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*Il Cane Incantato della Divina Costiera: A One-Act Sketch for *The Rose Tattoo**

Tennessee Williams



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**Previously Unpublished:
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(A one-act sketch from which *The Rose Tattoo* was derived.)

(CLARA, a plump widow of Italian extraction, is seated in a tight-fitting pale blue silk dress in the exact center of a small sofa in the parlor of a shot-gun cottage. The town is on the gulf-coast of Mississippi. The parlor is brilliantly lighted with three or four lamps in addition to the bulb suspended from the ceiling. It is full of hot colors, pinks, oranges, vivid greens, purples, the palette of Matisse. It is very tacky and yet rather charming. The plump young widow sits like a woman not accustomed to wearing a girdle, but it is not the girdle alone that accounts for her air of discomfort. She has a severe case of butterflies in the stomach, for she is expecting a caller, the first that she has received in nine years of being a widow.

Somewhere in the back of the house there is a loud thud and the widow springs up, clutching her middle with one plump hand, thinking that perhaps her caller has hopped in the kitchen window.)

CLARA: *Who's there, is somebody there?*

CAT (Identifying itself): *Me-owwwwww!*

CLARA (Disgustedly): —Oh! *You!*—hunh . . .

(SHE sits down more stiffly than ever. It is apparent from her sighs and wriggings that the girdle has become intolerable to her. SHE picks up the clock, holds it to her ear. Sets it back down with an air of desperation. Disappears for a minute behind the brilliant green portières. Her loud grunting sounds and the elastic *snap* make it evident that she is ridding herself of the constricting garment. While she is so engaged the caller appears in the half-open door framed by a summer sky that is hardly deeper than dusk. Mr. MANGIACAVALLLO is a young truck driver wearing his best suit which is purplish brown and very shiny and a little too small for his powerful shoulders and thighs. With it he wears a pale green satin tie with a hula-girl's picture painted on it. HE looks in the door with an air of gleeful anticipation as a child about to enter a candy store with a couple of nickels in his fist. A wide and irrepressible grin appears on his face, which is engagingly clownish.)

(The WIDOW returns with the girdle in her hand and goes directly to a chest of drawers to put it away when Mr. MANGIACAVALLO sticks his hand through the door and says:)

PAUL: BOO!

CLARA: Oh, my God, how you—scared me . . .

PAUL: You didn't expect me.

CLARA: You said at half past. The clock says quarter to.

PAUL: I took a walk over.

CLARA: You didn' come in your truck?

PAUL: Naw. I didn' come in th' truck. The truck looks too conspicuous after dark.

CLARA: Too conspicuous? Why?

PAUL: It looks like I'd come for business after dark.

(With no embarrassment whatsoever HE bends and picks up the dropped girdle and hands it back to her.)

PAUL: You musta just took this off. It still feels hot from your body.

CLARA: Hunh. (SHE throws it in drawer and kicks the drawer angrily shut.) Be careful how you talk here, Mr.—Is it Mangiacavallo?

PAUL: Mangiacavallo is right but righter still would be Paul. Paul and Clara—two names that go good together.

CLARA: That remains to be seen.

PAUL: I got something for you.

CLARA (Suspiciously): What?

PAUL: A chocolate box.

CLARA: Aw. Thanks. My daughter's crazy for choc'lates.

PAUL: These are for you, not your daughter.

CLARA (Emphatically and severely): Everything that's for me is also for my daughter, Mr. Mangiacavallo.

PAUL: Yeah, but you take a back seat. You're not yet ready to take back seat by a long shot yet. Open the chocolates! Open the box up now.

CLARA: You wanta eat some? Huh?

PAUL: I want to see if they're fresh.

CLARA: Alright. You see if they're fresh. I don't want to look at them now, it would make me sick. In hot weather they get so mushy.

PAUL: Each box got a different movie star's picture on it. I picked out Gloria Greene. Do you like Gloria Greene?

CLARA: Naw. You made a bad choice as far as I am concerned when you picked her out.

PAUL: You don't like America's Sweetheart?

CLARA: Naw. I heard she takes dope.

PAUL: America's Sweetheart takes dope?

CLARA: That's what somebody told me who has a girlfriend that used to work there in pictures. She's very sly about it, very dishonest about it. She comes to work in the morning with a French Maid and the French Maid stands beside her while she's working and holds this rose. But it ain't just a rose. You know what it is? She's got dope powder in it.

PAUL: Dope powder in it? No!

CLARA (Excitedly): *Yes, not no*, powdered dope's sprinkled in it! All of a sudden she puts on one of those smiles and holds out a hand and says, "Oh, oh, give me that rose, that lovely rose." She takes it and sniffs up the dope!

