

PASADENA

"PILOT"

By Eve Crusto

Tisch Other Showcase Excerpt
FINAL - ACTOR SCRIPT

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Nestled between mountains and ocean is Pasadena, the kind of town that encourages the idyllic dreams of transplants searching for the perfect way of life: sunny weather presiding over polished streets lined with quaint homes and friendly neighbors.

It is the kind of place where any family would want to live. And any family *could* -- as long as they could pay the price.

Inside one of these homes is a family who is not like the others. Their cost of living is high.

From New Orleans, through swamp and desert and hardship, Celeste moved her children to Pasadena to meet her husband, Maurice, who went ahead a few months ago to find work. Celeste enjoyed the prospect of a new start in a new place, until she learned that the lovely home Maurice bought for them comes at a price that she is not willing to pay...

CELESTE

You want us to pass for white?

We meet them in the kitchen. Fried chicken crackles in grease.

MAURICE

"Passing" makes it sound sneaky.

CELESTE

It *is* sneaky. We ain't white, Maurice. You want us to lie.

MAURICE

It won't be that hard. When people assume we white, we just won't say anything.

CELESTE

They don't *assume* we white. They *know* we Negroes!

MAURICE

We ain't from Nigeria or Senegal or Egypt, so are we lyin' when we say we Negroes? Maybe we are.

CELESTE

I know I'm a Negro and I'm proud of it.

MAURICE

Think to all those times back home when folks mistook you to be a white lady.

(MORE)

MAURICE (CONT'D)

They'd see you and treat you a certain way. Then come to find out you *Colored* and they step back. Ain't nothin' changed but what you told 'em. *Looks* don't make you a Negro.

She changes tactics.

CELESTE

Legally, we Negro. My birth certificate, my mama's, my daddy's, our children's, yours.

MAURICE

Not anymore.

From a high cabinet, he pulls out legal documents.

MAURICE (CONT'D)

New birth certificates for everyone. A new wedding certificate for us too.

(pointing)

See there?

CELESTE

"White."

MAURICE

(smiles)

Legally.

CELESTE

Ain't legal if you buy 'em.

MAURICE

(offended)

They're real.

CELESTE

(looking closer)

You changed our last name??

"Celeste Blanchard"? *Blanc*?

Maurice, it has the word "white" right in the name! This won't work.

MAURICE

When I applied for my job, I didn't tell them anything about my background. And they never asked. So I went right along with it.

(MORE)

MAURICE (CONT'D)

Now, I get paid what a white man gets paid and I get the responsibilities a white man gets. All because I didn't tell them what some little piece of paper says about me.

CELESTE

I can't be something I'm not. Especially not if it's my enemy.

MAURICE

You would do it for your family. You would do it for our children.

CELESTE

Our children? After what those people did to our son, how could you want this?

MAURICE

How could you not?? As white people, we will no longer have a bullseye on our backs.

DING DONG.

Celeste and Maurice's eldest daughter NADINE moves through the foyer toward the front door.

Waiting on the porch outside are LUCILLE and EDWARD holding a cake.

LUCILLE

I finally found that other earring on the floor of the nursery.

Nadine opens the door.

NADINE

May I help you?

LUCILLE

Luckily it was before Eddie got to it. Can you imagine if he had stepped on it, poor thing? Or worse, if he had eaten it?

EDWARD

Uh, welcome.

Edward hands Nadine the cake, but Lucille grabs it first.

LUCILLE
 (laughingly)
 Don't be ridiculous.
 (to Nadine)
 This is for the *family*. Are they
 home?

Lucille barges into the foyer. Celeste approaches.

CELESTE
 (thinking fast, to Edward)
 I'm sorry, sir, but we ain't
 interested in buyin' nothin'.

Maurice comes into the foyer.

MAURICE
 (in a more proper tone)
 Dear, this is Edward and Lucille
 Pike. They live next door.

CELESTE
 Oh... hello.

She looks hatefully at Maurice. Lucille hands Celeste the
 cake.

LUCILLE
 It isn't like us to intrude, but we
 wanted to give this to you
personally.

Lucille looks over at Nadine like a spider on the wall -- *why
 is she still here?* Edward shakes Celeste's hand.

EDWARD
 Good to finally meet you, Mrs.
 Blanchard.

NADINE
 (whispers to Maurice)
 Who's Mrs. Blanchard?

Maurice takes the cake from Celeste and hands it to Nadine.

MAURICE
 (too loud)
 Nadine, take this into the kitchen.

Nadine exits with the cake.

EDWARD

Already smells like a home in here.
Poor Lucille doesn't have much
skill there.

Lucille warmly links onto Edward's forearm like newlyweds.

LUCILLE

That's true, cooking's never been
my best asset.

EDWARD

(taking a whiff)
Is that fried chicken?

MAURICE

Sure is! Finest this side of the
Mississippi!

Maurice looks lovingly at Celeste. She wishes he'd shut up.

