

Casserole Girls

A Play in Two Acts

by

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Registered WGAw

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Casserole Girls

a comedy in two acts

Estelle... There's a black man in your kitchen!

SYNOPSIS

Good Southern Baptist Estelle has been estranged from her so-called heathen daughter, Jane, for over two decades until tonight, when she gets an unexpected phone call during her weekly bible study group, that Jane has died in a tragic car crash along with her longtime boyfriend. Being the good Christian woman that she is, Estelle invites the father of the boyfriend, George Delacourt, to the funeral, not realizing that the man just happens to be her favorite cookbook author -- and black.

Casserole Girls, explores the beliefs of the Elm Haven Missionary Baptist Church, especially their position on interracial marriage, that have led Estelle into disowning her only daughter and the secrets over all these years that have kept Estelle in the dark while she was trying to see the light.

SET REQUIREMENTS

Casserole Girls takes place in present day, primarily in Estelle's living room and kitchen. The kitchen will require a working electric stove and oven, as food will need to be prepared during the course of the play.

A funeral scene can take place in front of a curtain, which will only require several folding chairs for the cast, a podium for the preacher, and flowers for the funeral.

ABOUT THE PLAYWRIGHT

Tracy Lea Carnes is the author of the humorous novel and 2010 Pulpwood Queen Book Club pick *EXCESS BAGGAGE*. In 2009, her one act play, *UNDERSTANDING POLLY*, won the Sculpted Entertainment's 24 Hour playwriting contest and was performed at the East Bank Theater in Bossier City, Louisiana under the direction of Broadway actress Mamie Parris. Tracy was also a finalist in the Chris Moore Challenge during the first season of HBO's Project Greenlight with a 60 second comedy spoof she wrote and produced. Her political satire has also appeared nationally in The Huffington Post.

CASSEROLE GIRLS

Character Breakdown (in order of significance)

ESTELLE WILSON - Our main character, is a sixty-something widow woman, Southern, set in her ways, involved in her small town fundamentalist Baptist church, proud & principled. She is a retired home economics teacher. Good manners, Jesus Christ & casserole are her life.

GEORGE DELACOURT - A handsome, well educated, well-to-do black man in his mid to late sixties. He is a retired, well-respected and world-renowned chef from New Orleans.

ALICE ANN ARMSTRONG - A ditzy, obviously pregnant, seriously evangelical, woman in her late twenties, early thirties.

CLARISE – Estelle’s incessantly absent minded, righteous neighbor and best friend, in her mid 70s. (Most of Act I, part of Act II)

BROTHER STANLEY – The fire & brimstone preacher of the Elm Haven Missionary Baptist Church. (Only appears but carries Scene 6 of Act I)

MIMSY - A devout woman in her mid sixties. (Act I)

LILA - A reverent women in her forties. (Act I)

MARGARET – A pious women in her forties. (Act I)

CHRISTIAN MAN #1 & #2 – They hallelujah and amen everything Brother Stanley preaches. (Only appear in Scene 6 of Act I)

ACT I

Scene 1

The setting is ESTELLE WILSON's kitchen and living room, late winter. Estelle Wilson, a 60+ year old widow woman, Southern, set in her ways, involved in her evangelical Baptist church, proud & principled. She is a retired home economics teacher. Good manners, Jesus Christ & casserole are her life.

Estelle wears an apron and busies herself in the kitchen. As she cooks, she sings her favorite hymn, "Come and Dine."

She spreads four pre-cooked and shredded chicken breasts all over the bottom of a large casserole dish while continuing to sing and hum. She salts and peppers the chicken to taste. She then dumps an 8 ounce container of sour cream into a bowl together with an opened can of Cream of Mushroom soup and mixes the two together. Then, she spoons the concoction on top of the chicken in the casserole dish.

Estelle picks up a ziplock bag full of 25 Ritz Crackers and examines that the bag is zipped up tight, then places the bag on the counter and changes her hymn to the chorus of "There is Power in the Blood" as she crushes the crackers with her rolling pin; emphasizing the word "Power" as she pulverizes the crackers to her satisfaction. She sprinkles the crumbs on top of her casserole.

The telephone rings. She picks up her handset and talks as she removes a small pot of 1/2 cup of melted butter from the stove. She pours the butter all over the top of her casserole as she talks.

ESTELLE

Hello?.... Yes, Clarise.... Making casserole... No, this one's a little different. It's the one with the sour cream... Yes. The sour cream makes it much richer... Well of course I'm making it for bible study tonight... Uh, hmmm.... I guess I am the queen of casserole... Yes... Yes... I did do a cookbook, Clarise... Remember?... I edited the Ladies' Church Service League Cookbook two years ago... I typed it, contributed most of the recipes... I even copied it on the church copier... Yes, Clarise, you did do the hole-punching... And you were very good at it, too...

Estelle examines her casserole and then places it on top of her stove as she continues to talk on the phone and clean up her mess.

ESTELLE

...Glenna took a casserole over to Virgil McCrary's?... Clarise, he's only been a widower for two weeks... I told Glenna to at least wait a month... For heaven's sake... Well, the early bird does catch the worm...

Estelle pulls back a cloth to reveal rolls rising on a cookie sheet and then places the cloth back on top of them as she continues to talk on the phone.

ESTELLE

...oh yes, bible study... Right... No, I think it's still perfectly relevant... Ephesians is one of my favorite books in the bible, too... It's what's wrong with this society today. Girls don't know their place. Women aren't women any more. They should make it mandatory that children study Ephesians in school so they turn out like they are supposed to turn out... "Wives, submit yourselves unto your own husbands, as unto the Lord" Don't you just love that?... Oh... Well, Earl is an exception... And you've henpecked him splendidly, Dear... So, you're bringing the salad, right Clarise?...

Estelle puts out six plates, forks, napkins, etc as she continues to talk on the phone.

ESTELLE

Clarise, you have to put the walnuts in the salad. That's why it's called Walnut Delight... Didn't you follow the recipe in that cookbook I gave you?... Honestly...

Estelle peers into her pantry.

ESTELLE

...No, I have walnuts. Bring the salad. You can add them here... Really, Clarise, what were you thinking?... No, Skittles are not a good substitute for nuts. Although it would be quite colorful... Well, it's a good thing you've got me as a best friend and neighbor to save your blessed reputation! The Women's bible study of Elm Haven Missionary Baptist Church deserves perfection, even if there's only six of us... OK... OK.... Well, you're so welcome... Just come a few minutes early and it'll be our secret... Well, God bless you, too, Clarise... I'll see you then.

Estelle hangs up the phone and arranges the plates, silverware, napkins, etc on the bar to perfection as she sings the chorus to "Trust and Obey." She makes sure that everything in her house is arranged perfectly. She wipes a spot off of a plate with her apron.

ESTELLE

Oh, yes. Cleanliness is definitely next to Godliness.

SCENE 2

Estelle removes the homemade rolls from the oven as the door bell rings. The front door is open and through the screen door we can see ALICE ANN ARMSTRONG, a young, obviously pregnant, seriously evangelical woman in her late twenties at the door. She carries a large Tupperware box of uniquely decorated cupcakes and, of course, her bible.

ESTELLE

Come on in, Alice Ann. I've got my hands full with the dinner rolls.

Alice Ann enters the house and brings the cupcakes into the kitchen.

Estelle quickly removes the dinner rolls from the cookie sheet and places them in a basket as Alice Ann sets her Tupperware box and bible down and hugs Estelle as if she were family.

ALICE ANN

Oh, Miss Estelle, everything looks and smells absolutely heavenly. Dinner rolls from scratch? Oh, how I wish I was half as talented as you.

ESTELLE

Please. You are talented. And rolls are too easy.

ALICE ANN

I don't think I have the recipe.

ESTELLE

Yes you do. You've got the Service League cookbook, right?

ALICE ANN

Yes.

ESTELLE

Then you have the recipe. Easy homemade dinner rolls. Page nineteen. Nothing to it. So much better than those boxed up, ready to serve ones.

ALICE ANN

But the time it takes to make them... I'm always chasing the children or...

