

The Lonesome Death of Janis Joplin

by

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Characters

JANIS - 27, a former singer, near the end of her rope

SINGER - older, a large, black blues singer

SUGAR - 20s, male, rugged sleazebag with some vulnerability

MAID - played by SINGER

ALBERT - played by SUGAR

DADDY, VOICES in MIRROR etc. - played by SUGAR

Production Requirements: A large frame suggesting a huge mirror
and a scrim across it which may be lit
to obscure and display people behind it.
A tape recorder.
A door.
A phone.
Some things to sit on.
Empty bottles of Southern Comfort.

(A hotel room. A vast mirror dominates the stage. Around it a bottle of Southern Comfort and several empties strewn, feather boas discarded in their yellow splay. A tape recorder. JANIS with a second bottle, of vodka, on the phone.)

JANIS

Albert? You gotta get me Albert. NO. I won't talk to anybody else - it's got to be Albert - don't you understand? - he's important to me,

he's my manager....Albert, baby, it's been so long, I really needed to see you baby... No. No I haven't. Not a drop...(cackles) Well not a big drop, you know what I'm saying Albert? No I'm not drinking it straight - it's Vodka Albert, do you think I'm crazy? Southern Comfort I can drink all night without a lemon but Vodka? - you ought to be locked up for even suggesting such a thing. What's that?...Half eleven. Why? Is my watch still ticking. Yes. Yes of course it's still ticking, of course I can see it's night out - it's dark isn't it and you're on the phone, it must be night time - I never get you daytime you're too busy talking to Dylan or some damn body - what honey? Uh-huh the watch is right. Albert- I know it's not eleven thirty in the morning, I'm drinking - I mean, Albert - you don't have to - Albert- I'm not going to listen to you Daddy if you don't talk to me nice- I know it's eleven thirty at night and I don't want to be onstage, I know it's eleven thirty at night Goddamit! I don't wanna sing and I don't have to sing and if I don't want to I don't have to! (Pause) Half a bottle, I told you. (Pause) Two bottles, I don't know - I throw away the empties. (Pause) There's no contract made that I can't break Albert, you know that don't you? (Pause) Baby I don't want to leave you, I don't want to leave anybody but I get so lonely, I don't wanna go onstage in front of two million people and get them off and then I have to go home all alone. Can you come over? Oh come on - I don't ask you, I don't call you all the time. (Pause) Albert? Are you mad at me? I couldn't stand it if my Daddy was mad at me. Uh-huh. I love you too. (Pause) Albert? You remember that first contract we signed Albert? - you, me and Big Brother? Wasn't that a trip? Ok sweetie - you'll call me back? Will you? Tell them I'm sorry - I won't be coming on. No. I'm sorry. No. Not a drop more.

(She puts the phone down. Pause. She drinks straight from the bottle.)

I remember Big Brother. Back then I sang just like Bessie Smith. And the drinking didn't taste like nothing. Where's that tape?

(She searches a handbag.)

Damn. Damn damn. I can't remember who I am half the time. (Pause) There.

(Retrieves tape from bag and inserts it in tape player.)

And by God I was bad then - I could really sing then.

(She presses play on tape recorder. A girl -the SINGER- approaches from the back of the mirror. Others behind the mirror are not seen but cast blue shadows.)

SINGER

Uh - hi. Are you guys ready?

OTHER

Sure.

SINGER

Well alright then.
 (sings) What good can drinking do?
 What good can drinking do?
 Well I drink all night
 but the next day I still feel blue-

There's a glass on the table
 they say it's gonna ease all my pain
 there's a glass on the table
 they say it's gonna ease all my pain
 well I drink it all down
 but the next day I still feel the same-

Was that alright?

(Smiles enchantingly. Lights die behind mirror.)

JANIS

Well, I wasn't bad. When I had a voice.

(Phone rings. She gets it.)

Sugar? Sugar is that you? I knew you wouldn't let me down. No it's not too late, it's never too late for me - can you make it here to the

hotel? You know who to see to get paid. You know how much, you know what kind, you know how high I wanna fly that's why you're my Sugar, Sugar- you know I love you don't you? Not like I love those other guys, they're just the audience, but you- - Bye. Ok. Bring the stuff.

(She puts the phone down.)

You let me fly. When I pay.

(Pause. She looks at the mirror.)

No, not a bad voice.

(She crosses to mirror and strokes her face.)

Not a bad voice once. 'Course you can't be shouting at two million people every night for ten years without a little polish going off the strings...But baby, you pushed it till it hurt, didn't you?

(Lights go on behind the mirror, on SINGER.)

SINGER

Excuse me?

JANIS

Uh oh.

SINGER

Are you talking to me?

(JANIS turns away from mirror. Lights behind the mirror go off. She picks up the phone.)

JANIS

Room service, I'd like a double - hello? Room Service, are you there? What do you have in the medicine cabinet for the night? You must have something for the guests so they don't start walking in the halls like the drunks they are?...Valium? No, too mild for me. Megadon? Been there, done that. Sweetie we are talking about a major hallucination here.

(She looks at the mirror.) (Lights up on SINGER.)

