiling.

FARNSWORTH

So he's a prig. There are lots of prigs in the world and I don't mind making them pay.

RALWAY

Is that right?

FARNSWORTH

That's right.

RALWAY

Maybe I'm a prig.

FARNSWORTH

Take it however you like it...asshole.

RALWAY

What'd you call me?

(Ralway suddenly goes after Farnsworth, taking him by the shoulders and pinning him against the wall.)

(Farnsworth and Ralway eye each other with contempt. Ralway lets go and backs off.)

RALWAY (Continued)

Let's get this damned show on the road. Damn it, we're wasting the whole morning with that damned machine.

FARNSWORTH

I'm working on it. It will be a few minutes yet. Tell them.

(Lights go down in the control room.)

(SCENE FIVE *Lights come up in the studio.*)

(Walter and Lucille are exchanging a glance before looking back to Spenser, who is seated on the piano stool.)

RALWAY

(over loudspeaker)

Lucille and Walter, we'll be a few seconds more, that's all.

LUCILLE

(calling back through microphone)

Let's get this session moving.

WALTER

England? London? You joined the circus then swam it across the sea? How you get there with all them animals?

SPENSER

It was Noah's ark. Elephants, giraffes, lions, tigers, you name it. I slept on the hay beside my ponies. Sick all the way. Twelve days throwing up.

WALTER

They don't have their own circuses in England? I hear they got Piccadilly Circus.

SPENSER

That's just a place. Nothing like Buffalo Bill's Wild West Show. We played Liverpool, and six months in London. We performed before King George and Queen Mary. That is, the lions and tigers did.

LUCILLE

Was you glad to get home?

SPENSER

That's the thing, I didn't get home. The war came.

WALTER

Great War.

SPENSER

That's right, the War to End All Wars. Put a stop to passenger travel, at least for whole circuses. Who would insure all those animals after the German blew up the *Lusitania*?

LUCILLE

So what did you animals do?

SPENSER

The circus played on until receipts dropped off finally and left everybody stranded. Then I worked odd jobs as men mobilized and melted away to trenches. I felt like a coward, not being a soldier. Before I knew it, I was standing in front of a recruiter for the British army. The Royal Fusiliers, the 39th.

WALTER

You not English.

SPENSER

This was the Jewish brigade. That was the trick the English liked to play all over the empire. Give them a brigade. You had the Royal Sikhs, Royal Gurkhas, the Royal Irish Rifles.

WALTER

The Royal Negroes.

SPENSER

Exactly: the King's African Rifles. I joined the 39th. We shipped out to Palestine, then crossed the desert to Egypt, where we joined the Zion Mule Corps. I trained in the desert, in the horrible heat with only a tin cup of water to last me the whole day long.

WALTER

Did you fight?

SPENSER

I couldn't shoot straight. At Port Said I was assigned to KP and peeled potatoes. General Allenby tapped me on the shoulder and said, "Jolly good." But it was not. It happened. One day it happened.

RALWAY

(over loudspeaker)

Lucille? Walter? We're ready in two minutes here.

LUCILLE

(calling out)

All reet.

WALTER

What happened?

LUCILLE

Walter, we got to get ready.

WALTER

Wait a minute, man be telling us a story.

SPENSER

It happened in Alexandria.

WALTER
Tell me the story, man. Then "it" happened. What happened?

SPENSER
I was seventeen.

WALTER
You an old man. Go ahead.

SPENSER
I shouldn't. I mustn't. Go, make your music.

LUCILLE
Come on, Walter.

WALTER
Tell me half the story. They made us wait, come on.

SPENSER
A few times I paid a woman to undress for me.

WALTER
That the story? Get naked?

SPENSER
No.

WALTER
But it was a start.

SPENSER
In those days you could have a woman in Alexandria on Sister Street for a few piasters. Not even a dime.

WALTER
Like these days in Birmingham.

(Walter winks at Lucille.)

LUCILLE
Walter, do not insult my constituency.

SPENSER
I watched only. We never did anything. I was scared half to death to see a woman unclothed but it also made me beam with delight.

(Spenser cannot suppress a smile,
remembering.)

WALTER
But sometime you going to do something. In the nature of things.

(Spenser's smile fades abruptly.)

SPENSER

Yes. One bright afternoon in Alexandria a woman passed me on the street. She was veiled in black. Something about her made me let down my defenses. On a whim, I asked her: Did she want to earn some silver? She did.

LUCILLE

She say yes?

SPENSER

She made it clear and showed me the number of piasters she wanted. A dollar, if that. We went into a narrow empty street behind buildings, like an alleyway. We were alone. I unbuttoned, she lifted a leg and put her back flat against the stone wall. All the while, she held her veil tightly to her head. Her skin was soft but I could not tell how old she was, whether she was pretty or ugly or if her lips were thick or thin. Her eyes were flat black and never left my gaze. She was not empty or full of love, either. How long did it take? Two minutes? Five? No more, I can't say.

WALTER

So you done lost your...lost your cherry. Is that what you was telling us about? That be it?

SPENSER

We finished, she let down her robes, I pulled mine up. I felt dizzy and excellent and poorly at the same time. I felt like a new man and yet there was melancholy. I walked behind her as we left. The street was narrow and walls ochre, the sky a thin wedge of blue.

WALTER

And that's it, goodbye?

SPENSER

As she reached the street I saw the flash of the scimitar. She started to scream but the blade sliced through her throat and turned her scream to a gurgle, then a fountain of blood, then a widening pool. Right through to the spine. Her head flopped back. She crumpled to the ground and lay in a crooked heap.

WALTER

Who done it?

SPENSER

I never saw. I ran into the street, it was empty.

(Spenser starts to breathe heavily
in an effort to hold back emotion.)

SPENSER (Continued)

My boots grew all bloody-caked, the tops of them covered too with dust and mud that glued me to the spot where she fell, her head hacked off and eyes blinking. What had I done?

(Spenser sits down in the chair and now begins to sob.)

(Lucille goes over to him.)

LUCILLE

I don't need this shit.

RALWAY

(over loudspeaker)

Lucille, Walter, we're ready. You ready?

LUCILLE

(calling back)

We needs two seconds here, WR.

SPENSER

I should go. I will go.

(He forces himself to stop crying and gets up. He starts to leave.)

LUCILLE

Spenser. Sit down.

(Spenser stops. He obeys.)

LUCILLE (Continued)

Be quiet. No. Stand up. I didn't mean for you to sit down.

SPENSER

You said ---

LUCILLE

Just stand there. Where I say. And be quiet. We don't want any noise.

(She indicates a corner of the studio. He complies.)

LUCILLE (Continued)

You thinks I care what happened to you in Alexandria twenty years ago?

SPENSER

No.

LUCILLE

That some veiled woman lost her head over you?

SPENSER

No.

(Lucille positions herself at the microphone.)

LUCILLE

Then just be quiet. Not a peep.
(to Walter)
Key of D.

RALWAY

(over loudspeaker)
Lucille, are you ready already?

LUCILLE

We ready.

RALWAY

(over intercom)
This will be Take One, "Mr. Screw Worm in Trouble."

LUCILLE

Wait a minute. I ain't going to sing that.

(Ralway bursts out of the control booth into the Live Room.)

RALWAY

"Screw Worm in Trouble" is first on the list, gall darnit.

LUCILLE

I got another song I'm gonna sing.

RALWAY

Keep to the list, Lucille. That's the only way me and Farnsworth keep the masters straight.

(A look from Lucille and he knows she won't budge. He goes back inside the booth.)

RALWAY (Continued)

(over loudspeaker)

Title?

LUCILLE

"Alley Boogie."

RALWAY

(over loudspeaker)
Spell that, please?

LUCILLE

A for Almighty, L for Lord, Lord again, E for Everything
Goin' Wrong, Y as in Why, I don't know.

FARNSWORTH

(over loudspeaker)

Wait for the Green Light. "Alley Boogie," Take One.

(As the Green Light goes on, Walter
plays the medium-temp intro.)

LUCILLE

(singing)

*I'm doing something now I ain't never done before/Going to do
it this time, ain't gonna do it no more/My alley boogie, only
thing I choose/It's the only thing I do, to drive away my
blues.*

(Lucille sings with intensity and
lights go down with a spot uniquely
on her.)

LUCILLE (Continued)

(singing)

*I boogied all night, all the night before/When I woke up this
mornin', wanted to boogie some more/Oh, alley boogie, only
thing I crave/I can do my alley boogie, so many different
ways.*

(As she sings a second spot comes up
to illuminate an androgynous young
male. Dressed entirely in white,
a Red Cross emblazoned on his
chest. This is the REDCROSSE
KNIGHT.)