PAUL: *Ho, ho, this is a joke, ho, ho, this is a crazy story, this is a joke!*

CLARA: I don't think so. They do some peculiar things. Lots of them are Communists, too. But this one takes dope, "Oh, give me that rose," sniff, sniff, "that lovely, lovely rose," sniff, sniff. One time, she says her girl friend told her, she sniffed the rose too much and they had to call the fire engine out to revive her!

PAUL: Ho, ho what a story, what an imagination that girlfriend has!

CLARA: Well, I personally think she wasn't exaggerating about it too much . . .

PAUL: Naw, just ninety percent, that's all.

CLARA: Set down, why don't you set down if you like to, please . . .

PAUL: You got a bright house.

CLARA: What do you mean, a bright house?

PAUL: Three lamps lighted and a light in the ceiling. You're burning up a lot of kilowatt hours.

CLARA: That's okay. You don't have to pay the light bill.

PAUL: Your husband left you well-fixed?

CLARA: I'm fixed well enough. I take in plenty of sewing.

(They fall silent. HE smiles at her steadily, too steadily, with his warm brown eyes. He watches her flushed face with an air of delight and wonder the way that a dog watches a child that is about to throw a rubber ball for him to chase. His hands rest in his lap and hers in hers, but hers are not relaxed there. They keep bounding up explosively as popcorn. SHE snatches various small objects from the table beside the sofa and examines them as if she were seeing them for the first time and sets them very carefully back down again. HE watches every movement with his air of delight and wonder, his mouth hanging slightly open, his head cocked slightly to one side, exactly like a big and excessively friendly dog, which makes the widow less and less comfortable in her brilliantly lighted little parlor.

At last having touched everything else on the table SHE moves the gold fish bowl, pushing it a little to the left then a little back to the right. His eyes follow this movement with friendly perplexity, and then HE says finally:)

PAUL: You got a bowl of goldfish.

CLARA: Yeah. We got two left. We used to have five of them.

PAUL: Three of them died on you?

CLARA: Three of them had a—disaster.

PAUL: What disaster was that?

CLARA: The cat of a neighbor jumped in the window one day. I work in the back, I sew, I work like a horse back there. I hear this noise but I don't think nothing of it, I think it's something outside, a kid throwing something, a tennis ball at the house. Then all at once something warned me. You know how you get them feelings?

PAUL: Aw. You had an intuition.

CLARA: Yeah, I had intuition. I jumped up and run in the parlor and there she was with the goldfish. Two she'd finished already and started a third one. Two was still flopping a little bit on the carpet. I scooped 'em up and revived 'em in the washbowl. My daughter was broken-hearted. Adored them fish. But I never cared much for 'em.

PAUL: I think they're hungry.

CLARA: What makes you think they're hungry?

PAUL: They go pop-pop with the mouth.

CLARA: That don't mean they're hungry.

PAUL: What does it mean?

CLARA: It means they're simple minded.

PAUL: They got a rock castle.

CLARA: Yeah, they got a rock castle.

PAUL: What do they do with the castle?

CLARA: They just swim in and out of the doors and windows.

PAUL: They never stay in the castle?

CLARA: They got no rooms in the castle just doors and windows.

PAUL: Oh, the castle is phoney.

CLARA: (Cynically) Yeah, like everything else. Especially most of the men you meet nowadays.

(SHE picks up a plump silk pillow and examines it closely as if she had just discovered a bloodstain on it. SHE sighs and puts it back down where it was before.)

PAUL: Why don't you put it *behind* you?

CLARA: What for?

PAUL: Make you more comfo'table.

CLARA: *I'm* comfortable.

PAUL: You don't *look* it.

CLARA: Well, I feel comfortable whether I look it or not.

PAUL: This parlor is blazing with light.

CLARA: Not too much light for me.

PAUL: Don't it make you self-conscious?

CLARA: Nothing makes *me* self-conscious! Does it make *you* self-conscious?

PAUL: No, but why be so *public*?

CLARA: I got *neighbors*. Neighbors got *tongues*, they *talk*! I don't want to give them no topic for conversation! Not about me!—and my daughter. I got a daughter.

PAUL: Yeah, you told me when I delivered the package to you this morning.

CLARA: I got a daughter, fifteen!

PAUL: Yeah, you told me. You must of got married young. I'm thirty-seven. A middle-aged bachelor. I almost got married but stopped myself just in time. I couldn't compete. She was going with a policeman!

CLARA: Maybe you give up too easy. What's a policeman got that you haven't got?

PAUL: Not a thing!

CLARA: Then why'd you give up?

PAUL: There's two kinds of women and I like the good ones better!

CLARA: Aw. That's a different story . . .

PAUL: Can't we—turn out—*one* light?

CLARA: If you are feeling self-conscious, turn out the floor lamp which is over your chair but leave the *other* ones *on*.