SINGER

Excuse me?

(JANIS looks away.) (Lights off on SINGER.)

JANIS

What? You have nothing stronger- without a prescription? What kind of a hotel is this? I bet Elvis never has this trouble. Honey do you know who I am? I am Ja-..Ok honey I know you know who I am- do you know what I do? I bring joy into millions of lives so when I say I want a depressant I MEAN IT!!!!...Sodium Pentathol? There's a thought. No - God knows what I'd start saying - I spill my guts out as it is. You know - what the heck. It's just a little thing. Tiny little thing. I'll cope with vodka. Thank you so much.

(Hangs up. Tip toes with back turned to mirror toward door.
Reaches door. Lights come on in mirror.)

SINGER

Hey!

JANIS

Damn!

SINGER

You think I'm drug induced? Fuck you, sister!

JANIS

Hey - I'm just-

SINGER

Who the fuck you think sang
your damn ass up the charts-
who you think spilled her heart all over the damn vinyl
so little missy could buy new feather boas-?

JANIS

Bessie?

SINGER

No I'm not Bessie Smith dammit! I look dead to you? I'm you!
Only the part that don't bullshit. Whine, whine whine.
I can't sing.

JANIS

I can't!

SINGER

Bullshit! Don't you talk about my voice!
That's my voice dammit, don't you be talkin' about it.
I sing just fine thank you very much
no matter how many bottles you pour down your hatch-
I got all gold on my strings honey, I didn't shout at those millions,
I sing.

JANIS

Whatever. Baby where is that smack?

SINGER

He ain't comin'.

JANIS

What? Of course he's coming.
Listen to me - I'm arguing with a hallucination.

SINGER

Don't you hallucination me - I'm the Pearl.
I'm you when they want somethin' from you.

JANIS

Well - that's all the time these days, actually.

(Takes a swig of the bottle.)

SINGER

Oh I don't know. Seems to me
they want less of you every day.
They only really want me - I'm the one that sings.

JANIS

(Pause) Great. Now my own ego is beating up on me!

SINGER

No ego about me honey. I'm a professional.
(takes out nail file)
I call 'em like I see 'em.

JANIS

Fine. Oh God I need the smack.

SINGER

They'll never feed you. They don't need you.
They'll never come see you again. You failed.
So long.

(Snaps fingers and goes out like a light.)

JANIS (runs to mirror)

Janis! Janis! (Pause) Listen to me
I'm calling the mirror by my name!

(The phone rings.) (She picks up.)

Hello? Albert? What do you mean he'll be delayed?
 Albert! ALBERT! Are you in the room? The background
 Albert like always? Are you making a flunky take the blame?
 He'll be a few minutes "sorting out the mess". Well you tell him
 I may not be here when he calls back. He can sort out messes
 for another client!

(slams down phone)

Albert!

SINGER

(strikes up "Another Piece of my Heart")

Didn't I make you fee-eel?

JANIS (jumps up)

No! No! No more Janis junior!

(stands with back to mirror)

SINGER

Who you calling "junior" bitch?
 Suit yourself. You'll beg for me to sing soon enough.

(Snaps fingers, lights out.)

JANIS

Damn, I have to be more careful.
 I don't know what's setting these delirium tremens off.
 God knows I'm not tryin' to quit.

SINGER (from darkness)

Uh-huh.

JANIS

Oh God. Oh God.

(back up against mirror)

SINGER (in darkness)

Sing bitch, you know you want to.

JANIS

I can't, my voice box-

SINGER (lights come on)

Put the damn cassette on then if you're chicken-

JANIS

You'll leave me alone?

SINGER

Play the song dammit.

You gonna bitch about your heart play what the bitchin's for.

JANIS

Alright! You'll just sing - and
 I can wait for my high?

SINGER

You'll wait forever.

JANIS

Go then.

(She presses play on the tape recorder.)

SINGER

Alright.

(sings) Didn't I make you fee-eel..?

Like you were the only man..

Didn't I give you everything that a woman possibly can?

(Sings "Take Another Little Piece of My Heart".

Reaches a crescendo and then JANIS switches off tape.)

JANIS

Oh God, you won't shut up!

SINGER

Well honey - if you don't exercise me on stage

- where you think I'm gonna go?

JANIS

Damn. I've got to stop drinking. Something.

SINGER

C'mere.

JANIS

What?

SINGER

C'mere.

JANIS

What?

SINGER

I'll whisper to you.

JANIS (comes over)

What is it?

SINGER (loud)

I'M NOT A GODDAMN ILLUSION!!

Deal with it! You ever want to sing again- I'm here.

And no little smacky-poo ass-wipe with your high

is gonna come put you to sleep, honey I'm here.

You just let the genie out the bottle that's all.

JANIS

Albert...

SINGER

He ain't coming.

JANIS

Sugar..

SINGER

A pile of powder in a bag.
He's home delivery. You better get your tip out.

JANIS

I've got to do something!

SINGER

Bitch - ain't nothin' you can do
I'm the singer in you an' you didn't know it.
I'm the Pearl.

JANIS

Damn.

SINGER

Don't complain sugar,
about being alone. You never alone again.