ESTELLE

You take your stress out on the dough, Dear. That's what's wrong with people today. They're stressed. If they made my homemade dinner rolls every night, they'd be cool, calm and completely relaxed. No need for that silly yoga class I saw advertised in the paper today.

Estelle has set up a cake stand for Alice Ann to display her bible themed cupcakes upon. Alice Ann begins to arrange them on the cake stand.

ALICE ANN

I don't believe in yoga. The way that they manipulate and contort their bodies like they do... and of course secretly chanting prayers to Satan... It's not Christian.

ESTELLE

Where'd you learn that?

ALICE ANN

On the Fox! That Sean Hannity sure knows his stuff. Like, what that pose that they do, you know "downward dog" really means.

ESTELLE

What's that, hun?

ALICE ANN

Bowing to the devil himself!... Honestly... And that Patrice Carroll is teaching that class down at the County Extension Office. She was such a hussy in high school. And now we know she's also a devil worshiper to boot.

ESTELLE

I didn't know that... Well, Patrice Carroll is an Episcopalian....

(looks at cupcakes)

Those cupcakes look delicious but what's that gray blob on there?

ALICE ANN

It's supposed to be the Tower of Babel. I had to take cupcakes to Jacob's Sunday School class this past Sunday ... See, this one's the Tower of Babel... and that one's a lion for Daniel & the Lion's Den... And this one... Sodom & Gamorrah in flames!

ESTELLE

How very... inspirational... Oh, before I forget, I've got a special present for the new baby.

Estelle sashays off stage for a few beats then emerges with a beautiful crocheted baby blanket.

ALICE ANN

Oh, Estelle, it's beautiful. Thank you...
(starts to cry)
You spoil me too much.

ESTELLE

I don't really have a daughter to spoil and indulge. You're what I would have hoped... Well, you're welcome.

The door bell rings again. It is CLARISE carrying a bowl of salad. Clarise is an absent minded woman in her mid 70s.

CLARISE

Hello... Estelle?...

Clarise enters the house. Alice Ann stashes the baby blanket away with her things and returns to displaying her cupcakes on the plate.

CLARISE

Oh, I hope I'm not too late... I have to send a Jello mold with Earl to the Men's Devotional lunch tomorrow. He was going to take a can of Viennie sausages, can you believe that? Had to stop what I was doing, head over to the Piggly Wiggly and pick up some lime Jello and Cool-Whip.

ESTELLE

Did you pick up walnuts, too?

CLARISE

Estelle, you know darn good and well that my lime Jello mold doesn't call for wal... oh, for the salad!

Estelle reaches into her pantry and pulls out a bag of walnuts. She tosses them to Clarise.

ESTELLE

I swear, Clarise. Wind your watch. Scratch your hiney.

CLARISE

Well, I did buy some of that gingko stuff for my memory the other day... but I keep forgetting to take it.

Clarise dumps the walnuts into the salad and tosses it in the bowl.

ESTELLE

You keep this up, we might have to put you on the prayer list.

CLARISE

Oh, rats!

ESTELLE

What?

CLARISE

I forgot my bible, too!

ALICE ANN

This calls for prayer, Ladies...

All three ladies clasp hands and bow their heads.

ALICE ANN

Dear Lord... you have given each of us a little light, a light that shines so bright in our minds, Lord... But one little light is not shining as bright as the others these days... We ask you Lord, please help our dear friend, Sister Clarise... to... to either change that light bulb of hers that used to glow so bright in her head... For it used to be glowing like a hundred watt porch light... but now it's down to like a forty-five or thirty watt appliance bulb or one of those sad little flickering yellow bug lights... So dear Lord, we ask that you bring her back to something more akin to a patio flood light... not one of those energy efficient, solar-powered models, mind you, but one that doesn't care that it burns up mass quantities of fossil fuel with its brightness ... or, dear Lord, in the very least, we ask, if it is your will, Lord... that you help her... screw that bulb in tighter... so tight that it makes that light shine so brilliant... so bright and brilliant and for so long... just like that twisty coil light bulb I bought the other day at the Wal-Marts... That it burn so bright and for so long that we here in the Elm Haven Missionary Baptist Church Ladies Bible Study all have to wear designer sun glasses, it burns so bright!... So bright in fact that airplanes use it as a beacon... So bright that the wise men...

Estelle coughs for Alice Ann to end the prayer.

ALICE ANN

Well... we ask that you make it a really bright light
in Clarise's head ... in Jesus' name we pray... Amen.

CLARISE & ESTELLE

Amen!

SCENE 3

*The ladies of the Women's Bible Study of Elm Haven
Missionary Baptist Church have all gathered at
Estelle's home - Clarise, of course, and MIMSEY, a
righteous woman approximately Estelle's age; LILA
and MARGARET, reverent women in their forties; and
Alice Ann. They sit in the living room and conduct
bible study.*

CLARISE

(reading)

For you were once darkness, but now you are light in
the Lord...

ESTELLE

Oh, amen.

CLARISE

(reading)

Live as children of light, for the fruit of the light
consists in all goodness, righteousness and truth, and
find out what pleases the Lord...

MIMSEY

Living a good and righteous life in His eyes, of
course.

CLARISE

(reading)

Have nothing to do with the fruitless deeds of
darkness, but rather expose them. For it is shameful
even to mention what the disobedient do in secret...

LILA

Live a life of sin, that's what they do.

MARGARET

Oh, Estelle, you know this one, all too well... God
bless you, honey.

CLARISE

(reading)

Be very careful, then, how you live -- not as unwise
but as wise, making the most of every opportunity,

(MORE)

CLARISE (cont'd)

because the days are evil. Therefore do not be foolish, but understand what the Lord's will is. Do not get drunk on wine, which leads to debauchery. Instead, be filled with the Spirit...

MIMSEY

Hallelujah!

ALICE ANN

I got drunk on wine once. I can safely say it does lead to debauchery...

ESTELLE

You can?

ALICE ANN

Why yes. I debauched that wine right up all over the floor of my dorm room. It wasn't very pretty.

THE LADIES ALL LAUGH.

CLARISE

Hallelujah, indeed.

(reading)

Wives, submit to your husbands as to the Lord. For the husband is the head of the wife as Christ is the head of the church, his body, of which he is the Savior. Now as the church submits to Christ, so also wives should submit to their husbands in everything.

LILA

Gospel to live by.

ALICE ANN

I know I submit to Stuart every day... Why this morning I submitted the credit card bill to him and I said, "Stuart, if you don't pay this credit card bill today..."

LILA

Alice Ann, I think what that means there is to be submissive to Stuart for he is the head of the household.

ALICE ANN

Oh... Submissive, huh?

(thinking)

If I do that, the lawn would never get mowed on Saturday mornings nor would he pick up his underwear off the bathroom floor or service the car or...

ESTELLE

Or it could just mean be a good wife the way God meant for us to be a good wife.

ALICE ANN

Oh, right, Miss Estelle... You know, if it weren't for you being my home-ec teacher back in high school, I don't think I'd be as good a wife and homemaker as I am. You prepared me for such a remarkable life with Stuart.

(starting to cry)

The values you taught me, well, you're like a second mother to me...

ESTELLE

You are what I wished... Well... You turned out like God meant for you to turn out.

MARGARET

It takes a village sometimes.

MIMSEY

Yes, it does.

LILA

You don't miss working?

ALICE ANN

It is hard with just one paycheck but with two other children and another on the way, I'm needed at home. We're thinking about home schooling. Public school is not for us. It's full of the wrong people and the wrong influences. Satan teaches there now.

MARGARET

Yes, he does. I do believe that new principal is not only Lucifer himself, but I think he might be a Democrat, too.

CLARISE

You know, I think you got out at just the right time.

ESTELLE

Oh, just indeed.

MARGARET

Not every woman could pull off raising a child, taking care of a husband AND having a career but you did it with such style, grace and perfection, Estelle. You are an inspiration to us all.

ESTELLE

Not everything turned out like it was supposed to have. Some things I didn't succeed at, at all. I fell very short of perfection, as a mother anyway.