(He creates a mime ballet as Lucille
sings.)

LUCILLE (Continued)

(singing)

*I've got a bed in my bedroom/pallet on my floor/I've got to
do my alley boogie, everywhere I go/'Cause I'm wild about my
boogie, only thing I crave/Good alley boogie will carry me to
my grave.*

(During the instrumental break, the
spot goes off Lucille and onto
Walter, then off, leaving the
Redcrosse Knight the only
illuminated figure on stage.)

(The second spot opens again on
Lucille:)

LUCILLE (Continued)

(singing)

Mama loves her boogie, papa loves it too, And it runs in my family, and that's all I like to do/And I'm wild about my boogie, only thing I crave/ I'm gonna do my alley boogie, rest of my days.

(The Redcrosse Knight moves into the space occupied by Spenser. The Knight takes Spenser's wrist and examines his hand. Spenser is oblivious to this inspection.)

LUCILLE (Continued)

(singing)

Papa got a watch, brother got a ring/ Sister got an armful, from alley boogie'n that thing/She's wild about her boogie, only thing she choose/ Now she got to do the boogie --- to buy her alley baby some shoes.

(The Redcrosse Knight moves back to center stage whence he began, and shares the spot with Lucille, who is entirely unaware of his dancing presence.)

LUCILLE (Continued)

(singing)

Now I done sung this song, until I sweat/And ain't nobody bought no alley boogie yet/I'm wild about my boogie, only thing I crave/I been doin' my alley boogie, I been boogie'n all of my days.

(As she finishes, the spot closes on Lucille. The Redcrosse Knight continues to dance as Walter plays the ending. Then the lights go down.)

END OF ACT 1

ACT 2

(SCENE ONE *Lights up in the Live Room, with the Green Light on, awhile at the piano Walter finishes playing the brooding "Bad Dream Blues."*)

(As he concludes, Lucille moves from the wings to the piano.)

(Spenser is still seated on the chair. At the conclusion of the piece, he claps politely.)

RALWAY

(over intercom)

Take two, "Bad Dream Blues." We'll break.

(Ralway and Farnsworth emerge from the Control Booth.)

FARNSWORTH

Walter, nice piece. Lucille, we've had a great morning. Just fine. Sure-fire hits.

RALWAY

Let's not go overboard. In this here economic depression, nothing is sure, not even Shirley Temple's shoes.

FARNSWORTH

WR and I are going down the street to pick up some extra acetates. Lucille, we'll be back shortly to record that special title.

RALWAY

Well, Spenser, how'd did you like it?

SPENSER

What?

RALWAY

The tunes we cut this morning. Lucille's singing, Walter's playing?

SPENSER

With love may one another entertain.

(Ralway stares.)

RALWAY

Yeah, well, we're back in a few minutes.

FARNSWORTH

Shortly.

LUCILLE

You know, baby, we still got to talk them terms.

FARNSWORTH

Yes, we shall. We'll pay the going rate.

RALWAY

Why do we have to talk terms? Lucille knows the going rate.

FARNSWORTH

Come on, WR.

RALWAY

Maybe your manager can talk terms. He don't talk much, maybe he can talk terms.

FARNSWORTH

Come on, WR.

(The two men exit. Lucille looks to
Walter.)

LUCILLE

You see what I'm talking about. You see what they want me to do? They want me to wax that song for nothing.

WALTER

That the way it always is.

SPENSER

What do they want?

LUCILLE

They coming back and we going to -- maybe, I mean maybe -- perform a song nobody ain't ever heard because I ain't' never sang it in the open.

WALTER

"Shave 'em Dry." The Lucille special version.

(Spenser repeats the title with a
sense of wonder.)

SPENSER

Shave 'em Dry....Shave Them Dry! What does that mean? If I can ask.

WALTER

You can ask. What you think it mean?

SPENSER

I don't know. Without Burma Shave? It brings to mind the highway signs: "Before I tried it/The Kisses I Missed/But Afterward -- Boy!/The Misses I Kissed!"

(Walter and Lucille exchange a sardonic verdict.)

WALTER

He comparing "Shave 'em Dry" to Burma Shave.

LUCILLE

Don't have nothing to do with Burma Shave.

WALTER

We're not talking about shaving whiskery.

SPENSER

Well, what then? What are you shaving? Shaving what?

LUCILLE

Depend on who you talking to. As a song it been around a long time. Ma Rainey recorded it. Jimmy Wiggins sang it. Papa Charlie Jackson sang it, too.

WALTER

Lucille here got her own.

SPENSER

Shave what dry?

LUCILLE

Let's not get into that now, if you don't mind. We got business to take care of.

SPENSER

Does it concern love?

LUCILLE

I didn't say nothing about love.

SPENSER

Lust.

LUCILLE

You getting biblical. Talking about lust. In your heart. Lust can get you killed just like love, today just like back then.

SPENSER

Lust is the mark of a brutish mind.

WALTER

Say what?

SPENSER

Lust is the mark of a brutish mind.

LUCILLE

You said lust. I didn't say lust.

WALTER

Hey, Spenser, you was talking about lust yourself. Down in Egypt. What happened then? You was coming out of the alley, with the woman you just did, and she had her throat slit, leavin' your boots all caked with blood. What happened then?

SPENSER

I don't wish to tell you the gruesome details.

WALTER

Nobody mind the gruesome details.

SPENSER

I am embarrassed.

WALTER

Bare-assed or embarrassed?

(Spenser stares and before laughing merrily:)

SPENSER

Bare-assed or embarrassed.

LUCILLE

Both.

(Spenser stops laughing.)

SPENSER

When I talk about it, I can still feel a sensation in these loins.

(In his recounting, Spenser takes the part of himself and his interlocutor:)

SPENSER (Continued)

That same afternoon, the commanding officer interrogated me. "What were you doing in that alley?" First I denied it all and dissembled, but military police had reported me. "I was with a woman." "The woman whose throat was slit?" "Yes, the same." "Did you swive her first?" "No, sir." "Let me repeat the question: Did you have an encounter of a sexual nature with her?" "Yes, sir." "Did you kill her?" "No, sir. I would never do that to a woman." "Come with me."

(MORE)

SPENSER (Continued)

He told me that if I had copulated with an Alexandrian prostitute, that I was in danger of mortal disease. "Do you want that, venereal sickness, a thick chancre on your member, and then the real disease begins and you die insane?" We went to the latrine and he produced a bottle of carbolic acid. "Use this full strength, soldier." He watched with delight and grinned ear to ear as I poured and screamed.

(Spenser re-enacts holding open his pants and pouring carbolic acid over his genitals. He screams.)

(Walter plays the piano.)

WALTER

(singing softly)

Carbolic in my coffee, turpentine in me tea/Strychnine in my biscuits, Lord but she didn't hurt me.

LUCILLE

That cured you of Egyptian prostitutes?

SPENSER

The war ended, we were demobilized. That cured me of women.

WALTER

That sound serious.

SPENSER

Rich with wages from sowing peace and prosperity in the Holy Land, I sailed back to the States. No battle scarred me, only a woman's slit throat. Returning to Boston, I hoped to reconcile with my parents but arrived only to learn they had been deported. The Palmer raids, the Red Scare. Father belonged to all the Russian Jewish organizations. Was he a communist? No, but that didn't matter. He was imprisoned in Boston Harbor, then deported with Emma Goldman and the first radicals days before I disembarked. My mother was about to follow. I sought her out, but she would barely talk to her prodigal son, and only in the Yiddish dialect I scarcely understood any more. My brother and two sisters had died of influenza. Grief and infelicitous rage consumed her.

LUCILLE

When a mother ain't going to admit her son, that rare. I seen it the other way round. Only one time did I go on tour when Naz'reth a baby. He had two years and I was gone four month. I come home and instead of smiling he turned his back to me. But you never hear a mother doing that to a child. What'd you do, Spenser?

(Spenser moves off into a spot of light.)

SPENSER

I changed my name. Yushkevich. I went before a judge. In a cheap hotel in Boston, where I rented a room by the week, from my window, down in the street I saw a delivery truck: The Spencer Turbine Company. That was the name. I wasn't thinking, and the clerk wrote it down wrong. My name became Spenser.

WALTER

That very nice but what do that have to do with what I'm asking you about?

SPENSER

The obligation of the name. Don't you see?

WALTER

Not really.

SPENSER

Well, like this Bessie Jackson business. Lucille gets called Bessie Jackson because she supposed to be like ---

WALTER

Jim Jackson

LUCILLE

Bessie Smith

SPENSER

That's the obligation of the name.

