

... (HANK steps into a pool of light, and begins humming a rubato version of "Darktown Strutter's Ball".)

BERNIE  
daddy wanted to join the army/in forty-one.

JOJO  
of course he did.

BERNIE  
but he was working in the foundry by then.

SADIE  
which *i repeat*, is how he ruint his back.

BERNIE  
which is how. *yes/mama*.

SADIE  
which is how we ended up working for the knickersons up in beverly hills —

BERNIE  
*i'm getting there*.

SADIE  
*you taking too long*.

BERNIE  
long story short —

SADIE  
too late!

BERNIE  
the military needed him in the foundry more they needed him in combat, so they forced him to stay put. after linkbelt, he apprenticed as a house painter.

JOJO  
if slapping paint on walls like his cousin bootsy can be called 'apprenticing'.

BERNIE  
all of this, painting and working in the foundry, after a stint as —

JOJO  
an amateur boxer.

ANNE  
special officer.

SADIE  
*a butler.*

BERNIE  
all of this by the time i was conceived.

SADIE  
conceived?

BERNIE  
still with aspirations of becoming a singer/songwriter.

SADIE  
*conceived?*

BERNIE  
of making it in the music business.

SADIE  
just how far back we going?

HANK  
*(singing, uptempo)*  
i'll be down to get you in a taxi, honey...

SADIE  
uugggg/hhhhh.

HANK  
*(singing)*  
please be ready bout half past eight...

BERNIE  
daddy was gigging at some swanky club/across town.

SADIE  
it wasn't that swanky.

HANK  
*(singing)*  
now baby, don't be late  
i wanna be there when the band starts playing  
remember, when we get there honey  
two step, i'm gonna have 'em all  
gonna dance out both of my shoes

when they play the jelly roll blues  
tomorrow night at the darktown strutter's ball...

*(ANNE and BERNIE applaud.)*

*(ANNE hums "Midnight Serenade", and extends her hand to BERNIE to dance. He takes it.)*

*(SADIE steps, reluctantly, into a pool of light opposite HANK.)*

*(JOJO takes notes. Digital images of his words appear in the space.)*

HANK  
thanks for coming down.

SADIE  
mmm hmm.

HANK  
i wasn't sure. i mean, you didn't sound sure you were/coming.

SADIE  
i wasn't.

*(Little pause.)*

HANK  
well, thanks anyway...  
*(little pause)*  
this is some place, huh?

SADIE  
*(indifferently)*  
it's nice.

HANK  
they say cab calloway stood right over there, on that little platform, not one decade ago,  
flapping his arms like a big creole hawk.

SADIE  
that so?

HANK  
say white folks and colored alike drove clear cross town to hear him. stylish folks. dancing  
cheek to cheek. jitterbug, lindy hop. cause swing was the thing. ha. imagine, they say doc  
cheatam could hit a note so lean and pure, and that it lasted so long that gabriel himself  
could slide all the way down from heaven to the dance floor before it ended. say that note  
lasted sixteen whole bars.

SADIE  
bars? what's that?

HANK  
that's... musician talk for a measurement of time. a snap of god's finger in the metronome of life. two palms connecting momentarily in the midst of thunderous applause.

SADIE  
you like words, huh?

HANK  
words, yeah. music... i like you, sadie.

SADIE  
you don't know me.

HANK  
man can dream, can't he?

SADIE  
dreams never done much for me. walked from one end of a dirt road to another chasing dreams, and all i got for 'em was a fistful of heartache, and three nappy headed kids screaming for milk that my ex-husband couldn't put on the table.

*(Little pause.)*

HANK  
you got kids, huh?

SADIE  
*(defiantly)*  
*three...* still want to get to know me?

JOJO  
how do you know all this shit?

BERNIE  
i asked, jojo. i asked, and i... imagine.

SADIE  
mmm hmm. i thought so. all you niggas are just alike.

HANK  
whoa/whoa, whoa.

SADIE  
soon as i utter one word about kids you high tail it back to where ever/you came from.

HANK

i don't know about any other nigga, but i'm still standing here. trying to make some time. trying to get to know you. find out what your favorite color is, your favorite cocktail —

SADIE

i don't drink —

HANK

your favorite *dessert*...