MIMSEY

You did your very best. I feel certain that one day your daughter will come to her senses and give up the evil lifestyle she has been living all these years.

ESTELLE

Highly unlikely.

CLARISE

Public school is a breeding ground for evil. As much as you tried to bring good into that school, they should not have pushed you out like that. Why starting the day with a prayer and a bible verse should be mandatory in school. Certainly not a firing offense.

ESTELLE

True. I have few regrets but the one thing I do regret is not keeping a tighter watch on Jane at that school. Oh, how I regret not sending her to a private church school.

ALICE ANN

Or homeschooling. I'm not going to let the left poison my children. No, ma'am. Fox News says homeschooling is the new private school. The bible is our only real textbook.

ESTELLE

Amen, Alice Ann... Well, Ladies, it seems we've gotten off the subject of bible study. Perhaps it's a good time to fill our bellies with my Sour Cream Chicken Casserole, Clarise's Walnut Delight, and Alice Ann's bible story cupcakes.

The ladies rise and head to the kitchen to help themselves to dinner.

LILA

Walnut Delight?

CLARISE

Yes. I put walnuts, cranberries and even some feta cheese in the salad. I got the cheese at the BX over in Bossier. Not sure what feta cheese is, though... It was all crumbled up so I guess that's one of those fancy ways of calling it confetti cheese!

Lila takes a bite of the salad and approves.

CLARISE

It's from that fancy cookbook that Estelle loves so much... The George-s Experiment...

ESTELLE

...'The George Experience,' Clarise.

CLARISE

Oh, yeah. The 's' in George is silent apparently.

ALICE ANN

I hate those silent letters. It's like they're trying to confuse us or something.

Alice Ann picks up her knife and brandishes it ala Psycho.

ALICE ANN

It's a k-nife, people! K-nife.

Margaret admires the casserole as she tenderly takes the knife from Alice Ann's hand.

MARGARET

And the casserole?...

ESTELLE

Very easy. Chicken breasts, one cup of sour cream, a can of cream of mushroom soup, Ritz Crackers, melted butter, salt & pepper. That's it. So easy it ought to be a sin. I doubled the recipe of course.

MARGARET

Doubly sinful then.

ALICE ANN

You taught us how to make this in school.

ESTELLE

Yes, yes, I do believe I did. It's a good recipe to keep in one's repertoire... I taught a casserole recipe every week. Math and English are necessary, mind you, but for a housewife, a good casserole recipe is as essential as air! It says that you care and that you baked it with love... You can quote me on that!

MIMSEY

I took this very casserole to the Elliot's the other day. Loraine had that (whispers) *growth* (back to normal) cut off, you know. And well, Gordon may be handy with a carburetor but he's not very handy in the kitchen. I told him, "a microwave is not a complicated thing. Stick it in, push the button, watch the dish spin round and round. Ding! Dinner is served." Easy!

MARGARET

I took chicken tetrazini over there one night. Thank goodness I did. Why, I caught Gordon heating up a can of Spaghetti rings with a blow torch.

ESTELLE

Sometimes I think men should have taken home-ec just for those particular situations when we're not available. I at least taught Arthur how to heat up a Swanson's Hungry Man... although he could never quite grasp the concept of folding the foil back over the desert.

Lila picks up a cupcake and recognizes the decoration.

LILA

Sodom and Gomorrah, am I right?!

*The telephone rings. Estelle answers the phone.
The Ladies continue talking about the cupcakes.*

ESTELLE

Hello... Yes, this is Estelle Wilson... uh, huh...

Estelle's face turns grim. The Ladies react and become silent.

ESTELLE

Oh... I see... OK... Sure... I'll be expecting your call-back then... Thank you.

*Estelle hangs up the phone. She is shocked;
gobsmacked.*

CLARISE

Estelle?

ESTELLE

There's been a car wreck. Apparently my daughter's been killed.

The Ladies all react.

CLARISE

Let us pray...

SCENE 4

All of the Ladies are dressed in black and gathered at Estelle's except for Clarise who is absent. There are all kinds of casseroles and food in the kitchen and the dining room. The ladies are in the living room, eating and mingling.

LILA

So let me get this straight... Jane has been living with some man for the past several years in New Orleans?

ESTELLE

Apparently. I didn't know.

MARGARET

Where did she go during the hurricanes?

ESTELLE

She didn't ask to come here. I didn't even know she was living in New Orleans until just now. Last I heard, she was in Colorado or somewhere like that.

MIMSEY

What on earth was she doing in Colorado?

ESTELLE

It certainly wasn't a church ski trip, that's for sure.

ALICE ANN

I love our church ski trip... Skiing for Jesus! I even have this T-shirt that says "Jesus is my..."

MARGARET

(scolding)

Alice Ann, please!

ALICE ANN

Sorry...

ESTELLE

Her 'MAN'S' name was Sidney apparently. I don't know anything about him. But Sidney's father is coming here later to attend the funeral.

LILA

What about attending the funeral of his own son?

ESTELLE

Says he's having him cremated for a memorial service at a later date. So the family can all be together or something to that effect.

ALICE ANN

Oh, how gross! That's not very Christian-like.

ESTELLE

He asked to have Jane cremated but I said no.

ALICE ANN

I don't know why people would want to be cremated. I mean, especially if they are going to go straight to hell anyway... That's twice baked... Eew.

ESTELLE

Anyway, they weren't married. No bond other than a mortgage apparently... So I have the final say-so on her affairs it seems... And so this man... Sidney's father, is coming up for Jane's funeral this afternoon... It's all caught me so off guard... I sort of told him he could stay here overnight.

CLARISE

Here at your house?!

MARGARET

Estelle! You don't know this man. What if he's... he's...

ALICE ANN

...not Baptist!

ESTELLE

He seemed very nice on the phone. Well spoken, anyway. Friendly. We don't have a hotel here in Elm Haven. Not one that isn't infested with Lord only knows what... He's coming all the way up from New Orleans. I've got this big house. For some reason I just feel it's the Christian thing to do.

MIMSEY

Jane left home over twenty years ago and you haven't heard from her since. And now...

LILA

It's like she's died all over again for you, Estelle.

MARGARET

She didn't even come back for Arthur's funeral, did she?

ESTELLE

There was a really beautiful spray sent without a card. I'm sure that was her. I think one of her so called friends from high school must have told her that her father passed. I certainly didn't tell her. I didn't even know where she was. How could I?

ALICE ANN

This must be so hard on you.

ESTELLE

The day she left she was basically dead to me. She had no money. Nothing. I have no idea what became of her. Living on the streets for all I knew. Arthur and I wanted her to prepare for a life in the Church, attend Baptist College, maybe become a youth minister or even a teacher but she wasn't going to have it. No, sir... I told her if she wasn't going to live a true and righteous life, well, she was on her own.

LILA

Oh, Estelle...

ESTELLE

And so she ran away and I have never seen her since... I guess she believed I would disapprove of her life. Well, of course I would have!... Oh, if she had just gone to Baptist College like I wanted her to...

ALICE ANN

I met Stuart at Baptist College. We were attending bible bingo night at the B-S-U. He was so cute in his "What Would Jesus Do" sweatshirt.

(sighs)

I'm sure Jane would have loved it if she had just gone there. I know I did.

MARGARET

It would have been the best thing for her. But Jane was a different sort of bird if I remember.

ESTELLE

I used to joke with Arthur all the time that Jane must have been swapped at birth. She was a square peg and we were a round hole.

MIMSEY

I never could get that child to listen in Sunday School. She hid books inside her King James bible.

ESTELLE

She loved to read. Always reading. Anything she could get her hands on. I just wish the devil hadn't gotten his hands on her. God only knows how she turned out. I don't even want to think about it. Such a waste.

MIMSEY

She brought a copy of 'Catcher in the Rye' to Sunday School that one time. I was shocked. Shocked, I tell you...

ESTELLE

I know you were, Mimsey. And I'm just sorry you couldn't get those books banned from the library... At least I thought I could ban my daughter from there. Obviously that didn't work.