WALTER

So who Spenser?

SPENSER

For God's sake, man. *The Faerie Queen*. Britomart and Prince Arthur and the Redcrosse Knight.

(Lucille and Walter exchange a look of bewilderment and amusement.)

LUCILLE

You got the Red Cross, don't you, Walter?

WALTER

Sure do.

(Walter begins to play.)

WALTER (Continued)

(singing)

Say you know I had a dream last night that I, had never dreamt before, I dreamt about that head clerk, down in the

(MORE)

WALTER (Continued)

Red Cross Store, And I told 'em: "No". Great Lord, says: "Girl, I can't go", Says: "I cannot go to Hill's, but I can go to the Red Cross Store."

(Spenser stares angrily at Walter.)

SPENSER

No!

(Spenser pounds sharply on the piano and Walter abruptly stops.)

SPENSER (Continued)

That has *nothing* to do with the Redcrosse Knight. Nothing, do you understand?

WALTER

What this Redcrosse Knight?

LUCILLE

Who be the Redcrosse Knight?

SPENSER

Everyone knows who he is. Everyone educated, that is.

LUCILLE

You educated, Walter?

WALTER

No, m'am.

LUCILLE

We not educated, Spenser.

WALTER

We lost about this lust.

LUCILLE

Don't want to lose sight of that, neither.

SPENSER

The Redcrosse Knight.

WALTER

But that what I'm asking. Who is this Redcrosse Knight?

SPENSER

I'm trying to explain who he is. He's like St. George. You know who St. George is.

WALTER

I don't know about no St. George, either.

LUCILLE

You mean with the dragon?

SPENSER

Yes, that's it.

WALTER

What dragon?

LUCILLE

Look here, Walter. You shoulda gone to Sunday school.

WALTER

I did go to church, Lucille. I sang in the choir.

LUCILLE

Well, you shoulda gone to Sunday school. Once upon a time, was this dragon. He lived on the outskirts of town and guarded over the onliest good waterin' spot around. Townspeople come to him, say, "We wants some water." He say, "I give you water but I gotta eat one of your little girls." So every day, people in the town, everybody get to vote. Those vote to choose a little girl for the dragon to eat.

WALTER

Where did this happen?

LUCILLE

Walter, I don't know where it happened. It was a long time ago. In the dark ages. Ain't that right, Spenser?

(Spenser is open-mouthed speechless.)

WALTER

We in the dark ages now. How'd they vote?

LUCILLE

Everybody in town gets a straw, Walter.

WALTER

Everybody?

LUCILLE

Everybody.

WALTER

That's a sight better than we do in Alabama. Charlotte telling me last night, "You don't even vote." I say, "I never tried." She say, "You got to try." She ignorant. Bitch can't tell apart what cost a dime from what cost your flesh. "Everybody got to vote." Pah. Stick a poll tax up your ass.

LUCILLE

Can I continue my story?

WALTER

Stomp 'em on down to the bricks.

LUCILLE

So every week about, they draw straws to see whose little girl gets fed to the dragon. Most times it just anybody's little girl. But one day the king gets the short end.

WALTER

The town has a king?

LUCILLE

The town has a king.

WALTER

Towns I knows about don't have kings. They has mayors.

LUCILLE

This town had a king.

WALTER

And so?

LUCILLE

So the king goes to the dragon and he say, "Don't you eat my little daughter, please." But dragon just ask him a question: "You peoples thirsty?" Enough said.

WALTER

So the king gots to feed his little daughter to the dragon? Just like everybody else?

(Lucille approaches Walter and puts
an arm around him.)

LUCILLE

(to Spenser)

You see how he be alarmed? Walter got a little baby girl just six weeks from being born down in Birmingham. He don't want to be putting her outdoors in swaddling clothes, handing her off to no dragon.

SPENSER

You tell the story marvelously well.

LUCILLE

Shucks I do. 'Course, that don't keep him from partying with Communist womens.

WALTER

Stay to your own business. So what about the dragon?

LUCILLE

Along come St. George. He be this knight on a horse with a spear and sweating armor. The king say, you can have my daughter if you slay that dragon any old way. George go sit all night in a little hut, then go after him next morning just when the little girls come down. King's daughter be heading the parade, ready to get herself et. Dragon's licking his chops. George throws his spear but the dragon's got scales hard as rocks and it don't make a dent. Then the dragon spit at him some poison and George dive under an orange tree where he protected. Then he come up again with his sword, and he stick the dragon right here.

(Lucille demonstrates on Spenser, driving an imaginary sword to the hilt underneath his arm.)

WALTER

All right.

(Spenser is unnerved by this physical contact.)

LUCILLE

Childrens like that story, don't they, Spenser? You learn it as a child?

SPENSER

I never heard it before I attended college. It is a Christian tale, a fable, a legend based on myth.

LUCILLE

I learned it in Sunday school.

WALTER

(to Spenser)

You went to some university? You got far up in education?

(Lucille has withdrawn her arm but still stands close to Spenser.)

LUCILLE

(to Walter)

Sure, he did. Just looking at him you can tell that.

(to Spenser)

You trembling like a leaf.

SPENSER

I'm just a little nervous, that's all....I did go to the university. I was trying to explain. After the war, when I came back to the States. Millions went to college for the first time. Schools opened right and left in 1920. Administrators didn't ask too many questions.

(MORE)

SPENSER (Continued)

I had a slight accent from my time in England. I had been in the Royal Brigadiers and had a good discharge letter. It didn't say I was a Jew serving with the Jews. It said I'd been a soldier who fought with honor in the war. All I had to do was pass an entrance exam.

WALTER

But you wasn't Yushkevich no more.

SPENSER

No, I was Spenser. In changing my name, I minted myself anew. I took courses in mathematics, science, Greek, Latin. But I always came back to English and the great poets of yore. Among whom I counted first: Spenser.

WALTER

You count yourself first.

SPENSER

And then I took Spenser himself as object of my master's thesis and the substance of my doctoral dissertation. Spenser's great poem, my true love.

WALTER

Which was?

SPENSER

The Faerie Queen.

(Walter starts to formulate a question.)

LUCILLE

Walter, let me, please.

(to Spenser)

What in hell you talking about? What is the Faerie Queen?

SPENSER

That depends on what you mean by "is." Or was.

LUCILLE

Fairy queen like we seen up at Madame Valentine's place? Fairy queen like Mr. Gladys Bentley? That kind of Fairy Queen?

SPENSER

No, nothing like that at all. I can see you don't know British poetry.

WALTER

British poetry?

LUCILLE

You saying I'm ignorant? Because if you saying I'm ignorant, you got another thing coming your way. I pass my whole life at my dining room table with a pencil I sharpens with a knife three times a day, writing songs.

WALTER

You gets out now and then.

LUCILLE

Shut up, Walter. My Daddy moved from Amory, Mississippi to Birmingham, Alabama, so's I could go to school, and I finished fourth grade before I had to stop. If I hain't got pregnant with Naz'reth Junior, I woulda gone back to school, too.

(Spenser is backing away from
Lucille.)

SPENSER

I didn't mean it the way it sounded. I was just talking about the *Faerie Queen*. It is a long poem, many poems, six books, he was going to write twelve --

WALTER

Who?

SPENSER

Spenser.

WALTER

There you go.

SPENSER

But only six were published, they're all disjointed and require years of study before anybody can read them in the first place. It all happens in faerie land. I shouldn't have brought it up and yet. It's what I do.

WALTER

You go to fairyland.

LUCILLE

Walter, please. Spenser gonna run me down by my education, I'm not going to have it.

SPENSER

No, no. I don't mean that. I'm living not in faerie land but in the real world, our world, our miserable and disconsolate world, the world of our Great Depression. I'm not trying to run anybody down. *The Faerie Queen*, I can't explain it. I lived it.

WALTER

What you mean, you lived it? How you lived it?

SPENSER

I am living it now. Why am I here?

LUCILLE

That what we want to know! What was you doing in Harlem last night? You never answered me. You told me how you got uptown, but not why.

SPENSER

I told you I come from Great Falls, Montana. I teach there. Or I did until ---

(Spenser fights off bitter adolescent tears.)

LUCILLE

Teach what?

SPENSER

The Faerie Queen.

WALTER

Oh, fuck.

SPENSER

I mean...I'm a teacher, a professor. No reason to jump on me. At Great Falls College. I teach literature.

WALTER

By the way you blubbering, you ought to be teaching home economics.