PAUL: You know lots of light increases the temperature of a room in summer?

CLARA: Yes, I can see you are sweating so turn out the floor lamp that you are sitting under.

(HE rises eagerly and starts turning out the lamps, one, two, and three, with a great alacrity. SHE objects at once, half springing up from the sofa with a defensive gesture.)

I said one lamp, not one, two, three! And leave the overhead on! What do you think this is? The tunnel of love or something on Pontchatrain beach? You turn two lamps back on.

PAUL: Can I leave the overhead off? (Pause) Can I leave the overhead off?

CLARA (Hoarsely): Yeah. Leave that one off. We don't need the overhead on.

PAUL: —You got a strange thing about lights!

CLARA: Well, I got nose neighbors!

PAUL: What d'you think they would think? Are they *evil*-minded?

CLARA: *Very!*—no, I mean . . .

(HE has crossed to the sofa and tries to wedge himself onto it beside her.)

(Fast!) You can't sit here. There's not room enough for two people on this sofa. Hey. Turn the overhead light on!

PAUL: You don't want the overhead light on.

CLARA: I do or I wouldn't of said so.

PAUL: I got sore eyes from that light. Let's leave it off, for God's sake!

CLARA: Alright, leave it off, but you sit back over there. I couldn't care less.

(HE coughs violently as he sits down in his chair.)

CLARA: Catchin' a cold?

PAUL: I'm hot. (Pause) Excuse me!

CLARA: My daughter she had her first real date tonight . . . yes, she did.

(Her voice is low and husky. As if unconsciously SHE reaches behind her and turns out one of the lamps. Only one remains lighted. HE leans eagerly forward with an enormous smile.)

PAUL: A big event in her life?

CLARA: Yeah. In *my* life, too.

PAUL: A big one in your life, too?

CLARA: Yes, my daughter's first date. I married a man that I loved with all of my heart and he's still living in it . . . He is! Still living in it, as alive as ever!

(SHE rises very slowly, all her self-consciousness gone for a moment, and crosses to the window. A guitar is played almost inaudibly as she hesitates before the soft blue window. *Come le rose* is sung very softly.)

PAUL (Rising): You like to stand at the window.

CLARA: I like to look at the sky.

PAUL: I do, too.

CLARA: The only trouble is neighbors.

(HE has come behind her and tentatively rests a hand on the small of her back. SHE plucks his hand off gently as a leaf fallen on her.)

PAUL: You got close neighbors. The only protection is to keep the shades down.

CLARA: Then I wouldn't be able to look at the sky.

PAUL (Leaning out of the window): Twinkle, twinkle little star!

CLARA: How I wonder what you are!

PAUL: Up above the world so high!

CLARA: Like a . . . like a *what?*

PAUL: —Like a *diamond* in the sky . . .

CLARA: Yeah, that's right, like a diamond. In the sky. Ha, ha, ha!

(His hand touches the small of her back again, a little bit lower this time.)

—She had on voile, white *voile* . . .

PAUL: Who?

CLARA: My daughter.

PAUL: Oh, we are back on your fav'rite subject again.

CLARA: You think I talk too much about my daughter?

PAUL: No, no, not a bit.

CLARA: It's very funny, the mother and the daughter both having a date the same night. Don't that seem funny?

PAUL: Nothing could be more natural in the world! You are not yet ready to take a back seat by a long shot.

CLARA: I have been very emotional all day. This is the anniversary of the day that I met my husband.

PAUL: And today you met me.

CLARA: That is not what I mean.

PAUL: No, but today you meet me! A woman can't live in a grave.

CLARA: —I had a crying spell this afternoon. You know how children can be, they are very unfeeling sometimes. I showed her this dress I had made her out of white voile. You know what that girl said to me? "Mother," she said, "you want me to look like curtains in a front window."

PAUL: That was very unfeeling.

CLARA: Oh, she changed her tune when I tried it on her! She was delighted with it when she looked in the mirror.—Don't look now but we're being watched from next door!

PAUL: That's what you get for making the house like a stage!—Pull the windowshade down.

CLARA: No, no, wait! Wait until she stops looking. We never speak. One time I caught her husband watching my daughter undress. Can you imagine a dirty old man like that? Watching a young girl undress through a bedroom window?

PAUL: Terrible!

CLARA: Yeah. He come out between the two houses and stood just like a tree! Right there on the lawn between this house and their house, eyes bugging out of his head while my daughter undressed!—She shouldn't of had the shade up, but a girl of fourteen is still innocent in her mind. And ought to stay so. Oh, did I give him Hail Columbia when I seen him at it! I happened to be outside myself at that time. And since that time we have never exchanged one word, not even hello!—him or that woman he lives with either, that strega!

