

The Copper Queen

Libretto by John de los Santos

SETTING:

The opera takes place in Bisbee, Arizona in room No. 315 of The Copper Queen Hotel, with the action alternating seamlessly between 2010 and 1910. The décor is garish, including a mediocre impressionist portrait of a woman. The furniture does not change between the two eras (with the exception of the portrait, which is a mirror in 1910). The shift in time should be achieved through the lighting: muted and unwelcoming in 2010, and more warm and vibrant in 1910.

DRAMATIS PERSONAE:

Julia Lowell [J.] (soprano) a “soiled dove”, then ghost

Addison Moore [Add.] (mezzo-soprano) an inquisitive woman with a secret

Theodore Billings [Ted.] (tenor) a handsome miner, and Julia’s favorite client

Peter Ackerman/Man #1 [P.] (baritone) a friend of Daddy Lowell’s

Richie aka Sugar Dog [R.] (baritone) a young and eager client of Julia’s with special tastes

Mr. Floyd [F.] (bass-baritone) owner and concierge of The Copper Queen Hotel in 2010

* Note: Mr. Floyd and Daddy Lowell are portrayed by the same singer.

PRELUDE

(Lights up very slowly on Room Number 315 of The Copper Queen Hotel.)

PART I: 2010

(Mr. Floyd leads Addison into the room, carrying her suitcase.)

MR. FLOYD

Here she is.

ADDISON

Number 315. Wow. Look at this wallpaper. The pictures in your brochure don't do it justice.

MR. FLOYD

My wife took those pictures and put the brochure together. *(He laughs at Addison's discomfort.)* Something else. She hasn't set foot in this room for years. The air's too frigid.

ADDISON

It is a little chilly. But nice after being out in that scorching heat.

MR. FLOYD

You'll be very comfy then. No matter what the thermostat says, 315 is *always* cold. Always cold, I tell you.

ADDISON

Cold, but not uninviting.

MR. FLOYD

So what brings you to Bisbee?

ADDISON

I'd heard about this place, and needed a break from home. I just lost someone very close to me.

MR. FLOYD

Sorry 'bout that. Your husband?

ADDISON

My grandmother. *(She notices the portrait on the wall.)* I guess this is Julia?

MR. FLOYD

Hit it on the nose. At least the previous owner said so. This was the room Julia Lowell lived in, but no photos of her exist. For all we know, that could be a Sunday school teacher...

ADDISON

Well if Julia visits me tonight, we'll have an answer.

MR. FLOYD

I doubt you'll see her, but you might smell something.

ADDISON

Like what? Something dead?

MR. FLOYD

Worse. Cheap perfume, sweet enough to make your eyes water. Julia annoys women, but only appears to lonesome men. She wants 'em all to herself.

ADDISON

The stories I've read sound like adolescent wishful-thinking. The specter of a woman dancing at the foot of the bed. Come on.

MR. FLOYD

Some have also heard sighs. Long, smooth sighs from a woman who's having a fine, good time. Sighs like she can never get enough. You follow me?

ADDISON

Julia was a "soiled dove".

MR. FLOYD

"Soiled dove"? In plain speaking ma'am, Julia Lowell was a whore. Damned successful one though. The original owner of this establishment made sure that soiled dove's client list was extensive. Shamefully so, and the hotel's more respectable guests were not amused. So the man built a ramp out back, hiding the flow of rough miner trade from the street to the third floor. A bridge of discretion for all their coming and going. Did you know about the ramp? Did you know the original owner was Julia's father?

ADDISON

(surprised) Oh?

MR. FLOYD

Not many do. Daddy Lowell hosted fancy soirees downstairs. And all the while, workmen from here to Tombstone were upstairs. Mining deep in lovely Julia's reserves. Day in and day out.

ADDISON

Soiled dove...

MR. FLOYD

Day in day out. I tell you, I couldn't have done that. You have kids, Miss...?

ADDISON

Moore. Addison Moore. And no, I don't.

MR. FLOYD

Mustn't mean much to you then. Sleep well. And don't wait up to see Julia. You'll only disappoint yourself. *(He turns to leave.)*

ADDISON

Mr. Floyd? I read she hanged herself. Where?

MR. FLOYD

Hanged. *(He points upwards to a ceiling beam.)* Hanged. Broke his heart, Daddy found her swingin' from that beam. Broke his heart, I tell you. 'Nite Miss. Moore.

(He exits.)

ADDISON

So Julia...it's just us girls now. I've heard a lot about you. Come a long way. Julia? Do you like to dance? You're welcome to show me. Break the ice. Can be anything. I won't rush you. *(to herself)* You don't to be afraid. Julia? Nothing.

(She opens her suitcase, removing her bathrobe and toiletry bag, then exits into the bathroom. The shower is heard running. Suddenly, the lights flicker. We are now in the same room in 1910.)

PART II: 1910

RICHIE

(pacing furiously) Julia! Julia! I ain't got but twenty minutes! Woman! You said you'd be right out!

JULIA

(offstage) Sugar dog! You know better than to try 'en rush me!

RICHIE

Julia!