JANIS

Who are you?

SINGER

I'm you sugar, only I'm the bit of you
been around too long to complain.

JANIS

Damn.

SINGER

You got a knife?

JANIS

What?

SINGER

Never mind. That comes later.

JANIS

What do I want with a knife?

SINGER

You never know what'll need opening.
Envelopes. Packages. String.
Any kind of thing might need to be cut.
You just got to learn to have one handy.
But it don't matter - I can improvise
and my tongue right here'll cut anything you want.
You got a little salt in this rest-room you call a hotel?

JANIS

No.

SINGER

Damn. I could go for some Tequila.

(Snaps fingers, lights out.)

JANIS

(Pause) This is not happening.

(Pause) I don't even like Tequila. Ooooh. (shudders)

(reaches for the phone) Where's the damn Sugar?

SINGER (snaps lights on)

Uh-uh honey, you leave him be.

JANIS

What?

SINGER

He'll be here when it's the time.

JANIS

Time for what?

SINGER

Time for you to take off.

JANIS

I'm gonna get my high?

SINGER

Well, yes and no.

JANIS

I didn't mean to get started, you know.

SINGER

I know. Ain't no big thing.

JANIS

Just friends, you know, and guitar players and men-

SINGER

You such a poor little thing.

JANIS

Alright.

SINGER

You'll get your needle honey
don't worry about that. I just wanted to
talk to you a little - 'fore your Sugar got to your heart.

JANIS

Well?

SINGER

You done singin'?

JANIS

No-o - I haven't quit at all- what makes you say that?

SINGER

Do I see you singin'? Hear you? Bitch-
you ain't sung in front of the mirror! Damn.

JANIS

I'm a professional- I don't sing for free anymore.

SINGER

No kidding. Here's a nickel.
(throws out coin, it rolls)
Sing "Like a Ball and Chain".

JANIS

I don't want to.

SINGER

Like I said...

JANIS

I don't, doesn't mean I can't.

SINGER

Yeah well- I don't fly across the Atlantic
'cause I can't move my arms that fast.
Infrastructure too. I'd be crushed like a napkin up there.

JANIS

Yeah well I don't crush that easy.

SINGER

That's the spirit. Now open your mouth honey and sing.

JANIS

You got more than a nickel?

SINGER

How much you want?

JANIS

I want everything.

SINGER

Well I can't give you everything.
I can only give you money.

JANIS

That's not enough.

SINGER

Well I'm sorry. I guess you're not singing anymore.

JANIS

It's not about money!

SINGER

Well- shoot honey
you don't gotta explain to me..
I'm just back here looking for a little Tequila
to go with that salt breaking out on your upper lip.

JANIS

Damn damn damn - I can't believe I'm here
trying to justify myself to a piece of glass.

SINGER

You watch your mouth honey - I'm a hell of a lot realer
than you'll ever be.

JANIS

Oh yeah?

SINGER

Yeah.

JANIS

Oh yeah?

SINGER

Yeah!

JANIS

Fuck you!

(She smashes the bottle into the mirror.) CRASH!
(Sound of glass smashing. Lights erupt out of the mirror and JANIS
drops the bottle. Pause.)

SINGER

Well bitch - you just made it easier.
(Steps out of the mirror frame.)

Gimme that damn vodka bottle.

(She stoops for it.)

Let see how you like being smacked across the head with it-

(She raises the bottle.)

JANIS

No-

(JANIS backs away from SINGER.)

SINGER

You messed with the wrong black woman honey.
(she advances)

(KNOCK KNOCK KNOCK KNOCK, at the door.)
 (Pause)

JANIS
 Who is it?

SUGAR (off)
 Sugar.

SINGER
 Damn.

JANIS
 Oh honey.

SINGER
 Bitch, you bought some time.
 (Goes back to the mirror.)
 I'll take this.
 (Waves bottle.)
 Why should I stay dry? I'm doing all the work.
 You got yourself a half hour, get high.
 Hell - I'll even help you clear up the mess -

(She steps into the mirror, snaps her fingers, strobe lights as
 smashing glass goes back to mirror.)

(KNOCK KNOCK KNOCK KNOCK, at door)

SUGAR (off)
 You dead in there?

JANIS
 Just a minute.
 (Goes to mirror, touches it.)
 It's back - it's glass!

SINGER (reaches through)
 I'm still here bitch.
 (Slaps her face.)

You suck on old Sugar boy - soon as his needle drops
 and he's outta here - I'm coming after you with a knife.

JANIS
 You don't have a knife.

SINGER
 I'll buy one.
 I got all God's hardware store back here.

JANIS
 You're just in my imagination!

SINGER
 Sure.

(She reaches out with pair of scissors, cuts hank of JANIS's hair.)
Enjoy your date.

(She pulls back into the mirror and snaps fingers, lights out.)

(KNOCK KNOCK KNOCK KNOCK KNOCK, at door)

SUGAR (off)

You gonna let me in? It's cold out here.
And there's cops out in the lobby, hustling drunks.

JANIS (looks dazed at the glass)

Do you happen to have a knife with you?