LUCILLE

Walter, let the man cry if he want. I seen men cry. My daddy cried sometime. It not no horrible thing. I bet mens cried in fairy land.

SPENSER

At the drop of a hat.

(A pause as Spenser composes himself.)

SPENSER (Continued)

I taught the *Faerie Queen*. As I said. Until they fired me. Last year. The depression ended my career. The professor was excised.

LUCILLE

If you needs a job, you got the WPA.

SPENSER

I prefer not to.

WALTER

You don't want to go to the Red Cross store, neither. But a man got to live. His family got to eat.

SPENSER

I'm alone. I'm a bachelor in Great Falls. I came to Manhattan for the annual meeting of the Modern Language Association. Perhaps, I thought, I might make new friends and renew old acquaintanceships with colleagues. For months I prepared. I sat in my boardinghouse room, composing my paper on Book Three of *The Faerie Queen*, and its many reverberations in Book Six. Somehow thinking that, though I had no money and no prospects, my reading would uplift souls and I would be in turn uplifted in every way by my colleagues. So I sweated and stormed to write the very best, the most scintillating paper, to be read at the meeting.

WALTER

To read to who?

SPENSER

In front of the Spenserian Section of the Friends of Sixteenth Century English Literature.

(Lucille and Walter exchange a look.)

LUCILLE

You done gave a speech. What did it say?

WALTER

Was it a fireside chat? With your puppy at your feet?

SPENSER

Oh, it was that all right. I titled it, "A Night at the Castle" and investigated the evening the knights all passed in the bowels of the Castle Joyeous, amidst the damsels and squires, chief among them Britomart, a gallant knight in a suit of armor. Who was, in fact, a fair lady.

WALTER

Wait a minute. If she was a knight, dressed up in armor, that was a man.

SPENSER

That's just it. She was disguised as a man. Wearing a suit of armor.

LUCILLE

Why she do that?

SPENSER

She was on a journey in Faerie land. A wonderful knight, full of amiable grace and beauty and manly manners mixed therewithal. Really, she was in search of Artegal, grand embodiment of Justice, with whom she was in love.

WALTER

He gonna really like her when she be all dressed up in a suit of armor.

SPENSER

She is a woman but also a warrior.

LUCILLE

What about this Castle Joyeuse? What was so joyeuse about I?

SPENSER

Therein lived this lusty woman, this Evil Malecasta, who took Britomart for a man and designed to seduce him.

LUCILLE

She think he a man or she be a dyke?

SPENSER

A man. She thought Britomart was a man.

WALTER

You sure about that?

SPENSER

I'm sure.

WALTER

Fifty pounds of armor -- that a lot of metal for a woman to carry. And with all that, how did this Malecasta get a good look, anyhow?

SPENSER

Malecasta tried to make her to take the armor off. But Britomart would not, lest she reveal her sexe under that strange purport.

WALTER

She want to keep it hid.

SPENSER

Exactly.

(Spenser starts to excitedly act out the scene in which Britomart goes to bed, begins to sleep, and Malecasta attempts to sleep with and seduce her.)

SPENSER (Continued)

Listen, I'll explain it. A great party takes place in the castle that night. All the knights and ladies are dancing and gambling and, all the while, Malecasta is working her wiles on the fair Britomart. When time comes for all to bed, waxen torches light their way. Once in her bedroom Britomart finally unburdens herself of armor and disrobes, and lays herself in her soft feathered nest for a sleep sound.

LUCILLE

For a sound sleep.

SPENSER

Yes, a sound sleep.

WALTER

Carrying around all that weight, she would sleep mighty sound.

SPENSER

But lust-driven Malecasta remains wide awake, so provoked is she by Britomart. She rises from her own bed and under the veil of weary night she goes, trembling with anticipation. By the bed she stops, lifts the quilt, to test whether Britomart sleeps soundly enough to admit caresses, putting her ear to listen to the knight's cool breath. She lays herself down beside Britomart ever so quietly. The beautiful knight turns on her side and then -- suddenly! She feels the intruder beside her.

WALTER

She onto it.

SPENSER

She leaps out of bed, and grabs her sword. Malecasta lets out a howl you can hear all over the castle, and to the chamber all do throng, including the Redcrosse Knight. And there sits Malecasta on the ground, and Britomart in her nightgown with her magic broad blade at the ready.

LUCILLE

Did she use it?

SPENSER

No, she gets dressed. She puts all her armor on, and off she goes with the Redcrosse Knight. There my paper ends, concerning *The Faerie Queen*, Book Three.

WALTER

How many books is there?

SPENSER

Six. Greatest poem in the English language

WALTER

That right? What the second greatest?

(A pause.)

LUCILLE

So Spenser, you tell me. You studying about this Knight who look like a man but he really a woman and this woman who wants a man go after her thinking she's a him, and goes beside his bed and listen to him breathe and climb into bed with him and find out he's got the wrong set of balls. You studying about all that....So what is then your problem in me taking you to a buffet flat in Harlem? They got gambling goin' on, they got men's doing it to womens, womens to mens and others womens, freakish mens doing to their husbands, bull daggers doing their wives. What is the problem? Ain't that Faerie Land, too?

SPENSER

Yet Britomart remains chaste. Beautiful she stands in her snow-white smock, her delicate face, her tender locks. She would not approve of your buffet flat.

WALTER

Spenser, you married?

SPENSER

No.

LUCILLE

What happened to you in the alley ---

SPENSER

Reverberated through my life, yes, I admit it.

WALTER

But you wasn't fire extinguished. No man extinguished at that age. You was eighteen then.

SPENSER

I bore up. Marriage? In Great Falls? Most of my students are men. Some young women, yes. They are all well-behaved. Some are charming. Yet of course, I never --

(Standing close to Spenser, Lucille has become aware of him.)

LUCILLE

Spenser, get your damned boots on. You can't play me for no fool, nor Walter neither.

WALTER

Lucille mean you got a hard-on out to here. Who you trying to fool?

SPENSER

No, it's not true. I would never touch any student, still less a young woman I teach.

(He nervously glances away from Lucille)

SPENSER (Continued)

Or anyone else.

WALTER

That why you got fired?

SPENSER

It was the Great Depression, I told you.

WALTER

Okay. You told me. It was the Great Depression, Lucille.

LUCILLE

You got the CCC. The WPA. All mens need relief.

WALTER

The Red Cross store. Give you a can a beans. But you got to have -- *relief*.

SPENSER

All right. It has not been easy. To control myself. But I wasn't fired for such malfeasance....Simply, I agreed not to see the young woman any more. It was a gentleman's agreement. Between the provost of the school and I.

LUCILLE

Who she? What her name?

SPENSER

Elizabeth. Never mind. She has left Great Falls. She married. She teaches elementary school in Nebraska. Her husband is an actuary....I told you, I buried myself in my work. I was fired. I had to keep busy.

LUCILLE

Spenser, 'scuse me for asking, but can you give me an idea of the frequency?

SPENSER

Frequency of what?

(Lucille reaches up to lay a hand on Spenser's cheek.)

LUCILLE

Before you was trembling. Now you sweating.

SPENSER
I don't know what you're talking about. It is not a question to ask a grown man.

LUCILLE
We not asking a grown man.

SPENSER
All right! Maybe...twice a year.

LUCILLE
Twice a year!

WALTER
Twice a year!

SPENSER
Are you satisfied?

WALTER
Is you? That be the question a man got to answer for hisself. There a little whorehouse in Great Falls? All them Northern cities have big mansions on the outskirts, don't they?

SPENSER
No, I could never do that. I would never risk soiling my reputation.

WALTER
What, you got to soil yourself some way. Go to the big city.

SPENSER
I go to Nebraska. To visit.

LUCILLE
Elizabeth.

WALTER
Ah!

SPENSER
But there is an end on it. Her husband discovered my letters, and now holds her close to him, and she is made to clean the floor with her tongue. So she writes.

WALTER
So that bring you to Harlem? You looking for sport and companionship.

SPENSER
No, it's not that at all.

LUCILLE
Walter, don't always be assuming that the man wants the same thing you do.

WALTER

Why not? It's true, ain't it?

LUCILLE

No two men alike.

WALTER

Excuse me, I thought you always saying all mens is alike.

LUCILLE

You confusing me with Ida Cox. White folks think all colored people look alike. Is that so?

WALTER

Only after you turn out the lights.

(Spenser moves and turns slightly away from Lucille and Walter.)

SPENSER

I wanted to put out the lights. Yes, assuredly. That was the whole idea.

WALTER

Come again?