(Three men outside in the hallway bang on Julia's door)

MEN

Julia!

JULIA

Awful busy for a Thursday. No time for proper washin' up.

RICHIE

Woman! I'm about to come in there and...

JULIA

Lie down Sugar Dog, lie down!

RICHIE

(Richie leaps onto the bed.) I'm lyin' down!

MEN

(Banging again) Julia!

RICHIE

I'm waitin' ...

JULIA

Let me hear you! *(Richie lets out a very long howl, and Julia enters from the bathroom. She is beautiful in a hardened way, wearing too much makeup, a necklace of turquoise stones, and very little else.)*

RICHIE

Auwoooooooooooooo!

JULIA

Hauling all that dirt's keeping you hard and healthy. *(She climbs on top of him.)* Since when do you keep your shirt on in bed? *(Richie begins to frantically remove his clothes.)* Don't bother, Sugar Dog. *(He tries to touch her, she pins his hands)* I was hopin' you'd have time for ropin'.

RICHIE

I do! We do! Come here! *(She begins to kiss him all over.)*

THEODORE

She always take this long? There's other places I could go to

MINER #1

Too hot! Time's up! Been waitin' out here all goddamned day!

MINER #2

You makin' a baby or are you havin' one? Move your ass, Pretty Boy!

JULIA

Awful busy for a Thursday. No time for any specials.

RICHIE

I want ropin' like last time! Ropin'!

JULIA

It'll cost you double.

RICHIE

Double! You're joking! I've been coming here for a month!

THEODORE

There's other places I could go to.

MINER #1

Been waitin' out here all goddamned day!

MINER #2

Makin' a baby or havin' one?

JULIA

(to the men outside) Save your hollerin' for your old ladies! (to Richie) Alright, Sugar Dog. What's it gonna be? You want routine or you want rope? (More knocks are heard, egging him on.)

RICHIE

I...there's a buck in my left boot.

(Julia takes off his boot and retrieves the cash. While the men outside bang on the door and call Julia's name, she reaches into the nightstand and pulls out a long rope.)

JULIA

Your wrists are still torn up from last time. Poor thing, can't help wigglin' when there's ticklin'. Let me hear you.

(Richie howls again as Julia ties his wrists to the headboard. As the men outside continue to bang the door, Julia undoes Richie's pants and rides him.)

RICHIE

Auwoooooooooooooo!

MINER #1

I'm sweatin' like a hog! By Jesus, you'd better smell sweet for me! Julia! Auwoooo!

MINER #2

Been two weeks! Can't you hear? Julia Lowell! Jezebel's envy! Julia! Auwoooo!

THEODORE

For God's sake, why'm I here? This isn't worth it. Damn her name! Julia! Auwoooo!

JULIA

You're all mine now! That all you got? Better dig your spurs, Sugar Dog! Keep this up and I'll open that door and...

(All builds to a loud, sexual, explosion, but Richie climaxes early, cutting everything short.)

RICHIE

Can I have that dollar back? That wasn't...

JULIA

Wasn't what?

RICHIE

I mean, that wasn't long enough to...

JULIA

Who's fault was that, Sugar Dog? You got what you came for.

RICHIE

Now hang on Julia, play fair...

JULIA

Play fair? Are you tryin' to haggle with me like I'm simple? *(Richie starts to speak, but she covers his mouth.)* Any more of your cock and bull and it'll cost you a fiver to get outta that rope. *Comprendo amigo?*

RICHIE

(mouth still covered) Mmm mmmm mmm mhhh?

JULIA

What's that now? *(She uncovers his mouth.)*

RICHIE

See you next week?

JULIA

I sure hope so. *(untying him)* Winter's coming. It'll be nice to have you light my fireplace. Now get on out of here Sugar Dog.

RICHIE

That name's stupid.

JULIA

You came up with it.

RICHIE

I know.

JULIA

How about I call you by your Christian name? Like to share it with me?

RICHIE

Um...Sugar Dog will do just fine. It may be stupid but it sounds like honey when it comes from you. *(He moves in to kiss her, but she stops him.)*

JULIA

That's angel sweet of you. Now scat. And do me a favor. Tell those coyotes outside to go home. I'm done for today. *(She opens the window and exits singing into the bathroom. Richie grabs his clothes and opens the door.)*

RICHIE

Sorry boys. Saloon's closed.

(There's a ruckus of disappointment from outside as the other men leave. Julia reenters, having washed her face. She puts Richie's coins in a small box in a drawer. From another she pulls out a bottle of cheap bourbon and takes a swing, as Theodore enters looking sheepish.)

THEODORE

Excuse me. I really need some company.

JULIA

I'm not seeing anyone else today. Come tomorrow.

THEODORE

I've been wasting away.

JULIA

You look like you got a healthy appetite. What do you go by, stranger?

THEODORE

Does it matter?

JULIA

Suppose not. *(She opens the window and looks out.)*

THEODORE

Theodore.

JULIA

Julia. But you already knew that. Sit down Theodore. I just need a minute. Awful busy for a Thursday...