SUGAR (off)

Shit Janis. What do I want a knife for?

JANIS

Oh...nothing.

(She feels the dark glass.) (KNOCK KNOCK KNOCK KNOCK)

SUGAR

Janis, I'm dying out here!

JANIS (softly)

Yes, I know.

(She goes to open the door. SUGAR, a burly young man in a denim cut-off jacket, showing biceps, enters with unlit cigarette.)

SUGAR

Got a light?

JANIS

No. I quit.

SUGAR

Since when?

JANIS

Since tonight. I've gotta get a hold of myself.

SUGAR

Try the mirror. It's big enough.

JANIS (rounding on him)

Fuck you!!

SUGAR

Hey, hey. Small humorous remark.

JANIS

Don't fuck with me man, where's the stuff?

SUGAR

It'll get here. I ever let you down?

JANIS

Plenty man - what's this "get here" shit? Are you the Avon lady?
Shit man - you're my man, aren't you - you're my man - you're supposed
to come through for me -

SINGER

(in darkness, comes to mirror)

Ain't nobody gonna come through for you...

SUGAR

I'm sorry?

JANIS

(coughs) Nothing. You got something in your
preppie brought up little ears.

SUGAR

Hey - I told you 'bout that-

JANIS

Yeah yeah - mister Sugar doesn't want nobody to know his tatoos are
freshly inked and mommy and Daddy sent him to Harvard-

SUGAR

Hey! I get you your shit or what?
I get you your shit like your man
or a Harvard professor? Huh baby? C'mon.

(She kisses him. Pause.)

JANIS

Pretty good tongue for a Harvard professor!
(cackles)

SUGAR

Janis you're impossible, you know that.

JANIS

Oh man, oh man you're so cute
when you get that little Ivy league suit
under the denim in your voice. You're so respectable - my Mommie
woulda cream right at the door if I brought you home. 'Course
I would be sniffing at your pockets like a bitch in heat, but hey
she doesn't have to see that. Momma doesn't have to see what Momma
doesn't want to see. Momma never ever even has to
look in the goddamn mirror.

(Pause)

SUGAR

What are you talking about?

JANIS

Nothing. The future. You got the stuff?

SUGAR
I got it. I always got it.

JANIS
Well okay.

SUGAR
Okay.

JANIS
Okay.
(They kiss.)

SINGER (in darkness)
Bitch, get the needle in your goddam pussy-
get him outta here. We got business.
(JANIS freezes.)

SUGAR
Do you hear something?

JANIS
Um-

SINGER
I heard the wind blowing
I swear. But we're two state rooms in
from the street and there's no window.

JANIS
Come back here.

SINGER (in darkness)
I'm not waiting for you all night.

(JANIS freezes.)

SUGAR
There it goes again. That's a vicious gale out there.
They let the corridor window stay open?
(He opens the door, looks out.)

Nope.
(He closes door.)

JANIS
Come on back here.

SINGER (in darkness)
I mean it - he doesn't go
I break his head with the bottle.
You two can bleed on the floor together.
(JANIS freezes.)

SUGAR
Janis? What is it? You look like you
heard the gravel crunching over your grave.

JANIS
Hey.

SUGAR
What?

JANIS
Let's get out of here.

SINGER (in darkness)
You're not leaving.

JANIS
What?

SUGAR
What?

SINGER (in darkness)
He leaves, you and me talk like grown women.
You walk out with him, I come out with a knife
cut both of your kidneys out.

JANIS
What? You are kidding?

SUGAR
What about? I'm not speaking!

JANIS
He's nothing - what you want to go and kill him for?

SUGAR
What? Honey-

SINGER
You know who I gotta kill.

JANIS
Don't call me honey.

SUGAR
Janis who you talking about
killing to? You ever see me pick up a napkin to kill a spider?
I mean, ok, the bellhop in the lobby was a little snotty
but I didn't like bitch to you about it - you're so intuitive-

JANIS
Yeah. (Pause) Do you want to go out?

SUGAR
No. I want to stay in. Are you kidding?
Beside, who you think you're fooling.
You didn't show up for your gig tonight
- where the fuck exactly do you think you're going?

Any Joplin fan in town - which is most of them
between twelve and twenty five - is going to be throwing rocks at you.

JANIS

Oh man - I just want to get out of here.

SUGAR

What for? I just brought you your stuff.

JANIS

Bad vibes.

SUGAR

Bad vibes? Honey you invented-

JANIS

Don't call me honey.

SUGAR

-sorry- vomit
on the carpet - lipstick on bloody sheets.
Honey - sorry - sweetness,
you are what's in the room, not what the room's got for you.

JANIS

That's lovely.

SINGER (in darkness)

He's a poet. Get rid of him.

JANIS

You got the stuff?

SUGAR

Yeah yeah yeah. Boy, I had to
push my ass through a crowd in the lobby.
Greasing palms. It's always a drag. Man-
the straighter a place is
the more dough a workin' man's gotta lay
across to get in there and score a little action,
know what I mean?

JANIS

I'll go and get the money.

SUGAR

Hey that's cool. It's not a problem.

JANIS

No. Really. It's not a problem.