SPENSER

I arrived a week ago at Grand Central Station with the firmament above and my last hundred dollars in my shoe. I would not beg, nor borrow. With the damned hope of reinvigorating my life and work, I would attract the attention of other scholars and still others would woo me and praise me. To a session of my peers I read the paper over which I had slaved since my final paycheck, sixteen months ago.

LUCILLE

And how did that do?

SPENSER

Three people attended. Three. One left before I finished. Two left when I had finished. I asked myself questions, and answered. I went back to my rooms in the St. George hotel. For three days I made inquiries. Returning to the hotel after I went out for breakfast on the fourth day, my lock was jammed. My key would not fit. That was three days ago.

(to Lucille)

You thought it was a Murphy man. I led you to believe as much. I didn't know the meaning of the term before you taught me. I went to Harlem quite on my own. To make inquiries.

WALTER

What kind of inquiries?

LUCILLE

Walter, listen to the man.

SPENSER

I had five dollars to my name, and my bags locked in the hotel until I paid the twenty-five I owed.

WALTER

You don't have no bank account.

SPENSER

Bank account? I had five dollars in my pocket.

(Spenser, downcast, stops talking at the sound of MEN'S VOICES and, a moment later, Ralway, Farnsworth enter. Followed by Breastman. Farnsworth carries a hefty package, wrapped in paper and twine.)

FARNSWORTH

Hello, again. Back with the acetates. We'll be ready to go in a minute flat.

LUCILLE

WR, we got to talk terms.

FARNSWORTH

Lucille, we have the same terms as ever, but bonus copies of the record itself. You asked for twenty. Twenty, then. Plus twelve dollars and fifty cents for you and you split that with Walter, any way you and he agree.

LUCILLE

That don't satisfy me.

RALWAY

Well, it will have to do. Everybody is hurting, Lucille. This is 1935, not 1925. Records don't sell worth a damn, most of them. You're one of our best artists, and I love you for your new songs every time you come to New York. With this song, "Shave 'em Dry," it's special. What are we all going to get from it? Besides a good time. It can't be sold in stores no way. I just want you to do it for me.

LUCILLE

You not giving me no reason to sing there.

RALWAY

Twelve-fifty worth of motivation and ten pressings. You can sell them for five dollars each one.

LUCILLE

And how many can you sell at that price?

RALWAY

Let's just do it, Lucille. You know I got to produce the record, pay everybody for that. Everything costs money. Let's just you sing it now.

(He tries to embrace her, but she walks away.)

(As Farnsworth and Ralway move toward the control booth, Breastman goes up to Spenser.)

BREASTMAN

You look like you need cheering up, pal. Here's one for you: There was a young girl from Medina/Who could completely control her vagina/She could twist it around/Like the cunts that are found/In Japan, Manchukuo and China.

SPENSER

That's disgusting.

BREASTMAN

You're just saying that because I'm a dwarf. If I was a regular person, you'd laugh out loud.

SPENSER

I would not. A dwarf should express common sense.

BREASTMAN

My common sense is six inches long, four round.

FARNSWORTH

Breastman, come along.

SPENSER

Prudence and charity should be your bailiwicks.

BREASTMAN

You know why people call me Breastman? Because they think a dwarf is like a boobie. You can cuddle me, suckle me, hold me in your hand, lift me up and squeeze me tight.

WALTER

Well, then, that big mouth of yours must be your titty.

BREASTMAN

Eat me, nigger.

(Suddenly enraged, Walter rushes at Breastman. Lucille and Spenser hold him back.)

WALTER

You ofay clown.

(Ralway drags Breastman by the arm.)

RALWAY

Breastman, will you leave off, and come with us?

(Farnsworth, Ralway, and Breastman
all disappear into the control rom.)

LUCILLE

You see what WR just did?

WALTER

He be giving you an ultimatum.

LUCILLE

I ain't gonna sing that song.

WALTER

I ain't going to play that song.

LUCILLE

Everybody try to cheat you, but he going whole hog.

WALTER

Ten pressings. We s'posed to sell 'em? For how much? Two
dollars apiece.

LUCILLE

I don't sell records. I makes records.

FARNSWORTH

(over loudspeaker)

We're ready in here, Lucille.

WALTER

Just don't say nothing.

LUCILLE

We not ready out here.

RALWAY

(over loudspeaker)

Well, get ready quick. We want to record Lucille Bogan,
"Shave 'em Dry." Special version.

SPENSER

Now tell me at last. What does that mean? "Shave 'em Dry."

WALTER

You never heard that expression before? You in the dark
ages.

LUCILLE
Walter, why would Spenser know that? He not among colored people.

WALTER
He get shaved.

LUCILLE
Not that way.

SPENSER
What does it mean?

WALTER
What you do twice a year.

LUCILLE
That is completely inexact. It don't mean that.

WALTER
I didn't say it was the whole story.

SPENSER
But what then, pray, does it mean?

WALTER
It mean you doing it but that's all you doing. You ain't doing nothing but.

LUCILLE
It don't mean that, Walter. Walter, I'm telling you, don't lie to this man.

WALTER
I ain't lying. It mean you be doing it. You ain't the only one to sing "Shave 'em Dry."

LUCILLE
I didn't say I was the onliest one. Ma Rainey got her words. Wiggins got his. But nobody got my words.

WALTER
I didn't say anybody else got your words.

LUCILLE
I wrote my words myself. And I know what they mean.

SPENSER
Will you tell me please!

LUCILLE
I don't know you gonna understand.

SPENSER

Why not?

LUCILLE

You had such bad experiences. What with veiled womens getting their throats cut. And not enough experiences. Twice a year.

SPENSER

The world beams to me through its chastest verse. But I know the world. Shave Them Dry? What does it mean?

LUCILLE

When you a man doing it, what happen at the end? You have a climax. Well, womens climax, too. You know that.

(Spenser nods.)

WALTER

Milk come with 'em too. Some of 'em.

LUCILLE

Walter, you confusing the issue.

SPENSER

The issue from what?

LUCILLE

Look, Spenser, I is a woman. If -- and this is only an *if* because it don't always happen, especially with the mens you got to work with nowadays -- if I comes once and again and then climaxes and again and again till the moon sets behind the sun and my parts turn cherry red. Then I'm all out. My parts no longer wet. You done shaved me dry.

WALTER

Is that what it mean?

LUCILLE

Yes, Walter.

WALTER

Ok, then.

SPENSER

All this talk. All these acts. I prefer my world.

LUCILLE

What is in your world? Beside your poem.

SPENSER

(quoting)

I might "sing of Knights and Ladies gentle deeds/Whose
prayses having slept in silence long,/Me, all too meane, the
sacred Muse areeds/To blazon broad amongst her learned
throng/Fierce warres and faithfull love shall moralize my
song."

WALTER

What you mean, moralize your song?

SPENSER

I live in an age of chivalry and knights in armor. Do you
know what chivalry is? Either of you?

LUCILLE

Walter, you know what chivalry is?

WALTER

Sure do.

LUCILLE

So do I.

SPENSER

The love of a knight for his lady. The virtues of courage
and valor, embodied in courtly love, a term only coined in
the nineteenth century yet part of the code of honor since
the eleventh. *The Faerie Queen* ennobled the chivalrous
virtues in a very, very special way.

LUCILLE

Which way was that?

SPENSER

"Abstaine from pleasure and restrain your will/Subdue desire,
and bridle loose delight"

WALTER

What century was that?

SPENSER

The sixteenth. You see, it is very old, the code of
chivalry, and much about it we do not know. Was it real, or
confined to stories and poems and songs? It involved
adulterous strivings, to be sure, but was the love of a
knight for his lady profane or unconsummated and Platonic?

WALTER

Unconsummated sound like a can of condensed soup to me.

LUCILLE

Walter, let the man talk.

SPENSER

Was Spenser of the Platonic School or the Ovidian? As I have proved, neither or both. A mixture, yet not a stew. An aged wine, not a sweet sherry. Spenser was a Puritan, and a woman ennobles man. Courtly love is fully compatible with marriages and hearth. The heat of lust, greedy vain desire, these can be tamed, and all remember: "Dearer is love than life, and fame then gold;/But dearer than them both your faither once plighted hold."

WALTER

(to Lucille)

That ought to tell us a thing or two.

LUCILLE

What you talking about?

SPENSER

Let me speak my mind. My ideals I put into practice. When you talk about Shaving ---

(He starts to laugh helplessly.)

SPENSER (Continued)

Shaving -- Them -- Dry.

(He stops abruptly.)

SPENSER (Continued)

We cannot have these exhibitions of villainy. Men with wicked flames within their bowels bent on filthy lust. We require courtesy, comely courtesy, knights gentle and bold.