ALICE ANN

Another reason for home schooling...

LILA

Control what they read. Christian books for a Christian mind.

ALICE ANN

And none of this evolutionary nonsense. My children are all being taught the one and only truth... creationism.

MIMSEY

I know that's right.

ALICE ANN

We're planning a trip to the Creation Museum next year, you know.

LILA

We took the kids a few years ago. You'll love it, especially the real live replica of Noah's ark. You can see the stalls and everything!

ALICE ANN

I always wondered how Noah packed all them animals in that boat and now I can actually see for myself. Shame Noah couldn't have had one of them Carnival Cruise line ships for an ark... I think he could have saved the dinosaurs if only he could have booked them all on a Carnival Dreamliner.

MIMSEY

So who was this Sidney fellow?

ESTELLE

I don't know. Some man she shacked up with apparently... Who knows.

MIMSEY

And he... how did they...?

ESTELLE

Car wreck is all I know.

MARGARET

Maybe they were drunk.

ESTELLE

I don't know anything. I don't even know why I'm doing all of this... I don't even know why I'm letting this man stay at my house...

LILA

Because no matter what... by the grace of God, you're still her mother and you're a good Christian, Estelle.

The door bell rings. Estelle dries her eyes, goes to the door and opens it. GEORGE, a very handsome and well-to-do black man in his mid sixties stands at the door, dressed in a very well tailored yet conservative dark suit.

ESTELLE

Yes, may I help you?

GEORGE

I'm looking for Estelle Wilson's home.

ESTELLE

I'm Estelle.

GEORGE

I'm George Delacourt, Sidney's father.

ESTELLE

(suprised)

Oh... Oh, come in, please. Yes.

The Ladies are also surprised and whisper amongst themselves as George enters the house. He feels a little conspicuous.

ESTELLE

(flustered)

Oh, you must be hungry from your trip. We've got plenty of food.

GEORGE

Actually, I would love to use your restroom, please, if you don't mind?

ESTELLE

Oh, sure. Right through... right through there. Second door on the left.

Estelle points George in the direction of the bathroom (off stage) and George exits. Estelle looks back at the Ladies who have all been watching intently.

ESTELLE

Oh my.

SCENE 5

George stands alone in the kitchen helping himself to a plate of food as the Ladies perch in the living room and scrutinize him in silence. Clarise enters the house, carrying a large casserole dish, oblivious to the scene. She saunters into the kitchen, acknowledges George awkwardly, and unwraps the casserole dish she has placed on the counter. She then moseys over to the Ladies in the living room, never leaving George out of her site.

CLARISE

Estelle... There's a black man in your kitchen... Did your dishwasher break again?

MIMSEY

(whispering)

That's the father of the man Jane was shackled up with.

CLARISE

Noooooooooo!...

The Ladies all nod in affirmation.

CLARISE

Well, he is a little overdressed for a Maytag repairman.

ESTELLE

Uhm, George, do make yourself at home.

George finishes loading his plate, grabs a glass of iced tea as he crosses the stage. He stops in front of Estelle's cookbook collection and smiles, then crosses to the living room and nestles himself in the middle of the Ladies.

ESTELLE

I'm so sorry for your loss, Mr... Delacourt, is it?

GEORGE

Yes. Thank you... Call me George, please. After all, we're almost fam... George is fine.

ESTELLE

You must have left awfully early this morning to make it all the way up here so fast.

GEORGE

It was a long drive but it wasn't too bad.

CLARISE

Is that your Mercedes outside?

GEORGE

Uh, yes it is.

CLARISE

It's so big and so new. Expensive, even.

MIMSEY

What is it that you do down there in New Orleans?

GEORGE

I just recently retired actually.

ALICE ANN

You don't live in that Ninth Ward down there, do you?

GEORGE

Uhm, no. I live on St. Charles actually. I renovated a very lovely old Georgian mansion some famous actor once owned.

LILA

With your family?

GEORGE

Well, my wife and I bought it before I retired...

MARGARET

Your wife didn't make the trip?

GEORGE

I'm widowed. About five years now.

CLARISE

Oh... Estelle's been a widow for almost ten.

GEORGE

Is that so?...

ESTELLE

Do you have other children?

GEORGE

I have two others... daughters. One lives in Paris and teaches at the Sorbonne and the other one is a lawyer in California.

ALICE ANN

They aren't married?

GEORGE

No, they're both married. Amelia, who lives in Paris, is married to a Frenchman, an architect. They have two children. And Sophie, she's a lawyer and is married to a vintner. Three children.

ALICE ANN

Vintner?

GEORGE

They own a winery outside of Santa Barbara. You've probably had their wine, Conifer Valley?...

ESTELLE

We don't drink wine...

GEORGE

Oh. Well, it's very exquisite. They produce zinfandel mainly. They've won several awards.

ALICE ANN

I tried that white zin in the box once... Stuart, that's my husband, got some in college this one time... I was so drunk I swear I saw Satan coming out of the B-S-U... Should be called 'White Sin.'

CLARISE

What did your son do?

GEORGE

He was a master sommelier.

MIMSEY

Do what?

GEORGE

He was an expert on wine.

ALICE ANN

So he probably drank a lot of wine out of them boxes then?

GEORGE

Well, not to get drunk, no. And not out of a box. He used to work for me until I sold off my restaurant

(MORE)

GEORGE (cont'd)
chain, then he stayed on with the chain to oversee the wine selection.

ESTELLE
Restaurant chain?

GEORGE
ZhORsh... French for George. The flagship restaurant is in New Orleans, two in New York, one in San Francisco, three in Los Angeles... oh, and one in Aspen, Colorado.

ALICE ANN
Oh, a chain... Like Applebee's or Red Lobster?

GEORGE
Not really, no. We service an upscale clientele. I have James Beard awards... Michelin stars...

The Ladies all stare blankly.

GEORGE
...It's a very fancy restaurant chain.

ALICE ANN
Fancier than Red Lobster?

CLARISE
Alice Ann, I think he's more like an Olive Garden.

GEORGE
I noticed that Estelle has a few of my cookbooks actually. I'm uhm.... I'm the George of 'The ZhORsh Experience.'

ESTELLE
You are not?!

GEORGE
Yes, I am.

CLARISE
So the 's' really is silent?

GEORGE
Pretty much.

ESTELLE
Oh, my. One year I gave your cookbook to every one here.

MIMSEY

We all have it.

GEORGE

Thank you. That's flattering.

CLARISE

I made Walnut Delight the other night for bible study from your cookbook.

GEORGE

Did you now? How'd you like it?

LILA

It was delicious.

MIMSEY

Sometimes it's hard to get certain ingredients here at the Piggly Wiggly but...

LILA

...Some things I don't even know how to pronounce, let alone know what they are.

CLARISE

Like why do you shave chocolate on top of some of your dishes?

GEORGE

Excuse me?

CLARISE

This one time I bought veal over at the BX in Bossier to make Veal Fru Fru something or other and you called for shaving truffles all over it. So I used some left over *Valentine's* candy I still had... Well now I see why you left that as an optional ingredient...

ESTELLE

No, black truffles are a fungi, right Mr... George? I told you this, Clarise. They are not to be confused with Russell Stover.

CLARISE

I thought it meant dark chocolate truffles...

GEORGE

I'm sure your version of Veal Tartufo Nero was wonderful.

CLARISE

My husband, Earl, did have three helpings.

GEORGE

I believe recipes are to be left up to the interpreter. They should be flexible.

ALICE ANN

Like when you call for wine. I don't ever buy wine. Not after the devil at the B-S-U incident anyway. So I substitute with grape juice. My kids drink it right out of those juice boxes so I just use one of those. Grapsey Grape is my favorite.

LILA

You were on that Iron Chef show once, weren't you?

GEORGE

Why, yes. I was actually.

MARGARET

You beat that Italian chef that's on there, didn't you?

GEORGE

Only by one point. One lousy point. Mario won't speak to me now.

The door bell rings.

ESTELLE

That's probably the funeral home with the limo to take us to the service.