PART III: 2010

(Addison enters wearing her bathrobe to find the window open. Confused, she shuts it. The room is colder. She adjusts the thermostat.)

ADDISON

Sun's already down? I don't believe it.

(She turns on the lights and gets her hair dryer out of her suitcase. She exits into the bathroom again and we hear the hair dryer running. After a short time, it stops.)

Oh come on you piece of junk!

(She gives it a last try, but this time it barely sputters. She exits the bathroom and tosses the hair dryer onto the bureau. She picks up the phone and dials the front desk.)

Mr. Floyd, this is Addison Moore in 315. Do you have any extra hair dryers? Mine won't...it's not brand new, why? Oh do they? Could I have more towels brought up? Thanks very much.

(She hangs up, sits on the bed and towel dries her hair.)

Julia, did you not like the noise? Do you want me to look like a drowned possum?

(She waits a moment, then looks at the painting.)

If this is you, there's no reason to be jealous of me. I don't have your allure, your mystery. What you see is all I am. Unremarkable. Organized. Still, I'd like to get acquainted. I have time. All that waits for me back East is my empty house with tidy rooms. What can I say? Cleaning relaxes me. If this is you, there's no reason to be jealous of me. A hundred years after your last breath, travelers still come through your door, desperate for a whisper. I know I'm only one of many, but won't you whisper to me? Julia? *(silence)* All this way for nothing but dead air. And after all I'd read about...

(She stops as the following words invade her mind.)

Awful busy for a Thursday...

(The lights flicker and the room becomes colder. The energy in the room has changed, and Addison is afraid now.)

I shouldn't have come. Promise or not, I don't need to do this. *(laughs)* I'm exhausted. Just talking to myself! I...

(She suddenly smells something. Something faint, but definite.)

Lilac...

PART IV: 1910

(Theodore is getting dressed, while Julia watches him like a well-fed lioness.)

JULIA

You're in a hurry. What's the occasion?

THEODORE

My father-in-law's coming for supper.

JULIA

Can't be late for that. Your wife'll skin you. What's she cookin'?

THEODORE

You know I don't like to talk about her when I'm here. *(He continues dressing in silence for a bit.)* Rosemary chicken. Dry as a bone.

JULIA

You should try the quail plate downstairs. Like to join me there instead? *(He gives her a look.)* Ah well, was worth a try.

THEODORE

I know the old man's coming to hound me again. "When are you going to give me a grandson?" It's not me, I'm trying.

JULIA

Of course.

THEODORE

I'm starting to think she's barren.

JULIA

That must be shameful for her. Poor thing. Does she please you?

THEODORE

She does, but nothing like you. (*He touches her necklace.*) Especially with this on your skin.

JULIA

My Mama was Navajo. She gave me this and my skin. I miss her.

THEODORE

I bet she was a great lady.

JULIA

Great at what she had to do. (*He pays her.*) This is more...

THEODORE

Hush up. You earned it. You always earn it. (*He looks at her, and she looks down.*) What is it?

JULIA

Nothing. Just a little worn.

THEODORE

Still pretty. Goodbye Julia. (*He starts to exit.*)

JULIA

Wait! (*She brings him his hat.*) You don't want to leave this. See you real soon? (*Theodore exits and closes the door.*)

JULIA/THEODORE

Nothing like you./See you real soon.

(She locks the door and puts some of the cash in the box in the drawer. She kneels down, pulls back the rug, removes a floorboard, and pulls out a reticule hidden under the floor. She puts the

rest of the cash in it, but then quickly replaces everything when she hears someone unlocking the door. She stands as Daddy Lowell enters.)

JULIA

You know to knock.

DADDY LOWELL

And you know I've got the key. That same fella again. He must be gettin' real sweet on you.

JULIA

He's quiet. Not like the others. He's gentle.

DADDY LOWELL

I'm glad you like that, because there's another quiet gentleman here to meet you. Friend of mine.

JULIA

What? You mean now?

DADDY LOWELL

I just said he's here so I didn't mean tomorrow Julia. *(He takes her jewelry box out of a drawer and pockets the contents.)* This it?

JULIA

(She hands him the remaining cash in her hand.) That's it.

DADDY LOWELL

Seems light considering all the recent traffic on your ramp.

JULIA

They want it fast. No extras. When they come back I'll get more.

DADDY LOWELL

You're already behind Julia.

JULIA

I know. I just... *(He throws the box on the floor.)* Please! Daddy, I just need a few days. I'll be really good to your friend. Let me wash up.

DADDY LOWELL

I don't think so. He wants to see you now, before his party arrives. You'll do whatever he wants. Put on that nice perfume I got you.

[BOTH

JULIA

Anything else Daddy? Yes, whatever you say. An important guest. Gentleman.

DADDY LOWELL

He's an important guest. A real gentleman. He loves the finer things. Put on perfume and a wide smile.]

(There's a knock at the door.)

DADDY LOWELL

Alright, do me proud now. Whatever he wants. *(He opens the door and a well-dressed Peter Ackerman walks in.)* Here she is. She'll treat you well, Mr. Ackerman. *(He exits)*

JULIA

Welcome to the Copper Queen, Mr. Ackerman. What do you think of her?

