

# **SIDESHOW**

Part I

A short play

by

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## **CHARACTERS**

JIMMY “THE WHISPER”

Sideshow barker and proprietor.

MARLA MCDANIELS

A mid-western woman in her early 20s. Wears a veil, glasses and a hat.

LILITH LAVEAUX

A beautiful Creole Cajun woman in her early 20s. She wears socks on her hands.

## **SETTING**

Jimmy “The Whisper’s” Sideshow, travelling through Dodge City, Kansas.

## **TIME**

Evening. Summer, 1931.

JIMMY "THE WHISPER"

*(standing on a hay bail, outside the side show tent)*

Come ladies and you gents,  
Step inside these mystic tents!  
Come behold ten odd events—  
Plus one more, plus one more.

The long-haired lion-boy,  
Just might eat your children's toy!  
Ma'am, be careful but enjoy!  
Move along, move along.

Step right up:  
It's all about to start!  
I am sure,  
It'll blow your mind apart.

All the way  
From jungles of Sudan  
You will marvel  
At the armless man.

No need to be afeard,  
Though perhaps you'll find it weird,  
When you tug our lady's beard  
Come on in, come on in.

I'm sure you'll have a shock  
And perhaps your knees will knock  
When you see the headless cock  
Dance around, dance around.

Don't like the way you feel?  
I'll give you a special deal:  
Our Ezekiel can heal  
All your ills, without pills

Come inside,  
'Cause this you have to see  
Certified  
To change reality

Mephisto,  
The mystic mentalist  
Has a mind  
Stronger than any fist

JIMMY "THE WHISPER"

*(cont'd)*

The smallest girl you've seen  
Will appear upon the scene  
A tiny beauty queen  
Make you laugh! Make you laugh!

And lastly you can win,  
If you've got scrofulous skin,  
If you're uglier than sin,  
Fifty bucks, fifty bucks!

Come ladies and you gents!  
Step inside these mystic tents!  
It is only fifty cents!  
Fifty cents! Fifty cents!

Have no fear,  
You'll get your money's worth.  
The greatest show,  
In Heaven, Hell or Earth!

*(JIMMY goes inside the tent just as MARLA and LILITH enter.  
MARLA sits on the hay bail.)*

LILITH

This is the place. He said we could win fifty bucks, right?

MARLA

Think so.

LILITH

C'mon, let's go in. You can win us that money, sha!

MARLA

We can't.

LILITH

Why not?

MARLA

Because you told me to get cotton candy while you "took care of something", and now we only have ninety-five cents.

LILITH

Here, honey, I got some money. *(gives her a dollar bill)*

MARLA

Where'd you get that?

LILITH

I got a way to make us some money, but I don't particularly like doin' it.

MARLA

I don't know, Lilly. Beside, I thought we were going to Kansas City.

LILITH

We ain't goin' to git to Kansas City on ninety-five cents, and that sure as hell ain't goin' to git us all the way to N'Orleans!

MARLA

I don't think fifty dollars will either. Besides, why we goin' to New Orleans, again?

LILITH

I told yas. To see the Queen: Marie Laveaux—The Voodoo Queen of New Orleans. If she can't cure ya, no one can.

MARLA

I'm sorry. I'm still half asleep. And it's hot out here.

LILITH

You would be with that veil on.

MARLA

Ain't you hot with those on your hands?

LILITH

Course I's hot! C'mon you don't want fifty dollars? Fifty whole dollars?

MARLA

It ain't going to be enough.

LILITH

With fifty dollars y'all can buy all the make-up and cotton candy ya want, sha.

MARLA

Hey, gimme that back.

LILITH

You shush!

MARLA

It ain't gonna be enough to get all the way to New Orleans. And even if we do, there ain't no guarantee that she—

LILITH

Honey, you know in this life there ain't no guarantees 'bout nothin'. Only guarantee ya' got is I's gonna be with ya' no matter what. Besides, I done heard you say that you believed that—

MARLA

Why don't *you* enter the contest?

LILITH

Me?

MARLA

Show ‘em your...*(points to her hands)*

LILITH

Shut up, skanky hair!

MARLA

Demon spawn!

LILITH

Ugly cow!

MARLA

Freak of nature! *(pause, they laugh)*

LILITH

Marla, you know, you and me’s just like that cotton candy: on the outside I’s all pink and pretty—

MARLA

And on the inside I’m the ugly stick!

LILITH

Now, I don’t want you talkin’ like that, girl. Positive thinkin’! Confidence! You gotta know you gonna win. And that’s half the battle. Besides, that’s not what I was goin’ to say. You’s beautiful on the inside. I’s gonna say that you’s sugary sweet!

MARLA

*(sarcastic)*

Why thank ya kindly, miss thang. *(beat)* Why you so dead set on gettin’ out of Dodge in such a hurry? *(overlap)* Wake me up in the middle of the night and all.

LILITH

Coz’ it ain’t Kismet! Kismet, Kansas is just a dust bowl filled with dusty people with dusty minds and dusty dreams, girl.

MARLA

And you think it’s not gonna be dusty in Kansas City or New Orleans?

LILITH

Dusty, rusty or musty, any place’s better than here. And I ain’t goin’ back to Hossenpfeffer’s no mo’, that’s fo’ sho’.

MARLA

I don’t know why we left in the first place. They were awful kind to take us in like that.