SUGAR

Cool man. That's really cool.
(JANIS exits to bathroom.) (Pause.)

SUGAR (looking in mirror)

(sings) Busted flat in Baton Rouge
 waiting for a train
 feeling near as faded as my jeans...

JANIS (puts head round door)
 You okay in here?

SUGAR
 Yeah.

JANIS
 I thought I heard somebody
 talking. I mean - I thought
 I heard some wind.

SUGAR
 No - I'm fine. Only the television.
 I guess. Next door.

JANIS
 Oh. Good.
 (She shuts the door.)

SINGER (in darkness)
 Bitch, you don't get him out of here for sex
 I'm gonna kill the both of you
 for this hillbilly shit.

SUGAR
 Tsk. That wind.
 (sings) Bobby thumbed a diesel down
 just before it rained
 took us in as far as New Orleans

(Pause. JANIS re-enters.)

JANIS
 Aw. Were you singing?

SUGAR
 Not really.

JANIS
 Good.
 (Punches him in the stomach.)

Here's your money.
 I'm not singing- I don't want any other bastard doing it.

SINGER (in darkness)
 You go, girl.

SUGAR (on the floor)
 Damn Janis, it's just a song.

JANIS

Ain't no just about it, if you can't get a word out your box anymore.
What the hell was that anyway?

SUGAR

Uh...nothing.

JANIS

You were getting into that shit. Come on. What was it?
Some Irish thing?

SUGAR

Bullshit. I look Irish to you?

JANIS

You wrote it? You wrote that thing?

SUGAR

C'mon.

JANIS

You write *poetry*? Oh Sugar - my Mom'd just -
I don't know, I better not take you home,
my Mom'd just run off with you herself,
just step over ol' Daddy where he sits
in his Lazyboy and just - lick you right up.

SUGAR

C'mon - man's allowed to have a hobby.
I mean - I push dope but I...
Alright, alright - I write country dammit.
I'm not ashamed of it. At least
I don't grade papers for a living like most of my graduating class.
All right. I admit it. Pushing is a day job.
I also write country. It's legal.

JANIS

Sure it's legal. You been to the Opry?

SUGAR

Twice.

JANIS

Hell, in Texas it's practically mandatory.
"Got to write song about my dead horse. Billy."
And about my woman who left me. On Billy.
Damn broke my heart. I miss that horse.
You sell the rights to that thing?

SUGAR

Not yet.

JANIS

You wanna?

SINGER

Honey you is slower than a barrel o' molasses
running downhill in December.
What do you think he sings for?
Do smack dealers serenade your ass?
No bitch, he wants you to sign him.
He wants you to sing *him* up the charts.

SUGAR

I don't know Janis, you always hit your collaborators?
(Pause) Hey. Small humorous remark.
What you looking at me like that for?

JANIS

Nothing. Voices in my head. You wanna sell it?

SUGAR

You wanna sing it?

JANIS

Maybe.

SUGAR

Janis, you sing me that song -
that'll be my score. I'll go to heaven
even if you never sing a word
onto a tape, or pay a cent.
I guess I'll die knowing Janis Joplin
sang my song and thought it had something.
That's enough for me. Y'know? I could retire
right there. Still fuck you, o' course.
But that'd be professional accomplishment
taken care of. Hell, that'd be my entire resume.

JANIS

Lemme look at that.

SINGER

Oh he *loves* you.

SUGAR

Sure.

(He hands a crumpled piece of paper over.)

You want the tune?

JANIS

I got the tune, Sugar, I got the tune.
If I didn't hear somebody inside my head
stamp her foot on a bar-room floor
when you sang that thing, I wouldn't read it.

SINGER

You can't be talking about me, bitch.
I wouldn't sing that thing
for all the crackers in Alabama.

JANIS
Well you don't sing, do you? You just play back.

SINGER
You watch your mouth, puppy.

SUGAR
What?

JANIS
Nothing. Nice piece of lyric.
(hands it back)
Don't know that I'll ever record again.
But it's a beautiful song all right.
Too bad I can't sing it.

SUGAR
Why not?

JANIS
My...

SUGAR
What?

JANIS
My contract says
I don't sing for free anymore.

SUGAR
C'mon. Get real Janis.

JANIS
Oh I'm real, I'm real Sugar. It's what
nobody else can see is real, can get you down.
You leave it with me, if you want.
I'll sing it in the bathroom.

SINGER
Not with me you won't.

JANIS
I'll sing it - someplace, Sugar. Don't you worry.
Just not now. Momma can't sing
for her own supper now. Momma's all sung out.

SINGER
You such a *poor* little girl.

JANIS
You better get out of here.

SUGAR (rising)
It's Albert isn't it? That fat bastard
- you're making him on the side-

JANIS

Honey, I'm making Cleveland on the side
 - you don't own title deeds on this ass.
 Albert turned me down a coon's age ago.
 I just got to get the pieces of my head
 to fall in line.
 (Pause)

SUGAR

Well these here confections
 (starts throwing bags of heroin on table)
 won't leave too many pieces not coming together anywhere.
 You take 'em real slowly. Don't
 be greedy. Remember what your momma said
 - baby eat too fast, baby thwow their little guts up like a dog
 that ate grass stalks.