PETER

I was led to believe you'd be younger.

JULIA

(stung) Well, when the lights are out, I can be as young as you need.

PETER

Even in the dark, I'd still smell that perfume.

JULIA

I'll scrub it off.

PETER

No, leave it on. What is it?

JULIA

Lilac.

PETER

Ah. My wife has worn that a time or two.

JULIA

She's lucky.

PETER

Why?

JULIA

Having a husband who takes notice of such things. A rare breed indeed. Make yourself comfortable.

PETER

(lying on the bed) Lowell tells me you dance like the devil. Show me.

JULIA

Whatever you want. *(to herself)* Whatever he wants. *(She dances for him at the foot of the bed.)*

PETER

Slower. *(She slows down.)* Turn around. That a' girl! Come here. *(Julia crawls on the bed and he feels her body.)* Well, fancy. You're still firm. *(He kisses her.)* Good girl. Already sweatin'. *(He kisses her again, but she is unresponsive.)* You have to work harder than that. *(He grabs her and kisses her hard. She's obviously resisting.)* What's wrong with you?

JULIA

Let me put out the lights.

PETER

No, I want to look at you.

JULIA

It's better in the dark.

PETER

You said whatever I want, and that's what we're doin'. *(He grabs her and holds her down.)*

JULIA

No!

PETER

Quiet, slut! I'll suffocate you! Fight all you please! It makes it fun. I'm gonna give you more than you've ever had! *(Julia protests and struggles as he laughs. She scratches his face and he shrieks.)* You bitch! *(Julia goes to the door and opens it to find Daddy facing her.)*

DADDY LOWELL

What the hell happened?

JULIA

He hurt me!

PETER

Bullshit! She clawed my face!

DADDY LOWELL

My God! Let me get you a towel.

PETER

(wiping his face with his handkerchief) I don't want anything else from you, Lowell.

DADDY LOWELL

Please, Mr. Ackerman, this has never happened! Let me make it up to you.

PETER

Give me my cash back.

DADDY LOWELL

(He hands it over.) And how about a hearty meal downstairs? On my dollar!

PETER

No, I want my entire stay, on your dollar. Otherwise I'll confirm the nasty rumors of what goes on in here. Your society guests wouldn't approve.

DADDY LOWELL

(Barely containing himself.) Fine. Mr. Ackerman. *(He looks at Julia, then back.)* Are you certain your face is alright?

PETER

Sure. She's chewed off most of her nails. Tryin' to leave her mark on me! I'm not some inbred miner. People like me keep this shack standing. One word, from any of us, the Copper Queen gets blown to hell. You best watch your back, Lowell. You too, stinkin' old whore. *(He exits.)*

JULIA

Please, I swear he...

(Before she can continue, Daddy Lowell grabs her by the hair and forces her to the floor.)

DADDY LOWELL

One more word and you'll be a cripple. He paid twice what you're worth, and like a wet cat, you maul his face? You think men are gonna climb that ramp forever? You think you're above what I provide you? You're just like your mother! *(He releases her and takes a hand mirror from the bureau, and shows her the reflection.)* Nothing but a painted ingrate!

JULIA

She deserved better than you. She deserved more than this.

DADDY LOWELL

(He hits her across the face with the mirror.) She left me with a weighty debt. That debt is your inheritance. *(He lifts up her face and forces a hard kiss on her.)* Best do what I say, Soiled Dove. Soon you'll be useless. *(He exits, locking the door. Julia picks up the mirror and looks at her bleeding lip.)*

JULIA

Still...still pretty. This split will close. The bruises will fade. The hurt may linger, but my skin forgets. Still...still pretty. Still so pretty. Same as Mama, she always said, "Give what you want, but keep what's yours." Ten years now in Bisbee town, chip away the debt. Ten years of The Copper Queen, nowhere near, and yet... Still...still pretty. Still so goddamned pretty! Cover and smear, lilac and rouge. I'm clean, aware. Who's next in line? I spread my legs, they spread my name. Treading rusty dirt, they stumble in with starvin' eyes. The best ones are quick, the worst take their time. They smell like work, endless labor in a narrow pit. Bangin' the floor and stainin' my sheets, we make our trade while the ceiling sags, the walls drip! I can barely breathe! Heaving! Heavy! This sweat box is my pine box! When it's done and they've all gone, I look out the window. The red rock goes on forever. Under the moon, the brush is blue. Blue like the ocean I've never seen? But there's still time. Time to see that special blue, and everythin' reflected. Everythin' that's been kept from me or taken! Alone or on someone's arm, there's still time. A ring, perhaps? There's still time. Give what you want, but keep what's yours! There's still time. The split stopped bleeding; I'm on my feet again! Look at yourself Julia, there's still time!

(She smiles, goes to the wall and repeatedly bangs her head against it as the lights fade out.)

PART V: 2010

(Addison is in the same position as Julia was during the last scene. The banging from the previous scene continues and accelerates. It takes a moment before Addison realizes it's knocking from outside the room.)