LUCILLE

See, Spenser, don't let me stop you. But we got chivalry, leastways where I come from, too. Down South we got knights. Knights of Pythias, Knights of Khorassan, Knights everywhere. I was born in Amory, Mississippi, Monroe County. White folks drive around in buggies, talking about them Middle Ages, vassals, and lords and such. About their honor and how it a shame mens can't duel to the death no more.

SPENSER

Southern chivalry, quaint indeed.

LUCILLE

First I heard about it, I was six years old. I remember a little barbeque over in Doddsville. My daddy knew the way: You take Highway 45 to Highway 82, to Highway 49. Doddsville, Mississippi. Lots of singers and musicianers from around there. Me, I like barbeque.

WALTER

You got a song about barbeque.

(He sits down to the piano.)

LUCILLE

(singing)

When you come to my house, come down behind the jail, I got a sign on my door, "Barbecue for Sale."

WALTER

(singing)

You talkin' 'bout your barbecue, only thing you crave.

LUCILLE

(singing)

And that good doin' meat, going to carry me to my grave.

(They stop playing.)

SPENSER

Why your grave?

LUCILLE

You got to listen hard to hear the meat crackling on the bone. Hear it?

SPENSER

No.

(Lucille puts a cupped palm to Spenser's ear, and when he bends down she puts her mouth to his ear and plants a kiss within.)

WALTER

Now you hear it?

(Spenser quivers at the contact.)

SPENSER

Perhaps.

LUCILLE

Barbeque took place at the old Eastland Plantation, outside Doddsville.

WALTER

Everybody know about *that* barbeque.

LUCILLE

Luther Holbert. I don't know if he did the murders of Old Man Eastland and Carr. Nobody know if he did. Nobody know why he did it if he did do it. Some say it was his woman and Old Man Eastland was interfering.

(MORE)

LUCILLE (Continued)

But I heard it was him opening his big mouth and telling another nigger he weren't obliged to work off no debt. That called peonage, just like slavery, you got to work when you owe a dime, otherwise you go to jail. That what I believe because Booker T. Washington spoke on Luther's behalf in the aftermath and a better nigger to the white man you could never find. He woulda kept his Tuskegee mouth shut if it was a crime of concubinage.

WALTER

(singing)

Now Booker T., he left Tuskegee ---

LUCILLE

Shut up, Walter. I'm trying to tell a story. Old Man Eastland come after Holbert and Holbert shot him dead with a bullet to the forehead.

WALTER

They found old Eastland lying across Holbert's bed.

LUCILLE

That right. And Holbert and his wife ran off. Holbert belonged to the Lodge, and some of his brothers give him money. And a gold watch. Almost three hundred dollars.

WALTER

Two hundred eighty-five.

LUCILLE

Exactly two hundred eighty-five. But first they had to get out of Mississippi. You ever tried to get out of Mississippi, Spenser? Land around Monroe County in 1904 wasn't nothing but swamp and forest and canebrake, all bamboo and sugar cane. They slogged across all night and slept by day.

SPENSER

Did they befriend the animals?

LUCILLE

Did they what?

WALTER

I think he said, "Make friends with the animals."

LUCILLE

Oh, yes. That good, Spenser. They did. Panthers round about looked out for the white men coming with the hounds. Black bears brought them honey to mix with the dew they collected and drank in the early morning when the sun come up.

(MORE)

LUCILLE (Continued)

At night wild dogs and rabbits surrounded them like sentinels and wolves stole into farmers' henhouses, and brought them chickens to eat.

WALTER

But they had to eat it raw because they couldn't make no fire.

LUCILLE

Meantime then Old Man Eastland's son, Woods Eastland, he raise a posse of fifty men and more. They took out after Holbert and his wife. Woods hisself shot this nigger Winters, killed him too. He thought he had helped Holbert go. Then the posse got lucky and shot one colored woman, then another. Five in all they shot dead.

SPENSER

Did they escape? Holbert and his wife? They got away?

WALTER

You ain't spent a gang of years in Mississippi, has you, Spenser?

LUCILLE

They got far. Holbert cut off his mustache. His woman shaved her hair short to look like a man. She put on a man's straw hat and dressed in duck overalls and a denim jacket.

WALTER

How you know it was a denim jacket and duck overalls?

LUCILLE

Walter, don't interrupt me. My daddy studied it and he know it down to the color of Woods Eastland's eyes and what he be doing the night of the day they caught up with 'em. Luther Holbert could read. So could my Daddy. People with that level of education concerned him.

SPENSER

So they were captured!

LUCILLE

Eastland heard they was up near Itta Bena. They brought dogs from Parchman Farm to scour the fields. Then a little black boy saw them sleeping in a field, and he told on them.

WALTER

Snitched on 'em, can you believe it?

LUCILLE

He didn't know no better. I ain't defending him. But a six-year-old child, he didn't know better.

WALTER

You know what happened next.

LUCILLE

Do you, Spenser, know what come next?

SPENSER

I don't.

LUCILLE

Word spread through the state like a barn afire. They brung Holbert and his wife back to Doddsville in a spring wagon. Posse didn't take them to the Eastland plantation.

WALTER

Nor to no jail.

LUCILLE

They brought 'em to the church next door to where Holbert had his cabin.

WALTER

Teach folks a lesson out of Sunday school.

LUCILLE

Peoples come from all over. More'n a thousand. Ladies in hats and picnic baskets. They swarmed like bees round a hive. They chanted and boomed and got down to business. Wagonloads of kindlin' wood and logs was brought on and dumped to make a pyre they doused with gasoline and set it to burning.

WALTER

He get the picture, Lucille.

LUCILLE

No, he don't, Walter. Spenser need the whole picture. They said to Holbert and his wife both: "Hold out your hands." They took up shears and cut off the fingers of one, then the other. One by one. Passed them out to folks for keepsakes.

(Spenser, now seated, puts his face in his hands as Lucille continues to walk around him.)

LUCILLE (Continued)

Then a man took a straight razor and cut off each of their ears. Them they got passed out as more keepsakes. Another man took a stick to Holbert's eye.

WALTER

That your Bible talking.

LUCILLE

Sure is. Poked it right in and plucked it out the socket till it hung down his face by a thread of flesh. Then come some mens, more than one, with a ratchet brace that had a three-inch augur and they drilled Holbert through and his woman through, then pulled the augur out, so the meat hung quivering. They drill a bunch a holes that way.

SPENSER

I don't need to hear any more.

WALTER

He don't need to hear any more, Lucille.

SPENSER

Please.

LUCILLE

Shut up, Walter.

WALTER

It was niggers they got to do the dirty work.

LUCILLE

That right. Niggers did their bidding but nobody roundabout later could blame 'em because they woulda been killed if they hadn't. They was probably members of the Lodge that give Holbert his money. They wrapped Holbert in chains and drug him to the flames. He shrieked till he expired.

(Lucille stops to address Spenser.)

LUCILLE (Continued)

Then the woman's turn. She asked, "Can I pray?" They said, "No." They thrust her in the fire. She never said a mumbling word. Her skin crackled then she died and went to ashes.

SPENSER

That's not justice.

(proclaiming)

"That Justice was a God of sovereign grace,/And altars unto him, and temples lent,/And heavenly honours in the highest place;/Calling him great Osyris, of the race."

LUCILLE

I ain't talking about justice, Spenser. I'm not sure I need any of your Egyptian bullshit, neither. I'm talking about chivalry. What you say to that, Spenser?

(Spenser rises, then suddenly kneels before Lucille, as a knight before a queen.)

WALTER

What the fuck you doing?

LUCILLE

Spenser, nobody told you to drop down on your knees. I don't need a man on his knees. Get up.

(He remains on his knees. She walks away.)

SPENSER

I knew it all the while.

WALTER

Knew what?

SPENSER

Chaste has no future. Nor do I. I went to Harlem for a reason. Perhaps I am a coward, or just a man on two feet without a farthing on a plain. But I could have found that arm I needed, and done with it what I wished.

LUCILLE

I'm not trying to hurt your damned feelings, Spenser. You was damaged enough. I'm trying to tell you something. I was six years old when Luther Holbert and his wife was lynched. We lived in Amory, right in the middle of Mississippi, halfway 'twixt Memphis, Tennessee and Birmingham, Alabama. Them events set my Daddy on his course and we moved. Not next day or next week, but we went. We weren't the onliest ones to go. Neither. The air was poisoned. He choosed Birmingham because he could make two dollar every day hauling steel instead of fifty cents baling cotton. We loaded up that old spring wagon. It opened up my world. Hell, all that chivalry.

