ANITA: So piano man, you got a name?

JELLY (Turning on the charm): You want to know my name? Jack, tell her who I am.

JACK: This is the Jelly Roll Morton. Lover of women, inventor of jazz and owner of twenty-seven suits.

JELLY: N’ you are . . . ?

ANITA: Not interested. (Anita turns to go)

JELLY: Ha! As many looks as you been throwin’.

ANITA: Just ’cause I throw a look, n’ you catch it, don’t mean it had your name on it. (To Jack) But you, Sugah, you ain’t tell Sweet Anita your name.

Anita pours it on thick, flirting with Jack, enjoying how much it’s annoying Jelly.

JACK (Rising to the occasion): Folks call me Jack the Bear.

ANITA: Is that B-E-A-R or B-A-R-E?

JACK: Both.

He and Anita laugh.

JELLY (Pulling Anita aside): Wait—whoa. Anita come on now. Jack’s like a brother to me, but . . . there’s no comparison. (Confidentially) For one thing he’s so . . .

ANITA: So what Jelly? So black? Sugah, if I’d wanted a white man, I’d get me the real thing, n’ not some pale imitation thereof. ’Cause like the sayin’ goes, “The blacker the berry, the sweeter the juice.”

JELLY: You know Anita, when I first saw you, I said to myself, “Jelly, before you stands a real lady.” I now see I was wrong. (He turns to go) Jack?

Jack reluctantly follows after him.
ANITA (Calling after Jelly): Oh is that what you lookin’ for?
“A lady!” Someone who smiles n’ pours tea n’ agrees
with her man, no matter what. He says it’s sunny, n’
even though it’s pourin’, she stands there smiling,
pretending to not be wet. If that’s what you’re lookin’
for, sugah I can tell you now, ain’t nobody home.

JELLY: If you think “The Roll” is gonna stand here while
you—

ANITA (Overlapping): Now, if you lookin’ for a woman . . .
(Seductively) Full-hipped n’ sweet-lipped, who says what
she feels n’ feels it to the bone, then maybe, just maybe
somebody might be home.

Provided the man inquiring loved the way he played
instead of the way he talked. If that’s the case, I’d advise
you to knock soon, ’cause Sweet Anita has no intention
of waitin’ around till you do.

Just as Anita is about to exit through the beaded
curtain . . .

JELLY: Knock, knock.

Jelly and Anita embrace. Music underscores. As they kiss,
they strip down to their undergarments. Lights out on
Anita’s club and up on the Hunnies pushing a large
curtained brass bed. Jelly and Anita fall into it.

SONG: LOVIN’ IS A LOWDOWN BLUES

HUNNIES:
THEY SAY THAT LOVIN’ IS A LOWDOWN BLUES
YOU AIN’T GOT NUTHIN’ BUT YOUR LIFE TO LOSE
HUNNIE TWO:

BUT WHEN IT DIES . . .
THE WAY IT DOES . . .
AIN’T NO SURPRISE . . .

HUNNIES:

LOVIN’ IS A SLY-DOG BLUES

_Jelly and Anita’s lovemaking transforms into a fight._

ANITA (Swinging at Jelly): You no-count-two-bit-two-timin’-son-of-a-bitch!

JELLY (Overlapping): Anita . . . Anita, wait—whoa . . . Anita calm down n’ listen. ’Cause see I’ve written hundreds of songs, each special in their own way.

ANITA: What’s that got to do with us?

JELLY: Every once in a while, a song comes along n’ it’s from this whole other place way deep down inside. That’s the kinda song you are.

ANITA: Oh I see. N’ so regardless of how many other songs or bitches pass through “The Roll’s” hands, that’s alright. ’Cause I’m still your “one special song.”

JELLY: Exactly. (He moves in to kiss her)

ANITA: Jelly you’re good. You’re real good. But like my mama used to say, “Jes’ ’cause a man smiles while servin’ shit don’t mean it don’t smell.”