Lila crosses to answer the door.

GEORGE

You're just having a graveside service, correct?

ESTELLE

Yes. I couldn't see the point in having a service at the church in lieu of what...Well... Yes, just a graveside service.

CLARISE

Are you a God-fearing man, George?

GEORGE

Excuse me?

CLARISE

Religion... Are you a religious man?

GEORGE

Somewhat. I'm Catholic by faith.

ALICE ANN

Oh, so you're not a Christian then?

GEORGE

Beg your pardon?

ALICE ANN

If you would like to accept Jesus Christ as your savior, I'm sure Brother Stanley would be more than happy to help save you this afternoon at the service.

GEORGE

Uhm... Well... I... No, that's quite all right.

ALICE ANN

It's no problem, really...

SCENE 6

The main curtain is closed and the graveside service is set up in front of the curtain. The only props are a few baskets and sprays of flowers and a few nice houseplants. All of the Ladies, George, and a few EXTRAS, including CHRISTIAN MAN #1 & #2, who are overflowing with the Holy Spirit, are gathered for the service. A podium is set up for BROTHER STANLEY, a fire and brimstone sort of preacher. George stands by himself, away from the rest of the group, out of place.

BROTHER STANLEY

Dearest Christian friends... and Mr. Day-la-kuuuur... A lost lamb has been returned to our flock...

CHRISTIAN MAN #1

Amen!

BROTHER STANLEY

Sadly, however, she has been returned to our flock too late... Jane Wilson was once a little lamb under the protection of God and Jesus Christ right here at Elm Haven Missionary Baptist Church... Yes, she was... But by circumstances only the good Lord himself knows... she was tempted by the devil and lured away from this flock... Matthew 16:26 says, "For what will it profit a man if he gains the whole world and forfeits his soul? Or what shall a man give in return for his soul?"... Young Jane Wilson thought she wanted the world and for that world, she sold her soul to get it. Let this be a lesson to us all that a righteous and good life served in the presence of the Lord is a rich and glorious life ... Hebrews 3:12 - "Take care, brothers, lest there be in any of you an evil, unbelieving heart, leading you to fall away from the living God"...

CHRISTIAN MAN #2

That's right!

BROTHER STANLEY

We see our own mortality through our dear lost Sister Jane... Paul's letter to the Corinthians 15:28 -
"Therefore, my beloved brothers, be steadfast, immovable, always abounding in the work of the Lord, knowing that in the Lord your labor is not in vain."

CHRISTIAN MAN #1

Hallelujah, Brother!

BROTHER STANLEY

Let this woman's untimely death be an example to the flock of lambs that have not lost their way - Hebrews 12:2 says "look to Jesus, the founder and perfecter of our faith, who for the joy that was set before him endured the cross, despising the shame, and is seated at the right hand of the throne of God"... Because when you take the love of Jesus Christ into your heart you are given the key to the heavenly kingdom.

CHRISTIAN MAN #2

Amen, Brother!

BROTHER STANLEY

Hebrews 7:25 tells us "consequently, he is able to save to the uttermost those who draw near to God through him, since he always lives to make intercession for them."... Revelation 21:21, it says: "And the twelve gates were twelve pearls; every several gate was of one pearl: and the street of the city was pure gold, as it were transparent glass." Oh, what a beautiful sight to behold indeed!... John 14:2 "There are many mansions in my Father's House." Friends, when you take the Lord Jesus Christ into your heart, you will walk on streets of gold and live in the biggest mansion you have ever seen! Won't that be something?

CHRISTIAN MAN #2

That's right, Brother!

BROTHER STANLEY

Your mansion in heaven is bigger than the Governor's Mansion... Bigger than Brad Pitt's smancy fancy Hollywood house.... Bigger than that new triple wide I saw recently out there over on County Road 22... Because when you go to your reward with righteousness and Christ in your heart, he's gonna reward you brothers and sisters... That's right... He's going to let you walk down your street paved with gold and he's going to let you move into that mansion - you've earned it my friends!...

CHRISTIAN MAN #1

Ain't that the truth!?

BROTHER STANLEY

Revelations 21:6 through 8 - "He said to me: It is done. I am the Alpha and the Omega, the Beginning and the End. To him who is thirsty I will give to drink without cost from the spring of the water of life. He who overcomes will inherit all this, and I will be his God and he will be my son. But the cowardly, the unbelieving, the vile, the murderers, the sexually immoral" - and you know who I'm talking about - "those who practice magic arts, the idolaters and all liars -- their place will be in the fiery lake of burning sulfur!"

CHRISTIAN MAN #2

Amen!

Estelle wails.

BROTHER STANLEY

Folks, it ain't that hard to understand... Be saved and the Lord will save you... I tell you - you got to prepare, for the time is nigh, folks... Heaven is going to split wide open and when it does, what a mighty sight to behold. The whole congregation of the Elm Haven Missionary Baptist Church will fly up to meet their Father in heaven and sit by his side!

CHRISTIAN MAN #1

And pick out our mansions!

BROTHER STANLEY

That's right, brother!... And this cemetery... this cemetery is going to crack wide open with the righteous ascending to heaven right along with us!

CHRISTIAN MAN #2

Arthur Wilson will be leading the flock home!

BROTHER STANLEY

Arthur Wilson, Jane's father, indeed... As we bury our sister Jane next to her father here, we can only hope that Arthur is there to counsel her, guide her, talk some sense into her... to cast away her evil ways and intentions and embrace the Lord so that she, too, may sit next to her father and his father, and his father before him... to have an eternal life with Jesus in heaven... Not burning forever in damnation!...

Estelle and Alice Ann both wail.

BROTHER STANLEY

Sister Estelle... congregation... and you too, Mr. Day-lah-kuuur... Let us pray... Dear Lord, we pray that Jane has finally found redemption in the eyes of her Lord God and Jesus Christ and that she is not burning in the eternal hell fire of damnation...

Estelle and Alice Ann wail again.

BROTHER STANLEY

...but instead, we hope that she is embraced by her Lord Jesus Christ!... We pray that right now, Dear Lord, Sister Jane is picking out her wallpaper in that great big mansion we hope you have built for her... And that you take care of her mother, Estelle, to reassure her that her long lost daughter, Jane, has indeed gone to a good place... a safe place... a big huge glistening kind of place... a cool and comforting refuge... not a hot and evil sort of a pit... that she be taken care of by her deceased father, Arthur, who was a good and righteous man in your eyes... And we pray for the son of Mr. Day-lah-kuuur, that he, too, may find redemption and eternal salvation, wherever he may be... Amen.

CHRISTIAN MAN #1 & #2

Amen!

BROTHER STANLEY

James 5:19 through 20 says "My brothers, if anyone among you wanders from the truth and someone brings him back, let him know that whoever brings back a sinner from his wandering will save his soul from death and will cover a multitude of sins".... Mr. Day-lah-kuuur has brought back such a sinner to our flock and for this... for this he shall be rewarded!... Our righteous sister, Alice Ann Armstrong, tells us that you, Mr. Day-lah-kuuur, are not a Christian in the eyes of the Lord and wish to be saved today...

GEORGE

Excuse me?

BROTHER STANLEY

Don't be modest, now Mr. Day-lah-kuuur, come on down here and receive your just reward by accepting Jesus Christ as your Savior!

George reluctantly approaches the podium. Brother Stanley lays one hand on the Bible and one on George's head.

BROTHER STANLEY

Mr. Day-lah-kuuur, do you accept Jesus Christ, our true and loving Lord as your Savior?

GEORGE

... of course, but....

BROTHER STANLEY

...For God so loved the world that he gave his only begotten son so that we may have everlasting life... Did you know that, Mr. Day-lah-kuuuur?

GEORGE

I've heard that, yes.

BROTHER STANLEY

Through the love of Christ and this congregation, you my friend, are now saved!...

CHRISTIAN MAN #1 & #2

Hallelujah!

Everyone claps. George could not feel more conspicuous or embarrassed than he is right now.