JANIS

Yeah, well, my Momma never said
 a thing about being greedy- only 'bout me not being pretty
 enough and not giving the boys a fuck.

SUGAR

Well I'm sure she'd have got round to it
 if you'd stayed home, not run off
 to fuck stray musicians.
 Take these one at a time Janis, I'm serious,
 this is real good shit.

JANIS

Really?

SUGAR

Really.

JANIS

Well Sugar - you worry 'bout me. That's so sweet.
 You take care of me just like my Mommy-

SUGAR

Aw-

JANIS

And you went to Harvard-

SUGAR

Now-

JANIS

You should meet my Mommy- you and her - you'd hit it off like fire.
 'Course, you'd have to get the tatoos torn off
 and not fuck me on the living room suede couch.

SUGAR

You got a dirty mind, you know that?

JANIS

Oh man - only thing got me through high school
was my teddy and my dirty mind. That and a lot of
paintings nobody ever wants to see. Then I started singing
and nobody ever wants me to stop.

SUGAR

You stopped me singing.

JANIS

Honey if you were the real thing, you couldn't stop.

SUGAR

You stopped.

JANIS

Get out of here. Go on.

I love you. Thanks for the shit. And the song.

SUGAR

Hey baby, are you sure?

JANIS

Yeah. Baby. Not tonight.

SUGAR

Yeah. Love ya. I got some reds tomorrow.

JANIS

Yeah? Call me.

SUGAR

Why don't I come over first thing?

You wanna do some toast?

JANIS

No. Yes. Call me before you travel.

I may not be here.

SUGAR

Why not?

JANIS

Ah - you know - Albert - He's a mess-

SINGER (in darkness)

He ain't comin' for you.

SUGAR

That wind, you gonna sleep through it?

JANIS

You better go 'fore it blows you away.

SUGAR

No muffins for breakfast? I'll buy blueberries-

JANIS

Call me. If a voice answers
I'll eat blueberries.

SUGAR

It's a date then.

JANIS

Sure, you're my pusher, it's a date.

SUGAR

I'm your lover, Janis. Hell, maybe your lyricist.
One day. For an hour.

JANIS

Maybe. One day.

SUGAR

I'll bring you blueberries. And reds.
We'll get room service. (exits)

JANIS (shuts door behind him)

All I ever seem to get.

(Pause.) You there Bessie?

SINGER (steps from mirror with bottle)

Bitch, I told you before- my name is "Pearl".
(smashes the bottle on bedside table)
You wanna arm yourself?- or you gonna try and hit me
like you hit that girl?

JANIS

I won't hit you.

SINGER

Good. I don't like to laugh.

JANIS

Put the bottle down.

SINGER

Don't give me orders.

JANIS

If I die, do you ever get to sing?

SINGER

Bitch, are you kidding? What you think this has all been about?
I got over you squeezing your zits in my face all those years.
You go and die- I'm the only one can ever sing again.
You go and die I'm the only one they'll ever hear
- singing on tape.

JANIS

I see.

SINGER

No little girl lost. No rasping at the audience.

JANIS

That happened once.

SINGER

Five times. The last five.

JANIS

I've rested my voice.

SINGER

Not long enough to get back your sad nerve.
You lost that baby.

JANIS

It's just a night off.

SINGER

I do not ever lose my nerve.
I'm always perfect. I'm the Pearl. And I will not grow old.

JANIS

Uh-huh.

SINGER

That's what it comes down to. You wanna fight?

JANIS

What for?

SINGER

You wanna bare your throat
for me? That's fine. I like a little sport.
But I can do without it.

JANIS

Fuck, you're such a bitch. You're me?

SINGER

Bitch - I told you - I'm better than you. I'm art.
And I don't whimper like a little puppy.

JANIS

Dog. You're a bitch and I'm a dog. I love people.

SINGER

You're a sad puppy - time somebody put it to sleep.

JANIS

Oh baby-

(JANIS smashes glass tumber into SINGER's face.)

I may be soft but I traveled some road.

SINGER

Good- you got somethin' in you.
I was starting to think I was all mirrors.

JANIS

No - I'm real all right bitch and I'm gonna go and sing me
one of those songs. I'm gonna go out in a bar right now and sing.

SINGER

Oh no you're not.

JANIS

Why the hell not?

SINGER

'Cause I ain't going with you.

JANIS

Well good.

SINGER

Yeah?

JANIS

Yeah. You talk too much.

SINGER

Well sing right here bitch. I ain't stopping you.

JANIS

Well-

SINGER

Can you?

JANIS

Of course I can.

SINGER

Well why don't you then?

JANIS

(Pause) I need an audience.

SINGER

What am I? Room service?
At least I know your ass
from before you made me money
or started spreading your legs
for every fly in town.

JANIS

I.. can't sing for you.

Chicken. SINGER

I'm not chicken. JANIS

No? SINGER

No. JANIS

SINGER
Well then you're a mute.
You just don't know no-one can hear you yet.
They just hear me.