CELESTE

It's not that good.

EDWARD

Haven't had fried chicken in ages.

MAURICE

Well, I'm sure we have enough to go
around...

He looks at Celeste whose face says DON'T YOU DARE.

MAURICE (CONT'D)

If you have no other plans, would
you like to join--

EDWARD

(cutting in)
We'd love to!

MAURICE

(false enthusiasm)
Excellent. Celeste dear, let
Nadine know we are adding two
guests for dinner.

Celeste's fake smile is more like a steel trap.

CELESTE

Perhaps you should let Nadine know.
Dear.

Moments later, in the kitchen...

NADINE

I'm not a dumb little girl, Daddy. When we got here, you rushed us from the car into the house. Then you gave me the tiny room under stairs. Now you're making me hide out in the kitchen. I won't be your maid.

MAURICE

You're my child living under my care, so you'll do as you're told. You're eating in here.

Nadine tosses the cake into the trash.

Later, the neighbors and family, including younger children ALBERT and SUZANNE, are gathered around the well-appointed dining room table. Edward has plowed through more than half a bottle of wine on his own.

EDWARD

Harry James is, hands down, the superior trumpet player.

MAURICE

(speaking extra properly)
Well now Mr. Pike, I don't know about that. This household has an allegiance to Mr. Louis Armstrong.

EDWARD

Now, now, Harry's skill is unmatched. But, I will say that Armstrong is quite talented. For a Negro.

MAURICE

"Po-tay-to, po-tah-to. Let's call the whole thing off."

EDWARD

(laughs)
You should be a politician, Mr. Blanchard.

SUZANNE

Why you keep callin' him that?

CELESTE

(thinking fast)
Suzanne, you know the rules -- don't speak when men are speaking.

SUZANNE
 (annoyed)
 Yes, ma'am.

Albert puffs out his chest to show he's a man.

ALBERT
 Could I ask Mr. Pike a question,
 Poppa?

MAURICE
 No, let him enjoy his dinner.

EDWARD
 Aw, let the young man speak.

MAURICE
 (cautiously)
 Go on, Albert.

ALBERT
 Mr. Pike, do you work in Hollywood?
 You look like an action hero!

Maurice looks relieved. Edward laughs, embarrasses Albert.

EDWARD
 'Fraid not, Albert. Was supposed
 to be a doctor in St. Louis like my
 old man. But Charles Lindbergh had
 my attention. I haunted Curtiss-
 Wright aircraft hangars until the
 war forced them to give me a job.
 Now I work over at the Glenn L.
 Martin Company making airplanes.

MAURICE
 Bootstraps kinda man. I'm sure
 your father is mighty proud.

EDWARD
 (takes a swig of wine)
 If he is, he doesn't show it.
 (leans in towards Albert)
 We're the real action heroes.

He winks at Albert who beams.

ALBERT
 Whoa.

Nadine carries her empty plate.

MAURICE

Nadine, do you need assistance in
the kitchen?

NADINE

Just comin' to get myself more
chicken.

She serves herself, to Lucille's horror. Edward pours
himself more wine, then gestures to his empty plate.

EDWARD

I'll take some more.

Nadine doesn't budge. Edward stares at her, then down at the
large platter full of fried chicken, back at her, expectant.
Celeste meekly gives into the humiliation, she nods.

CELESTE

(fearfully begging)
Nadine.

Nadine serves Edward.

EDWARD

(to Nadine)
C'mon, more than that.

LUCILLE

(whispering to Edward)
You've had enough.

EDWARD

I'll decide that.

LUCILLE

I'll have some more too.

SUZANNE

Me too.

Off her mother's piercing look.

SUZANNE (CONT'D)

...please?

Nadine serves them.

LUCILLE

I haven't had fried chicken this
good since I visited my sister-in-
law's in Georgia!

EDWARD
 (maliciously)
 Lucille's cooking is shit.

LUCILLE
 (covering, trying to be
 entertaining)
 The Colored woman who works for the
 Parkers up the street -- her food
 is just awful. And here I thought
 they were all good cooks! When I
 was a gal in St. Louis, my Miss
 Minnie tried to teach me how to
 bake biscuits once. She was a
 terrible teacher.
 (this is the punchline)
 Father slapped her good thinking it
 was *she* who burned them!
 (she laughs then bites a
 fried leg; genuine)
 Your darkie cooks quite well.

CELESTE
 Seems like you the one who could
 use a slap!

Lucille's smile fades. Silence and fear permeate the room.

Suddenly, Edward laughs drunkenly and slaps Lucille on her
 back as if she were his buddy.

EDWARD
 Ole Lucille never could take a
 joke!

Lucille and Celeste share angry, fearful looks -- neither of
 them think this is funny.

CELESTE
 Nadine, take the children upstairs.

Nadine obeys. Slowly, Celeste rises and pierces the soul of
 everyone present, especially Maurice. She exits.

END EXCERPT