MR. FLOYD

Miss Moore? I've got your towels. *(She opens the door on Mr. Floyd standing in the hallway.)*

ADDISON

Thank you. *(He hands them to her.)*

MR. FLOYD

Sorry about your hair dryer. Electric appliances have a mind of their own in there. Probably just a spooked circuit.

ADDISON

This happens often?

MR. FLOYD

Some crazies hear Julia in every creak. Others bring old charms, trying to open a door to the other side. We had two ladies swear she hid their jewelry while they slept. Had to tear the room apart to find it.

ADDISON

I smelled Lilac. Old perfume.

MR. FLOYD

Really? May I? *(Before she can answer, he enters the room and inhales.)*

MR. FLOYD

Same as always. Your nose'll fool you if you let it.

ADDISON

According to you, I'm not the first.

MR. FLOYD

You must be wiped out from the time change.

ADDISON

No, I'm fine.

MR. FLOYD

This bed never disappoints. Nothing's here, but it's understandable. No one, no one wants to leave The Copper Queen without a story.

ADDISON

Something's here! I felt it through the shivers. I did! I did not come to The Copper Queen just for a story.

MR. FLOYD

You know Miss. Moore, 315 is not our best suite. If you want to change rooms, I'm willing to oblige. I have something mighty cozy on the fourth floor. Very private, no spooked circuits. I could show you...

ADDISON

I'm not going anywhere. All I want is some P and Q. *(He stares at her.)* Now.

MR. FLOYD

Sleep well then. Do you good. *(through gritted teeth)* I tell you. *(He exits.)*

ADDISON

It's only a whiff, then pounding. The tourist tales could never capture your icy touch. The terror is humbling, now I'm awake! I can feel your poise in the nip. We can understand each other if we try. Try! *(She sits on the bed and closes her eyes. A rag on piano is heard almost imperceptibly, then it crescendos as the scene changes.)*

PART VI: 1910

(Julia is on the bed in the same position as Addison was while Theodore stares out the open window, listening to the music from downstairs.)

THEODORE

That's one hell of a piano man! He's making that rag his slave!

JULIA

Daddy spares no expense. Downstairs.

THEODORE

You should've seen them. Swirling around, bumping the furniture. Must be good hooch. *(The music transitions into a waltz.)* Now he's waltzing'. *(He extends his hand to her.)* Should we?

JULIA

Not right now.

THEODORE

Come on Julia. Its damned heavenly. You and I need more than just one kind of exercise. *(He pulls Julia off the bed and they waltz. He's an excellent leader, and while Julia keeps up, she's still restrained. Just as she begins to enjoy it, the music stops, followed by applause and laughter.)*

THEODORE

Damn! Guess they heard us and got jealous.

JULIA

You're a tornado.

THEODORE

And you're a wildfire.

(They kiss. Julia breaks it off.)

JULIA

I forget, when are you headin' for Boston?

THEODORE

Next month.

JULIA

Those Yanks diggin' a mine with your name on it?

THEODORE

Wife's uncle's building a dam on the Charles. He can make me a foreman.

JULIA

So it'd be permanent? All this for her? You've said she's barren. She's barely a wife. MOvin' East won't change that.

THEODORE

I want a new start out of the mines. I can't do it here. But Julia, I won't forget...

JULIA

Save your lovin' tongue for her uncle and his pennies.

THEODORE

You don't need to get nasty.

JULIA

That's what I'm good at. What else keeps your boots by my bed? Your time's wastin', you should go pack your bags.

THEODORE

Come here. I said come here! *(He tries to pull her towards him be she resists. He touches her upper back and she recoils in pain.)* What's wrong?

JULIA

Never you mind! Leave me alone!

(She tries to keep him away, but he stands firm. He slowly pulls down her dressing gown to reveal several hideous lash marks across her back.)

THEODORE

Who did this?

JULIA

Who do you think? Gamblin' nights rile Daddy up. Add coffin varnish and that rope in my drawer, you'll have a royal ball with ole' Julia.

THEODORE

I'll kill that son a bitch!

[BOTH

JULIA

Kill him? Then off to Boston? He knows folks. They'd track you down. Make you cash in.

THEODORE

That bastard should be shot! Bad enough he keeps you here!]

JULIA

It's none of your affair.

THEODORE

Great Christ! I'm not moving to hurt you! If I wasn't...

JULIA

And if I wasn't...

THEODORE

I'd lift you from this place! Never looking back, I'd guard your heart, bind the pieces whole again. You'd be free to soar! All of me, all of you. Finally, that'd be enough.

JULIA

Why paint a shinin' picture? It's just another dream. Dreams don't soothe the hurt anymore.

THEODORE

I'm afraid of what you could reveal.

JULIA

You're a coward, barely a man at all! The ache won't heal by closing your eyes. Bisbee or Boston, with her it's all the same. She's burying you. Let's save each other before we rot!

THEODORE

I thought she'd saved me. I had nothing, time was laughing. Along came a quiet girl with a good name. Defying her father, she wanted me. So I grabbed her hand, and laughed at time. Now we try. We fail, and I dry her eyes with dollars. She takes everything, but what I save for you. Is it enough?