BROTHER STANLEY

You stay on a good and righteous path now, Mr. Day-lah-kuuuur... stay away from wine and liquor and all other things evil in this world... perhaps find yourself with some good and descent employment... you won't need no help from the government then... you won't find yourself in any jail cell neither... No, sir.... and then... hopefully someday real soon, on that glorious day of the rapture, you'll be flying up to heaven, leaving that awful government housing behind you, to finally claim your very own mansion in the sky! Won't that be something?

GEORGE

Won't that be something?!

ACT IISCENE 1

George brings his overnight bag into the house as Estelle, overwhelmed, sets down her bible and examines all the casseroles which cover every vacant spot in her kitchen and dining room. Lots of houseplants and some of the flowers from the funeral service now decorate her house as well.

GEORGE

Estelle, where do you want me?

ESTELLE

Oh, uhm, down the hall... first door on the right.

GEORGE

Thank you.

George exits off stage as Alice Ann enters the house; her arms overloaded with plants and flowers.

ALICE ANN

I think we're going to need another pack of thank-you notes, Miss Estelle!... I swear, even some of the Methodists sent flowers.

ESTELLE

Thank you, Alice Ann. I don't know what I'd do without you.

Alice Ann curiously holds up an Antherium plant.

ALICE ANN

Miss Estelle, what the heck kind of plant is this?

ESTELLE

Oh, I think that's a tropical plant, Dear.

ALICE ANN

It looks obscene is what it looks like. Like the plant's got a little dingleberry on it.

ESTELLE

A what?

ALICE ANN

A dingleberry! You know... (whispering) a penis.

ESTELLE

Who sent it?

Alice Ann examines the card.

ALICE ANN

Well no wonder... Patrice Carroll, the Yoga Lady, sent it... I guess this must be 'Up Dog.'

ESTELLE

Alice Ann... at least she was nice enough to send something.

ALICE ANN

True.

(whispering)

Is he still staying here?

ESTELLE

Yes, I do believe so.

ALICE ANN

He's a black man!

ESTELLE

You noticed?

ALICE ANN

Does that mean his son is black, too?

ESTELLE

Generally that's how it works.

Alice Ann pulls out her iPhone from her purse.

ALICE ANN

I have a concordance app for my phone and I looked up what God says about interracial relationships. He doesn't like it, you know?

ESTELLE

What does yours say?

ALICE ANN

It's from Deuteronomy... Deuteronomy, don't you just love saying that... Deuteronomy, Deuteronomy, Deuteron...

ESTELLE

...Alice Ann, what does it say, as if I don't know already?

ALICE ANN

Oh, it says, (reading) "Do not intermarry with them. Do not give your daughters to their sons or take their daughters for your sons, for they will turn your sons away from following me to serve other gods, and the Lord's anger will burn against you and will quickly destroy you." He's right. Some things should never mix.

ESTELLE

I believe that.

ALICE ANN

Except when I'm pregnant. I mix all kinds of things that should never go together. Why yesterday I ate Underwood Deviled Ham spread all over a chocolate Pop-Tart... Not bad actually.

George returns to the living room. He has taken off his coat and tie. Alice Ann and Estelle revert to their original tasks. Alice Ann suspiciously watches George. George feels awkward.

ALICE ANN

Well, all the plants and flowers are here and the cards are right there. I should get going. I'm sure Stuart is going crazy right now taking care of the kids and all but...

George approaches Alice Ann and extends his hand to shake. She reluctantly takes it.

GEORGE

It was a pleasure meeting you today.

ALICE ANN

Same here... I'm just so happy we could also save your soul, Mr. George... It feels good following in the path of the righteous, doesn't it?

GEORGE

Why yes, yes it does... Thank you very much.

ALICE ANN

It was my pleasure. Now you stay on that path, Mr. George, you hear? No straying... And Miss Estelle, now if you need anything... And I mean, anything... You don't hesitate to ring me up... I mean, I can get over here in less than five minutes...

ESTELLE

Thank you, Alice Ann. No, I think I'll be fine for now.

ALICE ANN

(whispering, to Estelle)

We can even have a secret word like, uhm...
'proselytize!'... If there's trouble and you can't
talk, you just say that word and I'll bring the
cavalry!

ESTELLE

Honestly, I'll be fine.

ALICE ANN

Really, Miss Estelle, if you want me to stay, I can
call Stuart...

ESTELLE

I'm fine, Alice Ann. Go home.

Estelle hugs Alice Ann.

ALICE ANN

I just think of you like a momma, you know.

ESTELLE

And you like a daughter to me... I'll be just fine.
Give the kids a kiss from their Auntie E.

ALICE ANN

I will.

(to George)

Remember that path, Mr. George!

*Alice Ann exits and Estelle closes the door. She
looks at George then at the table full of food.*

ESTELLE

Well, George, are you hungry?

GEORGE

Would you like something different besides funeral
casserole, Miss Estelle?

SCENE 2

*The casseroles have been put away and George has
rolled up his sleeves and is sifting through the
refrigerator for things to prepare Croque
Monsieur. Estelle is seated on a bar stool
watching George assemble the ingrediants.*

ESTELLE

Did I read where you attended the Culinary Institute of
America?

GEORGE

I did. I love saying that I trained at the CIA. Makes it sound more covert.

ESTELLE

(laughs)

Arthur and I ate at your restaurant once.

GEORGE

You did? In New Orleans?

ESTELLE

Yes. My husband, Arthur, he owned the newspaper here in Elm Haven...

GEORGE

Did he now?

ESTELLE

Yes. And we were down in New Orleans for a newspaper convention... must have been twelve years or so ago now... He brought me to your restaurant. It was wonderful.

GEORGE

That makes me happy.

ESTELLE

I guess it's sort of ironic perhaps.

GEORGE

How so?

ESTELLE

Our daughter could have been there and we not even have known.

GEORGE

You really haven't heard from Jane in all these years?

ESTELLE

Not really, no... Do you have plenty of butter there, George, for your recipe?

George looks around.

GEORGE

Yes, I think I have everything I need here... She...

ESTELLE

...You really don't have to do all of this... I have enough casserole here to feed us until next Easter! I'm going to have to give away a lot of it.

GEORGE

We have a name for ladies like you.

ESTELLE

Old?...

GEORGE

...Casserole Girls...

ESTELLE

Oh?

GEORGE

You ladies bring food everywhere. Death, sickness, worship, love... Jane used to tell me that you always had a casserole for every occasion.

ESTELLE

She was probably right... I suppose we take comfort in food. I know Arthur did.

George places the assembled Croque Monsieur in a saute pan and moves the skillet back and forth on the stove like the accomplished chef he is.

ESTELLE

What recipe is this one? Is it in one of your cookbooks?

GEORGE

You know, I don't think I've ever covered this one before...

George flips the sandwich in the skillet.

GEORGE

This was one of Jane's favorites. She used to ask me to cook it all the time.

George removes the saute pan from the fire, slides the Croque Monsieur onto the plate and then places a serving on the plate in front of Estelle.

Estelle stares at the plate and then bursts into tears and runs off to the back of the house leaving George alone in the kitchen.

SCENE 3

George dries the last of the dishes and places them on the counter.

Estelle emerges from the back of her house.

ESTELLE

You didn't have to do those.

GEORGE

It was no bother... Don't tell my housekeeper but I actually do like to do the dishes.

ESTELLE

You have a housekeeper?

GEORGE

Yes. She actually lives there at the house. There's an old converted servants' quarter out back... Jane and Sidney lived out there for a while.

ESTELLE

Oh... Do you have any more of the...

GEORGE

...Yes. I kept it warm for you.

George removes the plate of Croque Monsieur from the oven and places it front of Estelle.

ESTELLE

I used to make this for Jane when she was little all the time. Found the recipe printed in a magazine and I thought it sounded so fancy for just a glorified grilled cheese sandwich... Jane couldn't even pronounce the name... She called it 'Croaked For Sure.'

GEORGE

I showed her how you can make it a Croque Madame by simply placing a fried egg on top of it.

ESTELLE

Oh?...