WALTER

Welcome to Birmingham.

LUCILLE

I'm grateful to it.

(Spenser rises at last. He takes his hat, and he bows.)

SPENSER

I'll be on my way.

(He turns and moves to exit.)

LUCILLE

Where you going, Spenser? You got no horse, what you going to do? You got no place to go. You got no job or no money. You ain't going to get no gat. Where you going?

WALTER

Lucille got a point.

SPENSER

For a knight to leave his lady --- were great shame.

LUCILLE

You ain't none of that. That's what I been telling you.

SPENSER

Not a knight.

LUCILLE

You my manager. Now I'm going to sing "Shave 'em Dry." If they cooperate. To let me they got to pay me what I ask.

WALTER

Show me the money, honey.

LUCILLE

Walter, let me do the rhyming.

(Lucille takes Spenser by the shoulders, moves with him upstage, stands with him, facing the audience.)

LUCILLE (Continued)

See, Spenser, I been coming to New York a long time. My first record I made in 1923, hollering into a big old horn, singing a song penned by this piano player named Porter Grainger, called "Triflin' Blues." It was some small beer, all right. But I undertook to write songs myself, and after a while one blues then another spilled from my hand. I recorded "Don't Mean You No Good Blues," which I wrote myself. I recorded "Coffee Grindin' Blues." Can you hear the coffee grinding, Spenser?

(She stands behind him, slips her hands through his arms, and massages his shoulders.)

SPENSER

I think I can. Coffee grinding is...a pleasure sure.

LUCILLE

As the years passed one upon another, and I raised my boy Naz'reth, lost my husband Naz'reth because he got jealous I was in love with another man, and it wasn't true -- still I wrote them songs. They become what I am in the minds of others. I recorded "Whiskey Selling Woman" and peoples thinks I'm a drunk. I recorded "They Ain't Walking No More" and mens think I'm a whore.

(MORE)

LUCILLE (Continued)

You can't drink and write songs, you can't walk the streets, it take all your time. But I musta made a hundred records by now, and I made myself a hundred times over. You see what I mean, Spenser?

SPENSER

If you can do it, I can do it.

LUCILLE

That right, Spenser. Exact. You don't need no Dale Carnegie. You can do it. And you know what you got to do. Listen to me just one second.

(singing a cappella)

Some folks say black is evil, but I will tell the world they are wrong, / Some folks say black is evil, but I will tell the world they are wrong, / 'Cause I'm a sealskin brown, and I've been evil every since I been born.

WALTER

Anybody can look at you and tell that.

LUCILLE

Do I look evil to you, Spenser?

SPENSER

I don't know.

(Walter starts to play the piano, accompanying her.)

LUCILLE

(singing)

I'm scared to trust a rabbit, and I won't even trust a squirrel, / I'm scared to trust a rabbit, and I won't even trust a squirrel, / And I won't bat my eyes, 'cause I might lose sight on this whole round world.

(Lucille points Spenser toward the Control Room as the lights go down.)

(SCENE TWO *Lights up on the Control Room. Farnsworth is at the console with Breastman seated on the second chair, and Ralway pacing.*)

RALWAY

What the hell is she waiting for? Talking to that so-called manager of hers! If she doesn't move on this thing in a minute, I'm calling it off.

BREASTMAN

Come on, will ya? These nigger singers all take their time. Stop walking the floor like that, you're making me nervous.

FARNSWORTH

She said she wanted terms, you remember. She wants more money.

RALWAY

I've given her money. I'm giving her an advance of twelve-fifty. What does she expect? The moon?

(Ralway continues pacing nervously. Breastman hops off his chair and puts his hands up to stop Ralway from pacing.)

BREASTMAN

She wants to take you for a fucking ride. So what's new? Stop pacing, for Christ's sake!

RALWAY

I'm going to go tell her it's now or never.

(Ralway turns to open the door to the Control Room, only to find Spenser in the doorway, about to knock.)

RALWAY (Continued)

Oh, it's you. Mr. Manager. Come right in.

(Spenser enters. His looks are improved. He is better groomed. His hair is slicked down and combed back. His suit looks less crumpled, his tie straightened.)

(He walks to the empty chair, and sits down.)

RALWAY (Continued)

Have a seat.

FARNSWORTH

Welcome.

RALWAY

What's holding things up out there? Is it more money? She's not getting another penny. I'm about had it with her.

SPENSER

Fine.

RALWAY

Fine? Is that all you can say? Look, what's going on between you and her? You're not really her manager. Are you? She never mentioned you before. You just met her, didn't you? Last night, last week? What are you, some kind of whoremonger?

FARNSWORTH

WR, for God's sake. A little decorum here. You don't insult the man.

RALWAY

I don't mean it as an insult. Any man has the right to be a whoremonger one day a week. Is Lucille a prostitute --- what's your name, Spenser? She's always singing about it, we figure she's got to be.

FARNSWORTH

You wish. I doubt it.

BREASTMAN

Hey, I'm a believer.

SPENSER

Lucille is a warlike maid.

RALWAY

That's one way of putting it.

BREASTMAN

Look, Spenser, whatever your name is, can we get this show on the road? I don't care if you're fucking her ten ways from Sunday, let's get this song done.

SPENSER

As her manager, I have decided that she will not make the record you wish. I have so advised her.

RALWAY

Oh, great. We're standing around here like idiots then. You're telling her we're what, wasting our time?

BREASTMAN

Wait a minute, don't get all excited. He's not done. Let him finish.

SPENSER

Miss Bogan should not be recording, much less singing the filthy verses you request.

RALWAY

It was her idea. What the hell do you mean?

SPENSER

However, she will sing a song of my choosing.

BREASTMAN

And what would that be?

SPENSER

She will sing "Frog Went A-courting."

FARNSWORTH

Oh, for Christ's sake.

SPENSER

(singing, in falsetto)

Frog went a-courting, he did ride, uh-huh/Frog went a-courting, he did ride, uh-huh/Sword and buckler by his side, hmm-hmm, hmm-hmm.

RALWAY

Shut your damn mouth. I'm going to see about this.

(Ralway opens the door and shouts.)

RALWAY (Continued)

Lucille, come on in here, Gall damnit.

(Lucille enters.)

RALWAY (Continued)

Now is this fellow your manager?

LUCILLE

What did I tell you?

RALWAY

Talking about you singing "Frog Went a-Courtin'."

BREASTMAN

That's not a what we want. That's nothing like what we want.

LUCILLE

I leaving it up to Spenser. He my agent.

FARNSWORTH

Lucille, you know how much we want "Shave 'em Dry."

LUCILLE

And you know what I want. I come to New York City every year, WR. You send me a railroad ticket and pay me twelve dollars fifty cents a song. Promise me the royalty but when I ever seen it? You change my name from Lucille Bogan, which everybody know, to Bessie Jackson that I can't get a job with. You want "Shave 'em Dry" for that same twelve dollars fifty? I can go out on the street and make more than that in ten minutes. Talk to my agent.

(Lucille exits, slamming the door.)

RALWAY

I told you what she was.

FARNSWORTH

She was pulling your leg, WR.

(Farnsworth moves toward Spenser.)

FARNSWORTH (Continued)

Come on, now, Spenser. Let's get things straight. I'm from England, all right? I was born there. We're brothers. I'm from the home of "Frog Went A-Courting." But that's not what we're here today to record.

SPENSER

That I know. Today the public wants words of sinful lust, dunghill thoughts, dirty drosse. Nothing of modesty or right comportment.

BREASTMAN

What the fuck are you talking about? We're here to do a party record, see?

FARNSWORTH

We're not writing sonnets, I'm afraid.

BREASTMAN

We make records so people can listen to them and laugh their asses off. A fellow can take a woman to his room and crank up the gramophone. They both laugh and get horny. They have few drinks. He plays another party record. She gets a little drunk and laughs some more. He tells her to quit procrastinating and lay down her frame before he knocks off her block.

FARNSWORTH

Breastman, your sensitivity -- forget it.

BREASTMAN

It ain't church music. These are records get sold under the counter. I distribute them all over the northeast, see?

FARNSWORTH

It's thoroughly illegal.

RALWAY

Not to say cheating the American Record Corporation, using their property and whatnot without consent.

FARNSWORTH

That's trivial, WR. The point is, we're taking a risk, Spenser.

SPENSER

I shall save you from it. I don't think we have business here. Good day, gentlemen.

(Spenser rises and walks toward the door. Breastman pauses, then dashes in front of him.)