[BOTH]

THEODORE

It damn sure should have been. But if it had been, we would never have met. Julia! If I leave, she'll never be alone. She'd find another. Far from here?

JULIA

When you're with me, there are no questions, only answers you've never known. Theodore! I can show you. Let me show you. Far from here!]

THEODORE

I will take you...

JULIA

Please take me!

THEODORE

We'll drop the rest to cross the far and wide.

JULIA

We'll drop the rest to cross the far and wide.

THEODORE

Escape the desert. Leave it to them!

JULIA

The ocean!

THEODORE

Have you seen?

JULIA

That special blue.

JULIA/THEODORE

Dive in endless waves and waves and waves! So/I'll lift me/you from this place! Never looking back, I'll guard your heart, bind the pieces whole again. On we'll soar! All of me, all of you. That's enough! Safe in your grip, caressing the ache, this beautiful pain. A love to cross the empty far and wide!]

(They kiss as the music continues.)

JULIA

We'll go east?

THEODORE

As far as the shore.

JULIA

When?

THEODORE

I'll be back for you in three weeks. Have to plan.

JULIA

You swear? On your life?

THEODORE

On the life we'll share.

JULIA

Give what you want, and keep what's mine.

JULIA/THEODORE

As far as the shore! *(They fall on the bed as the lights fade.)*

PART VII: 2010

(Lights up on Addison. She is overcome by the intensifying visions.)

ADDISON

Torrent! Your remnants form a blurring torrent. Perfume. Sighs. Sweat. Cries. Droplets of longing bleed from the corners and soak me to the core! I'm lost. Lost in this blurring torrent, As lost when my grandmother died. I wanted to go with her. Instead I came in search of a legend. Your torrent reminds me I'm alive. Alive, but untouched and getting old. I've been a caregiver, never a lover, never yearned for as I walked away. I won't walk away from you Julia! Not from all you've left behind. We'll unearth it together! I have more to tell you, but first, show me. Julia? Is this where it ended? I have to know! *(The energy in the room changes.)* The cold is gone. No! Please, you can't leave me! Not now like this! *(furiously)* This legend is a mirage. You're nothing but a lie! Nothing... *(Drawers from the bureau fly from their slides and crash to the floor.)* You're above parlor tricks, Soiled Dove. *(The lights flicker in rage and the foundation of the room seems to buckle.)* You know I'm afraid, but not of flying drawers or old lightbulbs. *(She replaces the drawers.)* Float the bed upside down. Break the window if you want! I won't run. I came and I found you. I know there's worse to come. I'm ready. I'm yours!

PART VIII: 1910

(The room is empty. The door opens and Daddy steps in carrying a package. He has been drinking.)

DADDY LOWELL

Julia? (He finds her jewelry box, pockets the cash, then begins to rummage through the bureau drawers while he sings to himself. At some point, he tosses his hat on the bureau.)

She's gone, done run gone!

Your Papa's one love, run gone.

Papa saw One Love pout 'round the ball,

Too proud to dip her toe.

So Papa roped her breedin' hips,

And licked the do-see-do!

One Love fed Papa shortnin' loaf,

Thick with butter from her churn.

Then he pushed her down the chapel aisle

So wifin' she would learn.

Papa hammer'd a house sturdy tall

Went out to hunt their sup.

Brought home bufflehead, just to find

She left and drained his cup!

Papa still cries cuz there's no more

One Love ridin' 'til the dawn.

And now the only place he sees her face

Is in their cross-eyed spawn.

(Julia's voice is heard outside the door. She enters and finishes the chorus with him.)

JULIA

“She’s gone, done run gone!

Your Papa’s one love, run gone.”

Long time since you and I sung that old tune.

DADDY LOWELL

Where’ve you been?

JULIA

The ramp. Needed some air after the rush. *(He stares at her.)* There’ll be some stragglers here directly.

DADDY LOWELL

Was gettin’ worried. *(He takes her bottle of bourbon from the drawer and takes a swig.)* But I know you’d never skip town again. Not after last time. Remember?

JULIA

Even better than that song.

DADDY LOWELL

You know what tomorrow is?

JULIA

Course I do. You’ll get a surprise from me.

DADDY LOWELL

(Pleased, he hands her the package.) I got you a little somethin’ too.

JULIA

Why? Ain’t *my* birthday tomorrow. *(She unwraps it and finds a beautiful black dress inside.)*

DADDY LOWELL

She’s a pretty one, refined. You deserve more than this. Well?

JULIA

You want it on me now?

DADDY

I can wait 'til after you're done tonight. Why are you shakin' girl? *(He strokes her hair.)* I do my best for you. Always have. You aware? *(She nods.)* my dancin' devil. I'll let you get clean. *(He starts to leave then looks back at her for a moment.)* Damn lucky.