GEORGE

I told her, 'if that's called *Croaked For Sure*, well this must be a *Croaked By Damn!*'

George and Estelle both laugh.

Estelle takes a bite of the sandwich and smiles.

ESTELLE

It's delicious. Thank you... I'm sure she really liked you a lot.

GEORGE

I think so.

There is an awkward silence between George and Estelle for a few beats.

GEORGE

You don't approve of interracial marriage, do you?

ESTELLE

No... The bible says that it is wrong. And the bible is God's law and I live by that.

GEORGE

My wife was white. French... I met her in Paris while studying cooking there... Sometimes love is simply colorblind...

ESTELLE

Your children are interracial then?

GEORGE

Yes... Sidney was a very handsome man... He was my youngest... He met Jane in New York at N-Y-U.

ESTELLE

N-Y-U?

GEORGE

New York University. They both graduated from there. Dated almost from day one... I didn't think it would last but...

ESTELLE

Oh? What, college?... the relationship?... both?

GEORGE

The relationship... Jane went all the way through grad school there. Sidney graduated, too, and then got his diploma in wine and become a master sommelier for me.

ESTELLE

Jane went all the way through grad school?

GEORGE

Yes... She received an M-F-A from there.

ESTELLE
Oh?

GEORGE
She was working on her doctorate at Tulane and teaching literature there.

ESTELLE
Really? That shouldn't surprise me, actually. She liked to read as a little girl. She was very smart.

GEORGE
When was the last time you heard from Jane?

ESTELLE
I got a Christmas card from her, oh, maybe six years back. It was postmarked from Aspen, Colorado I think. No return address though.

GEORGE
Must have been when she and Sidney were in Aspen opening up my restaurant there. Sidney set up the wine list and stocked the cellar.

ESTELLE
I don't believe in drinking wine. The church and the bible both frown upon it.

GEORGE
Really? Funny, but I kind of recall from my Sunday School studies that Jesus' first miracle was turning water into wine for a wedding celebration.

ESTELLE
Oh, well, back then that wasn't really wine.

GEORGE
It wasn't? Then what was it?

ESTELLE
Just plain old grape juice.

GEORGE
Like from a juice box, perhaps?!... You really believe that?

ESTELLE
Of course I do. Brother Stanley says so...

GEORGE
Ah.

ESTELLE

Next to my late husband, Brother Stanley's one of the smartest people I know.

GEORGE

He sure had me pegged, huh?

ESTELLE

He just doesn't know you, that's all.

GEORGE

So because he doesn't know me, he just stereotyped me?

ESTELLE

You just read into it, things you thought you heard him say because...

GEORGE

...because I'm a black man?

ESTELLE

Perhaps. Your guard is up. We're not racists, you know.

GEORGE

Then what do you call it?

ESTELLE

Purists. We're God-fearing people, George. We live by the bible. It's words were put there for a purpose.

GEORGE

So two-thousand years can't be wrong, huh?

ESTELLE

Yes, I think the words are as relevant today as they were then. Our world would be so much better if we simply lived by those words. There'd be less violence, that's for sure.

GEORGE

Hmmm... Words like, "Go up against the land... and against the inhabitants... Slay and utterly destroy after them, sayeth the LORD, and do all that I have commanded you?"

ESTELLE

That's not what the bible says.

GEORGE

Look it up. It's Jeramiah 50:21. Our God is a warring, jealous God, Estelle. He does like to smite!

ESTELLE

I'm sure you were quoting out of context. Some people have a knack for memorizing bible verses and then using them out of context. Brother Stanley says we should always be careful about doing that.

GEORGE

Ah, yes... Brother Stanley should know.

ESTELLE

You don't approve of us Baptists much, then, do you?

GEORGE

I was raised a fundamentalist Baptist actually.

ESTELLE

What made you quit?

GEORGE

Lots of things, really... The snakes were the final straw, though.

ESTELLE

Snakes?!

GEORGE

Sometimes... The speaking in tongues, though... that sort of messed me up.

ESTELLE

Sometimes the Lord expresses himself through us...

GEORGE

So you speak in tongues then?

ESTELLE

Well, no... Not really... I did think Jane was speaking in tongues once... turned out she was just faking a Brooklyn accent.

GEORGE

You're not too far off, actually.

ESTELLE

Jane used to pretend she was from anywhere else but here. All the time. She would check out travel books from the library. Far off places I hadn't even heard of. She excelled in Spanish. That's the only foreign language we had here in Elm Haven. They made the school offer it so she had to take it. I hated it. Of course she loved it.

GEORGE

She learned to speak French, too. She and my wife would converse for hours. It was as if she had discovered a kindred spirit.

ESTELLE

Oh...

(changing subject)

So how did you come to be Catholic?

GEORGE

Converted for my wife. She was the Catholic. She loved the pomp and circumstance of it all. A small country church in Mississippi is sort of a let down once you've been to one of those big cathedrals in Paris.

ESTELLE

Mississippi?... Oh, I do recall reading something in your cookbooks about you growing up in Mississippi now that I think about it... Did you take your wife home to your family and church then?

GEORGE

Actually my family didn't like her. Didn't approve of the relationship. Not only was she a white woman but to add even more insult to their injury, she was a foreigner as well. Outcast we were.

ESTELLE

I see.

GEORGE

So that's why Jane and I got along so well, I suppose. We sort of came from the same place.

ESTELLE

I didn't know Jane was with a black man until now.

GEORGE

Half... Sidney was also half white.

ESTELLE

I guess the attraction doesn't surprise me, either... Jane was always a different child growing up. Strange. I guess some folks would have called her weird. If she hadn't have had Arthur's eyes, nose and chin, I would have sworn the hospital gave me the wrong baby.

GEORGE

She didn't fit in at all here, huh?

ESTELLE

Not at all. In high school she was the weird kid who sat in the corner and read. I think she had one friend in school and that friend ended up going to jail or rehab or something like that... So you can see why I figured she didn't turn out so well.

GEORGE

I guess I can now.

ESTELLE

How did she describe us to you, me and Arthur?

GEORGE

Hmph... She used to say that her mother was staggeringly drunk on the Holy Spirit.

ESTELLE

To her I guess that's an adequate description. The more I tried to instill our ideals into her, the...

GEORGE

...the more she rebelled?

ESTELLE

Yes... The summer after high school was the worst. Arthur was even going to relent and let Jane attend some secular school up North but I didn't think it was a good idea. No. She was just so rebellious that I thought attending Baptist College would sort her out, bring her inline, so to speak. I put my foot down.

GEORGE

And that's when she ran away, huh?

ESTELLE

Yes... She just disappeared off the planet as far as we were concerned... Broke Arthur's heart.

GEORGE

And your's?...

ESTELLE

Yes, and mine... I don't know why God took her away from me like that. I was a good mother to her and Arthur was a wonderful father.

GEORGE

In my world, Sidney's world, she was considered normal. I even nicknamed her Plane Jane. She loved that.

ESTELLE

She always wanted to be normal... That was her prayer,
at least when she prayed... just to be normal.

GEORGE

She got her wish.

ESTELLE

To her, I guess she did... You said she described me as
full of, uhm...

GEORGE

...Holy Spirit...

ESTELLE

Yes... But not Arthur?

GEORGE

No... She called him humbled.

ESTELLE

Humble... Well, he was a humble man. Very respectful.
Reserved. A very thoughtful man, he was.

GEORGE

No. Humbled. She called him humbled. Not humble.

ESTELLE

Oh? I wouldn't call him that. He was anything but.
Reserved, perhaps... because he was a newspaper man.
Always trying to stay neutral for the story... Humbled?
I don't think so... Not Arthur. He just didn't like
confrontation, that's all.

GEORGE

And he never heard from Jane either?

ESTELLE

Nope. Not a word that I recall. We both just believed
she ran away and didn't want to have anything more to
do with us. She knew I would never approve of her
lifestyle.

GEORGE

Like shacking up with a black man?

ESTELLE

Exactly... Don't get me wrong, George. You seem very
nice...

GEORGE

...and you love my cookbooks, but...