BREASTMAN

What do you want, Spenser? How much? How much?

RALWAY

Let him go, for the love of God.

FARNSWORTH

Don't be unreasonable. Spenser. WR, the both of you.

SPENSER

I have a number in mind. In view of your present offer, I thought it worthless to mention because of its magnitude.

RALWAY

I told you she's a trollop. We're not arguing profession now, just price.

SPENSER

Miss Bogan --

RALWAY

And now it's *Miss Bogan*. A nigger's a nigger.

FARNSWORTH

WR, will you control yourself?

(He shoulders his way angrily past Ralway to confront Spenser.)

FARNSWORTH (Continued)

What is it? What does she want? A little more money? She can have it from my own pocket. Five dollars? Ten dollars? I'll pay double. How's double.

SPENSER

Miss Bogan envisions her mission rather differently than you who talk of laying down frames and cranking up gramophones.

BREASTMAN

So what's the price?

(Spenser returns to the chair and sits down.)

SPENSER

Miss Bogan is a guiltless woman with guile to entertain. She can "cast her colors, died deep in graine/To seem like Truth, whose shape she well can faine/And fitting gestures to her purpose."

RALWAY

For Christ's sake, man. Can't you talk English?

BREASTMAN

He's fucking with us. I'm going to bite his balls off in one minute. You prick, you think just because I'm small, I can't smash your face in?

(Spenser puts the palm of his hand flat out in front of Breastman.)

FARNSWORTH

What is the figure? How much do you want?

SPENSER

Pencil and paper.

(Farnsworth lays before Spenser a pad of paper and hands him a pencil. Spenser writes down a number and turns the pad so they can study it.)

BREASTMAN

What? For crying out loud!

RALWAY

Blessed are the meek -- and filled with shit to boot.

FARNSWORTH

Fock.

(The three men stride around Spenser in frustration, pulling their hair, pounding their breasts, and swearing to high heaven as the Lights go down.)

(SCENE THREE *Lights up in the recording studio. Walter standing by the piano with Lucille. Spenser stands, expectantly, center stage.*)

LUCILLE

We been waiting near an hour. You didn't send them to the moon, did you, Spenser?

WALTER

They say they going to Chemical Bank to get a chemical reaction. I hopes so.

(MEN'S VOICES and shortly after, RALWAY, FARNSWORTH, and BREASTMAN enter.)

FARNSWORTH

All right, Lucille.

RALWAY

You just talked us out of a whole gang of gold. I hope you're happy. We're just gonna leave it there. I'm not going to reproach you any further except to say it's chiefly highway robbery.

BREASTMAN

Let's get this show on the road.

(Ralway hands a sheaf of dollar bills to Spenser, shoving it into his midriff.)

FARNSWORTH

One take, Lucille. Can you do it in one take? We don't have time for two.

LUCILLE

Do your business, I'll do mine.

RALWAY

Just so you understand, every one of you. What's about to happened never did happen. Your name is not on this record, Lucille. Not as singer, or composer, or anything else. You neither, Walter. So you talk about royalties, don't expect any.

(Spenser counts the cash.)

LUCILLE

You send me my pressings. Fifty of 'em. You might want to see me again.

RALWAY

In a plain brown wrapper.

(Ralway, Farnsworth, and Breastman enter the Control Booth.)

WALTER

How much we getting?

LUCILLE

Let the man count.

(Spenser finishes counting and hands the money to Lucille.)

SPENSER

It's all there.

WALTER

How much?

(Lucille counts rapidly but pauses as she comes to the last bill. She hands the sheaf to Walter.)

LUCILLE

Count it.

(Walter starts to count, but he counts slowly, laying each bill on the piano.)

SPENSER

Was that satisfactory?

(Lucille goes up to Spenser. She adjusts his lapels.)

LUCILLE

This song ain't for you, Spenser. Walter, hand me my briefcase.

WALTER

Damn, you made me lose count.

(He hands her the briefcase, picks up the bills he has already counted, and resumes counting.)

(Lucille opens her briefcase and draws out a key with a large flat hotel fob. She closes it in Spenser's hand.)

LUCILLE

You take this and go uptown. Hotel Theresa, Seventh Avenue and 125th Street.

SPENSER

That's a long journey.

(Lucille takes a bill off the pile
Walter has already counted.)

(She stuffs it into the handkerchief
pocket of his jacket.)

LUCILLE

You take one of them Checker cabs. When you get to the hotel, you go up to my room, its number printed right there on the key. You take off your suit, it standing up on you, anyway. Order up the bell boy to take it to have it cleaned. Then you lie down in the bath and soak off all them days you spent walking. They got hot water and Ivory soap.

WALTER

Are you up to what it sound like you up to?

LUCILLE

Shut up, Walter.

(to Spenser)

Then you lie down and take some rest.

SPENSER

But I want to hear--

LUCILLE

Just do what I tell you.

(Spenser moves reluctantly to the
exit. He looks back again and
again.)

SPENSER

I wouldn't make any noise.

LUCILLE

Go on. Do what I say.

(As he exits, Walter finishes
counting.)

WALTER

That some amount, all right.

LUCILLE

You get what I got?

FARNSWORTH

(over loudspeaker)

Are you and Walter ready, Lucille?

LUCILLE

We ready.

WALTER

You believe that Spenser? You believe him?

LUCILLE

I don't want to think about it now, Walter. I want to sing my song.

WALTER

Two eight five, Lucille.

FARNSWORTH

(over loudspeaker)

Wait for the green light, please.

WALTER

Two eight five. What you think?

LUCILLE

Walter, shut up. I'm thinkin' about all them animals in the forest. Out there waiting to hear us do this song.

(As Walter and Lucille move
offstage:)

WALTER

All I'm saying is --

LUCILLE

I'm still running.

WALTER

So am I.

LUCILLE

Nobody gonna stop me, neither. They can suck my dick.

WALTER

Key of C, four bars to a measure.

RALWAY

(over loudspeaker)

Lucille Bogan, unassigned matrix number, "Shave 'em Dry."

(The green light goes on. Walter
begins to play.)

LUCILLE

(singing)

I got nipples on my titties, big as the end of my thumb/I got somethin' between my legs will make a dead man come/Oh daddy, baby won't you shave 'em dry?

WALTER

(falsetto aside)

Lord, draw it out!

LUCILLE

(singing)

Want you to grind me baby, grind me until I cry.

(Walter emits a sound like a duck.)

LUCILLE (Continued)

(singing)

Say I fucked all night, and all the night before baby/And I feel just like I want to fuck some more/Oh great God, Daddy, Grind me, honey, and shave me dry/And when you hear me holler baby, want you to shave me dry.

WALTER

(aside)

Say you gonna get it. You need it.

LUCILLE

(singing)

I got nipples on my titties, big as the end of my thumb/Daddy you say that's the kind of woman you want/ And you can make 'em come, Oh, daddy shave me dry/And I'll give you somethin' baby, swear it'll make you cry.

WALTER

(aside)

Oh, you shaved so much, mama.

LUCILLE

I'm going to turn back my mattress and let you oil my springs/I want you to grind me daddy, 'till the bells do ring/Oh daddy, want you to shave 'em dry? Oh great God daddy, if you can't shave 'em baby, won't you try?

(As Walter goes into the instrumental break, Lucille kicks of one shoe, then the other. She kicks each shoe into the air and catches it in midair. She begins to dance around the microphone.)

LUCILLE (Continued)

(singing)

*Now if fuckin' was the thing, that would take me to
heaven/I'd be fuckin' in the studio, just to fucks that
lever/Oh daddy, daddy shave 'em dry, I would fuck you
baby/Honey I'd make you cry.*

WALTER

(aside)

Sure enough, shave 'em dry

LUCILLE

(singing)

*Now your nuts hang down like a damn bell clapper/And your
dick stands up like a steeple/Your goddamned asshole stands
open like a church door/And the crabs walks in like people.*

(laughing, aside)

Ow, shit!...

(singing)

Baby, won't you shave 'em Dry!

WALTER

(aside)

You got to shake it, don't break it.

(The red light begins to blink on
and off.)

LUCILLE

(singing)

*My back is made of whalebone/And my cock is made of brass/And
my fuckin' is made for workin' men's two dollars/ Great God,
round to kiss my ass.*

(Walter plays the final bars as
Lucille continues to dance lightly
around the microphone.)

(The red light stays on. Walter
stops playing and flashes a finger
at Lucille.)

WALTER

Shave you dry!

(Blackout.)

Performance rights must be obtained before production. For contact information, please see the [Shave 'em Dry information page](#).