JULIA

Scat! *(Daddy exits. Julia retrieves her reticule from under the floor. She pulls a wad of cash from her person and puts it in the stuffed bag. She hums "Run Gone" as she removes the cases from her pillows and begins to cram her belongings into them. When she gets to her hand mirror, she looks at it in disgust, then tosses it under the floor and replaces the floorboard. There's a soft, rhythmic knock on the door. It's Theodore.)* Get in here quick! *(She yanks him in and closes the door.)* You're early!

THEODORE

No one saw me.

JULIA

Can't take risks tonight! Where's the spare travelin' bag? Actually, it's fine. I don't need this trash anyway. Look what the ol' rip bought me. *(She shows him the dress.)* He'll never see me in it! Once we're far off, I'll buy a heap of new clothes! The best of what they wear yonder. It'll be fine meetin' folks who never heard of the Copper Queen. Never heard of Julia. You think they'll like me? They got to. When they see us arm n' arm...

THEODORE

Julia...

JULIA

I have to change my name. I think something French...

THEODORE

Stop.

JULIA

How 'bout Antoinettie? Or Isabelle? Oooo! That's pretty. I like Isabelle.

THEODORE

Goddammit listen to me! *(Daddy Lowell appears outside the room and listens at the door.)* I can't...

JULIA

Calm down, Tornado. I'll shut up.

THEODORE

I can't do this.

JULIA

What do you mean?

THEODORE

I can't take you with me. She's pregnant.

JULIA

(laughing) Quit foolin'. You said she was barren! *(He looks away.)* She's lyin' to you!

THEODORE

I thought she was, but her breasts have swelled and she's daily sick. Her whole family knows.

JULIA

Who cares what they know? However swollen she is, we can still go! I've saved up a lot. Daddy's a soaked pig! Has no idea what I've kept from him. *(She shows the reticule and cash.)* See? Almost a hundred! Can start everything new! *(He turns away.)* Her family's rich, they can take care of her. The baby too, if she has it.

THEODORE

We're having the baby. I'm sorry Julia.

[TRIO

JULIA

Sorry?! You'll be sorrier when that whelp drops out! Buried for good, you'll be a family of howling ghosts! That's not who you are! You're honest. The only decent thing I know. Don't leave me now, alone with Daddy and the others. You're no different! You're worse than them! Telling me you'd lift me from this place! Never looking back, you'd guard my heart! Now you throw it to the wolves!

THEODORE

I was just impatient. You have to be patient too. One day you'll escape all this. Free yourself for good and find that special blue. You're stronger than The Copper Queen. I wanted to lift you from this place. Never looking back. You had my heart! Now I have to lift my child.

DADDY LOWELL (*outside the room*)

Papa saw One Love pout' round the ball,

Too proud to dip her toe.

So Papa roped her breedin' hips,

And licked the do-see-do!

One Love fed Papa shortnin' loaf,

Thick with butter from her churn.

Then he pushed her down the chapel aisle

So wifin' she would learn.]

JULIA

You're all I have. Don't you see? Hold me now, have me now! Theodore! I'll never let you go!

THEODORE

You have to let go Julia. I've said it all as best I can. It's done now. Julia, enough! Get off!

(He pries her off of him and when she struggles, he violently shoves her away. Horrified, he moves towards her, but she recoils like an animal.)

JULIA

Touch me, and I swear you're a dead man.

THEODORE

Julia, I'm... Listen, once we're settled and have the baby, I'll come back and help you. By then, I'll know my way around Boston. I could set you up somewhere nice. You'll never have to sell yourself again.

JULIA

I don't need your charity. Get out.

THEODORE

I didn't want this sort of end. Julia. You know that. *(He turns to leave.)*

JULIA

Wait. *(She takes off her necklace, and holds it out without looking at him.)* Take this. Lest you forget.

THEODORE

I swear I won't.

JULIA

You've sworn before. You liked this so much, now it reminds me. Still pretty. I don't want a souvenir. Take it. *(She slides it towards him.)* Unless you hate me, you and those stones will be gone before I turn around. *(Theodore hesitates, then takes the necklace and leaves as Daddy Lowell steps out of sight. Once she hears the door close, Julia opens the window and looks out. She paces the room.)* Mexico's less than a day's ride. Almost a hundred dollars. I'll sell that dress, but nothing else. *(Daddy Lowell silently enters behind her.)* There's still time. Time to see that special blue and everythin' reflected. There's still time, time to dive in endless waves of everythin' that's been kept from me or taken! Alone, there's still time.

DADDY LOWELL

So I'm a soaked pig, am I? You been saving to steal away again! Almost a hundred! Come here! Now!

JULIA

No, never again!

DADDY LOWELL

NEVER? *(He locks the door and looks at his watch.)* In about two hours, I'm a year closer to the grave. *(He throws the black dress at her.)* So how 'bout you give me my surprise early?

JULIA

I've got nothing left for you, old man.

DADDY LOWELL

(He pulls out a Bowie knife.) Put on that dress, or this goes inside you. (She stoically puts on the dress. He takes her rope out of the drawer.) You know they hang thieves out there? (He ties a noose.) This one's frayed. Could still hold its own. (Fully dressed, she faces him.) Where's your turquoise?

JULIA

Gone, done run gone...