ESTELLE

I just don't believe in interracial relationships. It's just wrong.

GEORGE

Did your husband share your belief?

ESTELLE

Of course he did.

Estelle fidgets in her seat.

ESTELLE

How did they die?... I mean, you said it was a car accident.

GEORGE

Drunk driver.

ESTELLE

Your son?...

GEORGE

Somehow I knew you'd think that.

ESTELLE

I mean, he worked with wine, you said. I just assume he was...

GEORGE

...the drunk driver?

ESTELLE

Well, yes.

GEORGE

They were both sober. Sidney was picking up Jane from the college. She had been working on her dissertation all afternoon and the street car wasn't running so Sidney went to pick her up... A drunk driver ran a red light... I used to hate Mardi Gras for all the drunks. Now I will always despise it.

ESTELLE

Sidney was a good man then?

GEORGE

Oh, yes, ma'am... He was a Mama's boy, that one. Always smiling. Never met a stranger...

THE TELEPHONE RINGS. ESTELLE JUMPS UP AND ANSWERS IT.

ESTELLE

(on phone)
Hello?... Oh, hello, Alice Ann... No, I'm fine...
Really... Yes, I'm sure... Quite... Uh, huh... Do
what?... Another word for converting someone to their
religion?...
(looks at George)

GEORGE

Proselytize?

ESTELLE

Proselytize... Alice Ann?... Hello?... Alice Ann?...

SCENE 4

Alice Ann and Clarise both stand in Estelle's living room. Alice Ann is dressed in her sweatpants and an oversized "Jesus is my Ski Instructor" t-shirt. Her makeup is removed and her hair is up in a ponytail. Clarise is dressed in her housecoat and her hair is in pink plastic rollers. Alice Ann holds a cast iron skillet in her hand while Clarise wields a spray bottle of Aqua-Net Hairspray.

ESTELLE

I told you I am fine. I've just been visiting with George here.

GEORGE

Estelle, if you don't mind, I think I will just go call my daughter out in California while it's still early out there...

ESTELLE

Well sure. Go right ahead. You can use my phone if you'd like.

GEORGE

Thanks but I'll just use my cell phone here... Good to see you Ladies... again.

GEORGE EXITS.

ESTELLE

Clarise! Alice Ann! I told you I was fine.

ALICE ANN

Well we didn't know. Clarise saw your light still on and called me.

CLARISE

It's not every night you have a man in your house, let alone a... well, a black man.

ESTELLE

Come to think of it, I never have entertained a man here at my house since Arthur passed.

CLARISE

See... And you always turn your kitchen light off by ten twenty, when the sports comes on the local news and you go to bed... I can practically tell time by you, Estelle... But now? Your kitchen light's still on.

ALICE ANN

And it's almost eleven o'clock.

ESTELLE

That's because I've been up talking to George. He's actually a very nice man... What a coincidence that he writes those cookbooks and owns that restaurant that Arthur used to always...

(realizing something)

Oh my...

ALICE ANN

Well for all we knew he could have been hacking up your body in the kitchen sink to make an Estelle gumbo out of you.

ESTELLE

And so you thought you could have stopped him with a skillet and a bottle of hairspray, did you?

ALICE ANN

Stuart won't let me touch his guns.

CLARISE

I couldn't find any pepper spray.

ESTELLE

I'm sure George is telling his California daughter what a bunch of racist hicks we all are right about now...

CLARISE

...I'm sure he's not thinking that.

ALICE ANN

Or perhaps simply thinking that I was returning your skillet...

Alice Ann hands the skillet to Estelle.

CLARISE

(handing off spray bottle)
...and you were completely out of Aqua-Net!

SCENE 5

Estelle, dressed in an oversized and well worn N-Y-U sweatshirt and sweatpants, stands in the kitchen lovingly examining one of George's cookbooks as George re-enters the living room. All of George's cookbooks are stacked upon the counter. They all appear to be heavily used.

ESTELLE

Did you reach your daughter?

GEORGE

Yes, I did. She reminded me to convey her deepest sympathy to you.

ESTELLE

Oh, thank you. That's sweet.

GEORGE

(surprised)
You're wearing an N-Y-U shirt?..

ESTELLE

It was Arthur's. He used to wear it all the time... I used to wonder why on earth would he be wearing an N-Y-U sweatshirt, of all things... Arthur graduated from L-S-U... I just figured someone from the newspaper office must have given it to him. We had a little 'financial difficulty' for a few years around the time Jane ran off... I'll be damned.

Another awkward silence for a few beats. Estelle stares at one of George's cookbooks and flips through it.

GEORGE

That was my first cookbook.

ESTELLE

Yes. This is the first one Arthur gave me, too... He just loved it when I would cook from it. Said the recipes were all so wonderful... And comforting.

GEORGE

He did, did he?

ESTELLE

Arthur used to go down to New Orleans all the time... Newspaper conventions, Rotary club excursions, news stories... Anything to get down there. He loved it there. And he would always eat at your restaurant and just rave about how good the food was... Always... And when there was a new cookbook, he'd bring one home with him... He always wanted something cooked from 'The George with an 's' Experience'... 'Let's try something new,' he'd say... And I would cook it for him... Not too long before he passed away, he finally took me down there to New Orleans... He just had to take me to the restaurant... You weren't there... But this nice young man came to our table... He knew Arthur, apparently from his past visits. Tried to talk me into a glass of wine. Even Arthur tried to get me to just have one glass... 'Just one glass, Estelle,' he begged. But I held on to my convictions. So the nice young man said that was OK and he brought me and Arthur, and himself, a glass of sparkling cider and we toasted to a wonderful evening... Said he was George's son and if there was anything we wanted, anything at all, to just ask for him and he would take care of it... He even gave us our dinner for free... I told him he didn't need to do that but he insisted... Said it was so nice to finally meet me... I just thought it was because Arthur used to come to the restaurant all the time and he was just being friendly; polite... He was such a good looking young man. Eloquent, poised... I even commented to Arthur what a nice young man he was and Arthur agreed... Treated us like we were special... It was nice... Oh, I'm sure I made some other comments, too... That's just the kind of thing I would do. You know, pollute the lovely moment with my foolish ideology...

GEORGE

Estelle...

ESTELLE

I should have known... I just should have known... Arthur, see, he used to be such a picky eater... But when he discovered your restaurant, all those years ago, suddenly he became a little more adventurous... No... I didn't think too much of it. Arthur always was somewhat of a loyalist... And I loved cookbooks. I thought that was just Arthur appreciating the fact that I was such a good cook... How could I not have seen?...

GEORGE

...Estelle, she wanted so much to be a part of your life but didn't know how... She knew you wouldn't approve...

ESTELLE

...I told her I'd disown her if she ever, well... And for that, she disowned me... And Arthur... Oh, Arthur...

GEORGE

I think maybe that's why they never got married... She was so close to telling you... But once Arthur died... well, she simply lost what little connection she had to you.

Estelle opens up a different cook book and flips it open to one of the first few pages. There are several 'Post-it Notes' hanging out of the well-worn cookbook.

ESTELLE

This cookbook is called 'Casoulets.' French for casseroles, it says...

GEORGE

...That's right... Jane thought I should do a cookbook on casseroles, since she basically grew up on them...

ESTELLE

It's my favorite... It was also the last cookbook Arthur gave me before he passed... I always hide this cookbook from the girls... The last church cookbook probably has a dozen recipes or more in there from it... From me, of course... Passing them off as my own... I've cooked every single one in here... And not once did I ever even think to comprehend why... Not once... Until just now, when I remembered the dedication page... I just loved the dedication page because it was exactly the sentiment I had tried to instill in my daughter when she was growing up and also my students in my home-ec classes... Such a coincidence but it just never occurred to me that you were talking about me... Jane is just such a common name... (reading) "To my future daughter-in-law, Jane, who was taught by her mother the valuable importance of being able to make at least one good casserole for those occasions when a covered dish is truly needed and called upon. As her mother was so fond of saying, 'A good casserole made with love says, *I Care!*'"

THE END