

desperate. *(piano vamp)* That's when the doors were opened wide to Mahalia Jackson and The Johnson Gospel Singers; 'cause when we sang, people came. And the walls came tumblin' down! *(looking up)* God, You sure know Your business! *(singing)*

MALE ACTOR - START

(cont.) UP TO DE WALLS OB JERICHO
HE MARCHED WITH SWORD DRAWN IN HIS HAN';
"GO BLOW DEM RAM HORNS," CRIED JOSHUA,
"KASE DE BATTLE AM IN MY HAN'." JOSHUA FIT THE BATTLE
OF JERICHO, JERICHO, JERICHO,
JOSHUA FIT THE BATTLE OF JERICHO
AND THE WALLS CAME TUMBLIN' DOWN.

(After song, DORSEY enters from left and crosses to her.)

DORSEY. *(applauding her performance)* Miss Jackson, when you sing you add more flowers and feathers than anybody, and they're all exactly right.

MAHALIA. That's not me, that's God. He gives it to me. I'm just the instrument.

DORSEY. Amen, sister, amen! My name's Dorsey, Thomas Dors...

MAHALIA. Honey, you think I don't know you? *(to audience as DORSEY arranges two chairs at center)* They used to call him "Georgia Tom," songwriter and blues player for Ma Rainey's Rabbit Foot Minstrels; until the Lord needed some gospel and snatched him away. *(to DORSEY as they sit)* You been doing some mighty fine "Kingdom work" with your gospel songs. But gospel singing something new to some of these preachers up North. They say you can't sing the gospel, you can only preach the gospel. *(said just loud enough for the PASTOR to hear)*

DORSEY. I believe they're jealous. You accomplish in one song what they can't accomplish in a two-hour sermon. *(He is carried off by his own thoughts.)* Gospel singing broadcasts the "good news" and nothing prepares the heart for the reception of God's "Word" as do gospel songs, sung with spirit and faith. They bring

good tidings about salvation as they find their place in the hearts of God's children, edifying the believer and glorifying God.

MAHALIA. *(There is a slight pause as MAHALIA takes all this in.)*
Uh huh.

DORSEY. And no one can hurt the gospel because the gospel is strong, like a two-edged sword. Strong enough to cut through to the soul, no matter if Satan himself sings a gospel song.

MAHALIA. He better not be playing your piano.

DORSEY. Well, some people say I'm still writing the blues, but I'm not. I'm writing gospel. The gospel of people standing with God in an open field. The blues is a person standing alone in a deep pit, crying for help. Gospel songs are songs of hope. And they come into being by divine design, not like ordinary songs. That's why I believe it's a little bit off to use the power of music just for entertainment. It seems that power ought to be reserved for the Word of God.

MAHALIA. *(pause)* You rest now, honey.

DORSEY. Miss Jackson, you have a sense of oneness with your respondents...a wonderful ability to capture the communal spirit of a performance.

MAHALIA. Say what?

DORSEY. And the combination of your natural appeal and blues presence, along with your spirituality, would convey the sentiment of my new more emotive gospels.

MAHALIA. You don't say?.

DORSEY. That's why I would like you to go on the road with me.

MAHALIA. *(suspicious)* On the road, darlin'?

DORSEY. To bring my songs to life. We'll play the gospel circuit. Churches, revivals, gospel tents, the National Baptist Convention. We'll bring in some souls and ease our own.

MAHALIA. *(pause)* That be good.

DORSEY. And, of course, with you demonstrating my songs, we'll sell a lot of sheet music. Ten cents apiece. That's where the real money is.

MAHALIA. Ten cents?

DORSEY. It adds up.

MAHALIA. You the Lord's first traveling salesman.

DORSEY. I hope you won't say "no."

MAHALIA. I never say "no" 'til I know what I'm "no-ing." Be right back. *(rises and crosses downstage right)* God, what You want? I come up to Chicago to be a nurse but maybe You got some other kind of healing in mind. Halie can't think like You do, Lord, so if You want me going on the road with this man over here, You going have to tell me. *(She waits a moment for the answer, then returns to DORSEY.)* The Lord say He want me to go.

DORSEY. *(rises)* Yes, I know. I've already spoken with Him. *(exit Right)*

MAHALIA. *(to God and all)* Lord, there ain't no turning back now! Why turn back on joy? We travelling the gospel highway, rolling on! Philadelphia, St. Louis, Detroit; bound for glory, Amen! *(to audience as lights come up center)* Oh yes, the Lord had given us our marchin' orders, "Go ye into all the world and preach the gospel to every creature." And we did. Five years of one-night stands and living out of suitcases. We were "fish and bread" singers. Singing for God, as well as for our supper.

(DORSEY enters from right and crosses to left of MAHALIA. He is counting the money.)

What's the matter? You look like death on a soda cracker.

DORSEY. Everybody talking 'bout heaven ain't going there! Someone been fooling with the money. There's more due us.

MAHALIA. Lord, they's a lot of trickeration in the world!

DORSEY. I thought that last promoter looked a little devious. *(He hands MAHALIA her share.)*

MAHALIA. Devious? Baby, that man a snake trying to walk. Still, it pays to serve Jesus! *(MAHALIA adds money to the growing wad retrieved from her bosom.)* Where we at next?

DORSEY. Bessemer Alabama.

MAHALIA. *(with apprehension)* Alabama?

DORSEY. "The Back To God Day."

MAHALIA. You got extra gas, case the "man" don't sell us none?

DORSEY. In the trunk. Got plenty food and coffee too.

MAHALIA. *(to no one in particular)* Got the money but he won't sell. Won't let us use the washroom either. *(looking up)* That's the worst part, Lord. Can't even relieve yourself like decent folk.

DORSEY. Lord didn't promise a smooth road, just a sure one. *(He exits right.)*

MAHALIA. That's right. And everywhere we went, gospel music was a mighty force. Breaking down the color line. Teaching people's hearts what their minds didn't know. 'cause darlin's, there's no great and no small among us. We great when we got God's love and we small only when we reject Him. And who would dare reject Him? No, you can't hate God. And babies, there's something of God in every one of us. Well, then, the depression was over. The switch was turned back on and people warn't poor as Job's turkey anymore. That's when the Lord had something new in His mind, and it warn't five and dime sheet music either.

DORSEY. *(entering from right)* Records! That's where the future is. The Good Lord is going into the recording business!

MAHALIA. *(to audience)* You can't out-think God!

DORSEY. Here, this is yours. *(hands MAHALIA some money)* Got some new songs for you to learn, get recording right away. *(starts to exit left)* Hey, let me know what you think of "Peace In The Valley." I wrote that one just for you and nobody else. Put your name on it. Mahalia Jackson, "The Queen" of gospel singers! "The Queen!" *(exit left)*

MALE ACTOR - END