DADDY LOWELL

Lady necks need jewelry. *(He slips the noose over her head. Music and drunken carousing is heard from downstairs through the open window.)* I do my best for you. Always have. *(They dance in a bastardization of her previous waltz with Theodore. When they dance near the bureau, Julia grabs her Lilac bottle and breaks it on Daddy's face.)*

JULIA

Never again! *(She rushes to the door and manages to step into the hallway before he is upon her. She screams as he drags her back in and slams the door. He stabs her with the Bowie knife. She crumbles to the floor and tries to crawl away, but he grabs the noose and tightens it. He pulls her close as she struggles for life.)* You broke my heart Soiled Dove. *(He repeats this line several times. Julia stops struggling, and he lets her fall to the ground. He exits, slamming the door. The men's voices build as the lights fade until the stage is nearly black.)*

[VOICE OF RICHIE

Woman! I want! I want ropin', like last time! Ropin'! Copper Queen!

VOICE OF PETER

Smell sweet. Still firm. Fight all you please! I'll suffocate you! Old whore! Copper Queen!

VOICE OF THEODORE

Damn her name! Wild fire! I'll take you! Dive! Copper Queen!

VOICE OF DADDY LOWELL

Jezebel's envy. One more word and you'll be a cripple. Just like your mother! Copper Queen!]

(Very gradually, Addison appears within the walls.)

ADDISON

Soiled Dove! Soiled Dove! “Daddy found her swingin’ from that beam.” All a lie!

(The lights flicker as Julia is revealed standing and Addison steps into the room. The women look at each other.)

BOTH:

JULIA

Who are you?

ADDISON

I see you.]

ADDISON

I know how it feels to be left. Forgotten and never seen.

JULIA

Soiled dove?

ADDISON

I’m...so sorry I called you that. People say it, but don’t understand.

JULIA

Voices echo in my skull. Warm bodies thaw the cold, reminding me I have nothing.

ADDISON

We’re the same, trapped like dust.

JULIA

Why’d you come?

ADDISON

Theodore’s wife died giving birth. A girl. He named her Isabelle. He never remarried and raised her on his own. They were each other’s world. There came a time when he spoke of his wildfire. Isabelle cried, but the loss in his eyes stayed with her for the rest of her life. When she died, only one stayed to hold her hand; her single granddaughter. She told me about her father. His love and the emptiness. She told me about you, and gave me this. *(Addison takes Julia’s turquoise necklace from her suitcase.)* Copper cracked inside the blue. Blue as the ocean you should have seen.

JULIA

Mama gave me this and my skin...

ADDISON

Isabelle wanted you to have it back. I promised her.

JULIA

Isabelle. Theodore.

ADDISON

You remained in his heart. You've shown me so much, everything reflected!

BOTH:

JULIA

Isabelle. Theodore. Voices echo in my skull. Warm bodies thaw the cold, reminding me. Buried, I had nothing. You answered my call.

ADDISON

We're alike. You were forgotten and never seen. I was trapped like dust. Before, I had nothing. You answered my call.]

ADDISON

Julia, go! You have to leave this place.

JULIA

The others told me to lie back, shut up, stay or go. Don't be like them after what you've seen. Forgotten or not, I can't leave. I am this room, always! You might be buried like me, but you still breathe. While you breathe, there's still time. We are more than what we lost. I'm not afraid of what's next. Why are you?

(Julia disappears into the walls.)

ADDISON

We are more than what we lost.

(The lights fade.)

PART IX: 2010

(It is now the following morning. The room appears empty Mr. Floyd knocks on the door.)

MR FLOYD

Miss Moore? Good morning! Miss Moore, are you awake?

ADDISON

(entering from the bathroom.) Yes! Yes, I am.

MR. FLOYD

(knocking) It's check- out. *(She opens the door.)*

ADDISON

Sorry. Guess I lost track. *(She tosses a few things in her open suitcase and closes it.)* I'm gone.

MR. FLOYD

(entering the room) Hold it. Any other problems? Sounds? Smells? *(She shakes her head.)* Well how'd you sleep?

ADDISON

Like a newborn.

MR. FLOYD

Ha! Didn't I tell ya? Nothing's here. *(He touches the painting.)* Sunday school teacher after all. What a waste.

ADDISON

What a waste.

MR. FLOYD

Addison, right? *(He moves in a little too close.)* So, think you'll ever come see me again?

ADDISON

Hmmm, I think not. I will never forget my time here, I tell you. *(The lights flicker.)* Spooked circuit.

MR. FLOYD

Spooked. Well, make sure you sign our guest log downstairs. Leave a little trace of yourself at The Copper Queen. *(Mr. Floyd exits. Addison pulls back the rug, removes the floorboard, and places Julia's necklace in the hole.)*

ADDISON

Back again. Julia, you're the copper, I'm the blue. *(She reaches under the floorboards to find Julia's now rusted mirror, and looks into it.)* We're not unseen. Breathe. While you breathe, there's still time. *(She replaces the mirror and floorboard and exits. The lights slowly fade out.)*

END OF OPERA