LILITH

Damn it, Marla. That's yo' problem: y'all goes lookin' for the good in people even when there ain't none to be found.

MARLA

I saw the good in you, didn't I? Even when people called you Demon spawn! Freak of nature!

LILITH

I ain't talkin' bout that. *(beat)* Hossenpfeffer got a letch fo' me.

MARLA

A letch?

LILITH

Been goin' on since we got there. First, I sees the way he bin lookin' at me. Ogglin' me. Undressin' me with them eye balls. Comin' in at night and touchin' me in that way. That unnatural way. He done touches all the girls, you know that.

MARLA

No. I didn't.

LILITH

He done more than touchin'.

MARLA

What are you talkin' about?

LILITH

Last night, like many nights before he came in—smellin' o moonshine. Pulled me from my bunk and took me out back. Undid his overalls and pushed me to my knees—

MARLA

No, Lilly.

LILITH

He ain't goin' to do that ever again. No sirree! I made sure of that. *(she makes a chomp with her mouth)*

MARLA

Good lord! That's the scream that woke me up.

LILITH

Damn right, girl. Now, come on, let's do this!

MARLA

I don't know, Lilith. I don't know how you dream up these crazy schemes. You know if I don't win, we won't be able to show our faces her or back in Kismet ever again.

LILITH

That's the cotton-pickin' point! New Orleans a big city! Ain't no one gonna take no mind of us there. We got to get to some place where we can just *be*. Be normal like. Get a job. Have a house. A family. You want that too, dontcha Marla? Dontcha?

MARLA

But all those people in there. They're gonna stare and point. Just like before.

LILITH

Yeah, but this time, they is gonna pay fo' the privilege.

MARLA

*(pause)*

Ok, Lilly. For you. I'll do it for you.

LILITH

Woo-hoo! Laissez le bon temp rouler<sup>1</sup>, sha! You can do it, mon ami! Oh, I love you, sugar. Let's go.

*(They enter the tent. Light change. JIMMY appears SL in spot.)*

JIMMY "THE WHISPER"

*(pointing offstage)*

There she goes, folks. Tiny Trina La Vonda, the tiniest lady in the world! Wasn't she just adorable? Let's give her a big hand. *(applause)* Now here's your chance, ladies, to win a whole pile of money. I've got a fifty dollars here. *(Takes out fifty one dollar bills and waves them around.)* Fifty whole dollars. I'm sure some of you never seen that much money in your life! I'm sure you're thinkin', "I'd sure like fifty dollars, Jimmy. How can I win?" It's very simple: just come on up here and say, "I'm the ugliest woman in the world! I'm the ugliest woman in the world!" Come, on. You can do it! Come on. How about you, ma'am? What about you? No? No one willing to degrade themselves? Come on now. Fifty dollars! Fifty dollars for a little humiliation? You can do whatever you want with the money. They're just words after all, aren't they?

*(LILITH comes up "on stage" with JIMMY. Hands in pockets.)*

LILITH

Hey, mister!

JIMMY

Well, well, what have we here? Where did you come from, princess? I don't think you stand a chance, honey. You're much too pretty, isn't she folks? You going to say the words?

LILITH

No, stupid! My friend wants to enter.

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<sup>1</sup> Cajun French for "Let the good times roll."

JIMMY

Your friend? Well where is she? In your pockets?

LILITH

Marla! Marla! Come on up, hun.

MARLA

I'm coming. *(sheepishly makes her way "on stage.")*

LILITH

Ladies and gentlemen, do not cover yo' eyes. What you are about to see is real. This woman's mother was kicked by a mule when she's with child. All her life been filled with sufferin' at the hands of her cruel fate. She done hided herself in back allies and in...in other dark places. But now, she ready to emerge from the darkness and into the light! Ladies and gentleman, Marla, the Mule-faced girl!

MARLA

*(takes off glasses, and hat)*

I am the ugliest woman in the world.

*(MARLA takes off veil. She suffers from a genetic condition known as Sturge-Weber syndrome, which causes a large, purple birthmark on the head and face that thickens and distorts the flesh. The production can decide whether or not to the actress playing MARLA wears make up to reflect this or not. SILENCE.)*

JIMMY

*(stunned)*

Mary, mother of God! She's hideous!

LILITH

Can we have the fifty dollars now, mister?

*(LILITH reaches for the money, Stunned, JIMMY drops the dollar bills and they fall to the floor. LILITH tries unsuccessfully to pick them up with her sock-covered hands. MARLA smiles entranced by the applause.)*

LILITH

Marla, help me! Help me, girl!

*(Still entranced by the audience, MARLA doesn't hear LILITH. LILITH removes the socks covering her hands to pick up the bills. When she does, she reveals that she suffers from a condition called ectrodactylysm, a deformity that has left her hands misshapen like lobster claws. The actress playing LILITH can approximate this*

*by crossing or binding her innermost and outermost fingers. JIMMY looks at her in horror.)*

JIMMY

Oh my god! You're both freaks! Here, gimme that money!

LILITH

But you said if she said those words—

JIMMY

Don't worry, princess. There's plenty more where that came from. I'm taking you two to Topeka—and the rest of the world! We're gonna be rich! Ladies and gentlemen, let me present Marla the Mule-Faced Girl and...and Lilith the Lobster Princess!

*(MARLA and LILITH look at each other in amazement, they smile)*

CALLIOPE MUSIC AS LIGHT FADE TO BLACK

[END]