JELLY: You and yo’ mama missed the point. (Begins to get dressed)

ANITA: Oh no sugah, your point was real clear. Just so long as you understand that that door swings both ways.

JELLY: What’s that supposed to mean?

ANITA: You’ve been expanding your musical repertoire, well so have I.
JELLY’S LAST JAM

JELLY: Shame on you, Anita. Sayin’ you was with some man, just to get back at me.
ANITA: What makes you think it was a lie?
JELLY: Anita, a man knows things ’bout his woman that she don’t know about herself. Like it or not woman, I got your game.
ANITA: Like it or not man, I got yours.
JELLY: Nobody’s got “The Roll’s” game. No sir, not “The Roll.” But as far as bitches go, you come pretty close. Gotta go.

_He stands to go, oblivious to the impact his last statement has had on her._

HUNNIES:

THEY SAY THAT LOVIN’ IS A LOWDOWN BLUES
YOU AIN’T GOT NUTHIN’ BUT YOUR LIFE TO LOSE
WHEN YOU CAN’T STOP YOURSELF FROM LOVIN’

ANITA: Jelly?
JELLY: Hmm?
ANITA: You gonna be seein’ Jack?
JELLY: Yeah, we hangin’ . . .
ANITA: Well, will you give him my best.

_Anita kisses Jelly long and hard. On the last line of the song, Anita and Jelly stare at each._

HUNNIES:

LOVIN’ IS A SLY-DOG
SWEET-ASS,
FUCK-YOU
LOWDOWN DIRTY BLUES

64
ANITA (Incredible): Jelly?

She laughs, rushes to him. They embrace one another, like old friends.

ANITA: Just look at you.

JELLY: No, look at you!

They both feel themselves going to "that place" and decide to pull back.

JELLY/ANITA: So . . .

ANITA: . . . been a long time.

JELLY: Yep. See ya got yo’self a new place.

ANITA: Nuthin’ like “Jelly N’ Anita’s Midnight Inn,” but it feeds me n’ a few other folks.

JELLY: Nice piano.

ANITA: N’ from time to time I sing me a tune.

Jelly applauds.

ANITA: I don’t know why you’re applauding. You never encouraged me before.

JELLY: I said a lot of things back then. But so did you. Lord knows I tried to git along with you.

ANITA: You! Sugah, I know I’m goin’ to heaven after all the hell you put me through.

They laugh.

JELLY: I always loved the way you said “Sugah.” Even when you was evil, it still sounded sweet.

They smile at one another. Chimney Man enters to observe the scene. After a beat . . .

JELLY: Anita?

ANITA: Hmm?
JELLY: Is that red beans n’ rice I smell?
ANITA (Laughs): Umhm. N’ on Fridays, it’s Gumbo a la Anita.
JELLY: Enough to make a person wanna hang his hat n’ stick around for a few.
ANITA: Not to mention a sign out front sayin’ “Mr. Jelly Roll Morton Appearin’ Here Tonight!”
JELLY (Playful): Seein’ as I am the inventor of jazz . . . so forth n’ so on, what kinda pay we tawkin’?
ANITA: All the Gumbo a la Anita you can take.
JELLY: Well now, good gumbo outside of N’awlins is mighty hard to find. But it can be done. N’ in my life I’ve seen a whole lotta signs sayin’ “Jelly Roll Morton Appearing Tonight.”
But the thing that could make a person really consider hangin’ for a few, is the “a la Anita.” Ah, could you tell me how’s that served?
ANITA: Hot. N’ over a bed of rice.
JELLY: He’p me Jesus! Already dreamin’ ’bout seconds n’ I ain’t finished firsts.
ANITA: As “The Roll” used to say, “Nuthin’ to it, but to do it.”

Music fades out.

JELLY: Ya know, Anita—you’re the closest I’ve ever come to feelin’ like I belong.

Just as they are about to hug, Jack enters.

JACK: Look out! I done died n’ gone to hell!

Anita and Jelly turn to find Jack standing before them.

JACK: Got’s to be hell, ’cause where else but would I run into “The Roll!”