*(HANK offers SADIE a cigarette. She ignores the invitation.)*

what you do early in the morning, late at night. why you ran out on me the first time we met here at the club. what i can do to get that pretty little smile i saw just a glimmer of back on your face. what i can do to keep it there.

*(ANNE and BERNIE stop humming and dancing. They applaud.)*

*(Pools of light slowly dissolve into a wash.)*

SADIE

*(taking the cigarette)*

my cousin warned me you was a smooth talker.

HANK

she's pretty smooth herself. talking me into painting her living room just for hooking us up.

*(BERNIE hums a slow rubato version of "Them There Eyes".)*

*(ANNE offers her hand to JOJO to dance. He declines. She sways to the music alone. He resumes taking notes.)*

SADIE

she said that's what you do. painting.

HANK

for now... but i got some other plans simmering on the back burner, and i'm getting ready to turn the heat up on 'em.

SADIE

turn the heat up, huh?

HANK

turn the heat up.

SADIE

*(playfully)*

what exactly you talking bout? turn the heat up.

HANK  
talking 'bout dreams, girl. talking/'bout —

SADIE  
*(annoyed)*  
dreams again.

HANK  
dreams are what got me through standing vigil over my baby sister's crib with a thirty-eight  
to keep the rats from eating her alive. back to back dinners of dandelion soup, and...  
*(BERNIE stops humming.)*  
dreams are all you got sometimes. all that. keep a man afloat.

SADIE  
like i said, dreams never done much for me...  
*(crossing)*  
i'm going to powder my nose.

*(SADIE steps into a pool of light. She's frozen in time and space.)*

*(HANK watches her.)*

JOJO  
what now, old keeper of romantic myths?

BERNIE  
just. cool your heart.

JOJO  
i'm just trying to get a *truthful* account of the/story.

SADIE  
it's been a long day, hank. why don't we call it/a night.

HANK  
*(singing)*  
fly me to the moon —

JOJO  
oh god.

HANK  
*(singing)*  
and let me dance among the stars  
let me see what life is like on jupiter and mars  
in other words, take my hand  
in other words, darling kiss me...

*(SADIE slowly surrenders to HANK'S spell. Her pool of light dissolves into a wash. He crosses to her, and takes her by the hand. They dance as he sings.)*

fill my life with song  
and let me sing forever more  
you are all i hope for  
all i worship and adore  
in other words, please be true  
in other words, i love you...

*(BERNIE hums "Fly Me To the Moon" underneath the text.)*

JOJO

*(to BERNIE)*

so, that was it? he sang, and she... *melted*.

ANNE

she opened, jojo. she. his voice opened her. it opened a lot of us.

JOJO

*(noticing ANNE has melted too)*

apparently.

ANNE

they worked it out. that's what people in love do.

SADIE

listen, i'm a simple girl. i got simple needs. i need a man who can deal with the here and now. i got a nine year old girl across town, and two boys older than that back in oklahoma. are you hearing me?

HANK

every word.

SADIE

you got kids?

HANK

haven't been blessed. not that way.

SADIE

you want any?

HANK

i'd be lying if i said i didn't.

SADIE

well, this could be our last dance cause i've done all/the birthing i plan to do.

HANK

i'd like to imagine there'll be a second, third, even a fourth —

SADIE

say what?

HANK

*dance.* not kids.

SADIE

hmm.

HANK

as much as i need dreams i need someone to share 'em with —

SADIE

i got dreams too. a little house for me and my daughter, and somebody who'll help me make it a home —

HANK

it don't sound that different. the dreams we got.

JOJO

a true disney moment.

ANNE

you are really too young to be so cynical.

HANK

what's her name?

SADIE

what?

HANK

that. little girl. what's her name?

*(Little pause.)*

SADIE

anita. smooth talker. her name is anita.

*(JOJO applauds, breaking the mood.)*

JOJO

that's just brilliant, bern. just brilliant.



ANNE

*(to BERNIE)*

don't mind him, baby doll. just tell the story.

BERNIE

*(interrupting JOJO'S applause)*

by the time i was born he was forty-two.

SADIE

*(back in present time and place)*

if i'm a day.

Continued...