JANIS (screams and stamps)
Aaagh. Where's that damn song?
(sings)

Busted flat in Baton Rouge
waiting for a train
feeling near as faded as my jeans...

SINGER
Well blow me down.

JANIS
Bobby thumbed a diesel down
just before it rained
we rode it in as far as New Orleans...

SINGER
I thought you were going to lay down in the snow for me.
Guess there's a little bit of me left in you after all.

(She crosses to tape without Janis noticing and presses record.)

JANIS
I pulled my harpoon
out of my dirty red bandana
and played it soft while Bobby sang the blues...

(sings to end of song)

(Pause. Wipes her mouth.)

JANIS
Reckon I sound just like you, don't I?
Only I'm *better* than you
'cause you cain't sing
what I ain't recorded.

SINGER

Oh I can sing it now, bitch.
Guess what? You just recorded it.

(She presses PLAY and Janis's voice comes out of SINGER's mouth.)

SINGER

(sings)
Busted flat in Baton Rouge...

(JANIS picks up the tape recorder and hurls it at her. It shatters.
SINGER stops.)

SINGER

Gee, that's too bad. Sounded like a number one to me.
But hey - what do I know, I just sing 'em don't I
I can't see the future and you lying in your cold white flowers.

JANIS

Damn you, you let me go, you let me go sing in a bar
getting shit faced drunk, where I belong.

SINGER

Listen
you wanna sing in this toilet, that's fine.
You wanna go sing for drunks in a bigger toilet down the block
that's ok too. But you wanna go out on stage again honey? Nu-uh.
You wanna go out there in front of people?
You think you'll sing if I don't wanna go along?
Who do you think was singing all those times?
Like Monterey Pop - that was you? I was the fire-
when you lost - control baby, when you said
you don't know what you did - who do you think that was?
The booze? Me! Me!! I'm the Singer.
I'm what made you what you are. You wanna go onstage without me - go-
there's not gonna be any singing there. And if there is -
here's what you don't get- nobody's gonna want to hear.
You singing without me is like a white boy singing okey songs
- he wants his momma but he ain't nothing to fear.
But when I'm on stage pretty Momma - I am your death
and you sing like you're gonna go right up to heaven.
That's who they come to see - your death,
they want you to give them your soul and I'm the one owns it.

JANIS

But I can SING again, I got my VOICE. I sound GOOD.

SINGER

Yeah, you sound good, if you want Doris Day singing your blues numbers
Sit your ass down.

(Pause)

You wanna be a little girl who stamps her foot
and sings dope pusher songs
or you wanna sing?

JANIS

I wanna sing. Damn it. (reaches for phone) Maybe they can get that audience back.

SINGER

Listen to me. You can't go sing for them suckers they long gone home. You can't go sing anymore for nickels and dimes, you're a legend ain't you? Don't you want to be a legend?

JANIS

I just wanted not to be laughed out of town.

SINGER

Well you sit down honey, and I'll help you figure it out.

(Pause.)

SINGER

I only want what's good for you.
I only have your best interests at heart.
Ain't I always been there for you, when you turned on the light?

JANIS

Didn't you think I could sing? I thought I could sing again.

SINGER

Now you tell me how you're going to sing again-
when I don't want you to and your voice is going-

JANIS

Not gone.

SINGER

Near enough.
And when you go on stage all the newspapermen can think is
"Boy, she'd make a beautiful corpse."

JANIS

They don't.

SINGER

They do. I seen 'em.
Glistening away behind their lamps.
They look at you and they see stories.
Beautiful glistening story scales like snakes.
Pictures of you in high school-

JANIS

Not my high school pictures!

SINGER

Oh yeah, that's what they see.
The bio pic. The compilation album. The legend.
Albert would make a mint.

JANIS

Albert loves me.

SINGER

Yeah. You hear him calling?

JANIS

He's busy.

SINGER

Just like your Dad.

JANIS

Daddy loved me.

SINGER

Yeah sure. Well - he
never quite got used to how you actually thought.

JANIS

Daddy's great.

SINGER

You alone baby, get used to it.
You alone, like you were born.
When they come to find you
nobody's going to care- only about "The Pearl."
That way it don't matter you die now or one year from now
or ninety. Nothing's gonna change.

JANIS

Nothing?

SINGER

What's gonna change? Love? You love Sugar?

JANIS

Albert.

SINGER

You love Albert? Albert loves money.
He doesn't love you. He's in business- you're property.

JANIS

I am nobody's property!

SINGER

Honey, either you're land being lived on
or you're a piece somebody abandoned.

JANIS

All I wanted was a little...

SINGER

Hey - you know Sugar boy is coming back with blueberries.

And a bill for the pharmaceuticals.

JANIS

I need love.

SINGER

You just now figured that one out?

JANIS

I need to know where I'm going.

SINGER

The grave.
But you could live forever. If you were a legend.
Wouldn't that be something?

JANIS

I need something.

SINGER

No-one is going to actually do it.

JANIS

No one?

SINGER

You need something.

JANIS

Something.

SINGER

Take another one.

JANIS

I haven't taken one yet. I drank too much.

SINGER

That was hours ago. You're straight now. You're tight as a drum.