(HE pulls the windowshade down. SHE pretends not to notice. HE faces her with a brilliant smile.)

CLARA: You like a player piano? This one is an electric, you don't have to pump the pedals. I will put a roll on it. Let's see now. "The Vienna"—(SHE has picked up a piano roll.)—"The

Vienna”—what’s that?—*Woods*, oh,—woods—yes, “The Vienna Woods” is a waltz, a real pretty waltz! Let’s play it, the piano’s electric, it’s an electric piano my husband bought before he was—Here, now, let’s have some music.

(SHE attaches the piano roll. While she is bending over to start it, HE comes up behind her and encircles her bent over figure with his arm, at the same time sucking in his breath with great violence.)

CLARA: HEY!—Somebody’s getting *familiar*! Sit back down where you were.

PAUL: One thing that I like about you is you don’t wear a girdle, I like that you don’t wear no girdle!

(The piano starts suddenly and very rapidly.)

CLARA (Shouting above the waltz): Is that too loud? Is that too fast or something? Something’s wrong with it, it’s going too fast or too loud!

PAUL: Turn it down just a little.

(SHE bends over to make another adjustment. HE reaches out and pokes a finger in the vicinity of her appendix.)

PAUL: *Soft! Soft!*

CLARA (Knocking his hand away): Oh, my goodness, I must of done the wrong thing, it’s playing faster.

PAUL: Yeah, you speeded it up.

CLARA: Speed it down a little. Do you know how?

(THEY stare helplessly at each other. The piano very loud and very fast.)

CLARA: (Almost screaming): *Fix it, fix it, please fix it!*

(Without removing his eyes from her face, HE reaches out and turns the piano down soft.)

CLARA (With a great sigh): —That’s—better . . .

(Pause)

PAUL: No, you don’t wear no girdle!

CLARA: Mr. Mangiacavallo!

PAUL: The shade is pulled down—we are two lonely people!

CLARA: Hey!

(HE plants a kiss on her throat.)

PAUL: Why keep up formalities, why keep formalities up?

CLARA: I am the mother of a 15 year old—girl . . .

PAUL: I loved you the moment I seen you, love at first sight, believe me!

CLARA: Don't be silly!

PAUL: A woman your age is in the prime of her life. You're plump, you're juicy!

CLARA: Hey!

PAUL: Why are you pushing against me? Hold still a minute! Let's get together, let's just press close together, we don't have to move! We don't have to move if we just press close together for half a minute, no more, that's all's necessary!

CLARA: Oh, now, please!

PAUL: Hold still, now, hold still, now, just a minute!

CLARA: Please, now, *please!*

PAUL: *Hold still!*

CLARA: *No, please!*

PAUL: Hold still, hold still, just let me get closer, just a little bit closer, that's all I need, now, just a little bit closer!

CLARA: No, no, no, no closer, no, closer, no, no, please, now, please now, let me go, now, let me go, now, let—me—*GO!*

(The piano roll comes to a violent finish. The paper flies off the roll and there is a loud mechanical noise, a rattle and a swish and a thud.)

CLARA (Breaking loose): The piano is stopped. Those people next door will hear us! What if my daughter comes home? If Rose should come in what would she think of her mother?

(HE plunges towards her, knocking the floorlamp over.)

CLARA: There, now, you've done it, you've knocked the floor-lamp over!—I have a reputation to uphold in this neighborhood. I am the mother of a 15 year old girl and people have tongues a mile long!—You have broken my floorlamp.

(SHE says this between gasps for breath. All this while HE is shuffling warily toward her like a boxer preparing for a knock out. His breath is louder than hers and the tip of his tongue protrudes between his teeth.)

CLARA: What are you trying to do, bite your tongue off like that? I think we better call this night to a halt! Yes, we'd better call a halt to this night, right now, this minute before it goes no further. Good night, Mr. Mangiacavallo. Go home, please! I got a headache and I am upset at my stomach. I might even throw up!

(SHE turns and stalks out of the parlor. A door slams in the rear. HE sighs and picks up the floorlamp. HE pulls the windowshade down. Then HE seats himself upon the piano stool in the attitude of *The Thinker* of Rodin.)

(After a while the voice of the Widow is heard from the back of the house.)

CLARA: Have you gone? Have you gone yet? Mr. Mangiacavallo, have you gone? (HE doesn't answer.)—Mr. Mangiacavallo—have you—*gone*?

(Still no answer. Presently SHE comes into the front room again. SHE wears a rayon kimono with scarlet poppies on it. SHE doesn't see him sitting in the dark room. SHE thinks that he has left. SHE raises a windowshade and begins to weep very softly and forlornly at the window, looking out into the soft blue night.)

PAUL (Springing up): *BOO!*

(SHE screams as the curtain comes down.)