JANIS

I'm floating.

SINGER

Sure you are. You're floating
and you'll be on the river - in no time
heading to the sea, as if all the water were a field
of one white flower, white as the grave.

JANIS

Yeah.

SINGER

And you crawl inside

like a lilly - you crawl inside its mouth - like a little bee
and you get all wrapped up in the pollen.

JANIS

Yeah.

SINGER

And you sleep in there. And when she's finally ready
she'll let you out-

JANIS

Yeah.

SINGER

And you'll fly like a butterfly.

JANIS

Bees don't become butterflies.

SINGER

Who's telling this story, you or me?

(Pause)

JANIS

One?

SINGER

What's one bag going to do to you?

JANIS

Two?

SINGER

Two is a beginning.

JANIS

I always wanted to be a Mommie.

SINGER

You have nothing to give anyone but your voice.
And I own that. What can you give anyone?

JANIS

A beautiful corpse.

SINGER

A legend. One big flower.
White from coast to coast. You just float in a sea of snow.
You just needle in your veins
the whole white flat and salty sea.

(JANIS injects herself.)

That's good.

JANIS

I'm not being greedy. Am I Momma?

SINGER

No honey. I'm going to go on back to the mirror now.

JANIS

Don't leave me. Mommy. Don't leave me. It gets so lonesome.

SINGER

Alright. I won't leave you. (She rises.)
A great white flower. White. And you flow in it.
Like one stalk rising out of the mouth
and you feel the wind bending you - you feel it?

JANIS

I feel - I'm bending with the wind.

SINGER

That's lovely. You gotta always bend
- a man don't know how to bend
in the wind - is gonna break.

JANIS

I'm not a man.

SINGER

Same difference.

JANIS

You think I shoulda hung on in the wind?

SINGER

Bitch what do I know? I'm just a beautiful and cold dead corpse.

(She re-enters mirror and laughs. JANIS rises.)

JANIS

Damn. I want to see the flower.

(She holds her veins.)

Albert?

(She knocks over the phone.)

Get me Albert. I want my management. Sugar? Mommy. Somebody.
Help me up.

(She falls.)

I want to see the flower.

Pearl? I only wanted not to be so alone.

(She dies.)

(Pause. KNOCK KNOCK KNOCK KNOCK, at the door.)

MAID (off)

Miss Joplin - iss the maid. You ready get your room clean?
I gotta vacuum cleaner, I be real quick. Miss Joplin?

(MAID enters with pass key. It is the SINGER with an apron.)

MAID

Oh - Miss Joplin!

(Feels JANIS's pulse.)

Oh, what a beautiful corpse.

(Feels in pocket for business card, reads it.)

I guess it's time to call the newspaper man.
Whatever you do you can always bring somebody a little happiness.

(Rises. Pause.)

Really lovely. Hardly any vomit at all
for an OD. You really one of this hotel's
best behaved guests.

(goes to door, opens it)

(calls) Aurelia, call the Manager! Another damage control situation
- yes, the Miss Joplin. She not going to stay another night.

(calls) Yes Aurelia - the Manager.
Tell him he's got to get the hotel doctor.
Somebody gotta sign and feel her hand.

MAID (returns to body)

She never left a tip either.

People get so wrapped up in they-selves.
I don't know what she was thinkin' about.
Some people don't know who to say thank you to
when they're gonna say goodbye.
Some people just clean forget who put their pillow there
you know what I'm sayin'?
I just put out a brand new sheet on that double bed.

(KNOCK KNOCK, at door.)

MAID

Doctor?

(Enter SUGAR)

MAID

You can't come in here now.

SUGAR

Janis? I got those blueberries. (Pause) Janis?

MAID

You a friend of hers?

SUGAR

I guess. You could say I was.

MAID

I think she would've wanted somebody to have this.
Wouldn't you? It's still warm.

(She holds out the cassette from the tape.)

Maybe she recorded something.

SUGAR (long pause)

Keep it.

So long Janis. I'm sorry I didn't get to hear you sing my song.
You were who I wrote it about. Wish we coulda took that train.
Would've been something.

(SUGAR exits.)

MAID

You will, white boy, you will.

(MAID takes off apron and becomes SINGER. She goes over to the phone.
She dials.)

SINGER

Albert? Get me Albert. Albert? Let me leave a message.
I got something for you Albert. I know it's late.
But you asked me to look out for somebody Albert
and she's not there to look out for anymore
but there's a tape with a song on it by the bed,
and you know, it could be that number one
you was always asking about.
If I can get this busted tape player to work Albert
I'm gonna play it to you. You judge for yourself
if she was worth all the trouble you took.
Don't worry about me. I can wait for my money.
Anyway, you take care of yourself Albert
I know you cared about her a little bit.
She'll look awful pretty with all them flowers.

(She puts the phone down next to the tape, puts the tape back into the
machine and switches it on. Then she picks the nickel up off the
floor, hums and begins to sing.)

SINGER

Busted flat in Baton Rouge
waiting for a train
feeling near as faded as my jeans...

(SINGER dances with herself, singing, all the way off stage.)
(Blackout.)