

Stand and Wait

By Eliana Pipes

In 2013, a well-known cooking show celebrity came under fire for comments about her dreams of a "Southern Plantation" theme wedding, complete with a historically appropriate waiting staff.

This is the story of the casting call for that party.

Epigraphs:

“Well what I would really like is a bunch of little niggers to wear long-sleeve white shirts, black shorts and black bow ties, you know in the Shirley Temple days, they used to tap dance around. Now that would be a true southern plantation wedding, wouldn't it? But we can't do that because the media would be on me about that.”

- Paula Deen, as alleged by former employee Lisa Jackson

"Remember thee!

Ay, thou poor ghost, whiles memory holds a seat

In this distracted globe. Remember thee!"

- William Shakespeare, Hamlet

“To be a Negro in this country and to be relatively conscious is to be in a rage almost all the time.”

- James Baldwin

CHARACTER NAME	BRIEF DESCRIPTION	GENDER
Carla Banks	(black) A seasoned actress.	female
Tracy Kinney	(white) A less experienced actress.	female
Mel	(any ethnicity) A very dedicated assistant.	male
Yvonne /Enslaved Ghost 1	(black) a seasoned, sophisticated performer	female
Martin / Enslaved Ghost 2	(black) the class clown of the dressing room	male
Lisa / Enslaved Ghost 3	(black) a new, but dedicated actress	female

TIME AND PLACE:

Act I takes place in a casting office - present day

Act II takes place in an event tent, two weeks later

Act III takes place on a plantation - outside of space and time

Note: a / indicates where the next line begins

Act I

SCENE ONE.

A dark stage, with a single spotlight.

CARLA steps into the beam of light. She's calm - looking polished and put together, with her hair tied back.

She speaks with great gravity, and warmth.

CARLA

(with a slight Southern lilt)

Lookin out, I see a future unfolding. It's calling me. Past those fields, over those hills and rivers and into cities whose names I'll know soon enough. Yes. Something out there's calling out to me. The future. Freedom's callin out. Yesterday, I bought my own name, my own time, and tomorrow - . . . And tomorrow - . . .

(she breaks, and speaks with a modern affectation)

Dammit, and then what comes next. Umm, "freedom's callin out . . . La la la . . . And tomorrow" . . . - I think I'm too excited to remember. It's been a while since I (gestures), you know? But, okay -

(she clears her throat)
(resuming)

Past those fields, over those hills and rivers and into cities whose names I'll know soon enough. Yes. Something out there's calling out to me. The future. Freedom's -

(breaking)

Ah, I just can't focus!

(beat)
(as herself)

There's something in the air today. Can you feel it? I really think this is the day. "Freedom's callin out, and tomorrow -" Tomorrow, my entire life could change.

Suddenly, a voice comes out of the dark.

TRACY

Hi, sorry - am I in the right room?

All lights suddenly snap on.

The space is an audition room, sparsely furnished, with four waiting chairs and a long casting table.

Tracy stands, clutching her bag, in the corner. She's much more disheveled than Carla.

Carla goes wide eyed like a kid caught with her hand in the cookie jar. She immediately bolts up and turns to explain herself.

CARLA

Oh! Sorry - it's just um, a little warm up exercise I do, nothing to worry about. It just calms me down, that's all -

TRACY

I didn't mean to interrupt your, um - it sounded really intense, I'm not trying to bother you I just think I'm supposed to be-

CARLA

(clearly changing the subject)

So! You asked about the room.

TRACY

Yeah. For the -

CARLA

Audition?

TRACY

Audition - yeah.

Strained laughter.

CARLA

Yeah, you're in the right place.

TRACY

Okay, great. Can I ? -

Tracy moves toward the row of chairs.

CARLA

Of course.

Tracy slowly takes a seat at the chair furthest from Carla.

They each sit in uncomfortable silence for a long moment.

Longer than that.

Even longer.

TRACY

So!

Yes?
CARLA

Tracy's demeanor is laden with innuendo.

TRACY
I um - I heard this was a *certain kind* of audition. Like, if you know what I mean.

Tracy means porn.

CARLA
Oh, you mean because it's for a private event?

TRACY
Yeah. *Private. Event.*

Tracy gestures - Carla, not facing her, doesn't see it.

CARLA
Yeah, I know it sounds strange, but it's really fine - these are super common, I get called in for them all the time.

TRACY
Really? I heard of some people turning to it, but only in like - moments of desperation.

CARLA
Oh not at all, everyone does these. They're a little awkward, sure, but it's a great way to pay the bills and still practice your craft.

TRACY
Craft?

CARLA
Yeah! It's all about craft at the end of the day - performance and storytelling.

TRACY
Wow, I never thought it was as complicated as all that.

CARLA
Oh of course! You have to investigate your character and their motivations, really get to the bottom of what you want.

TRACY
Wow.

Carla speaks from the heart, Tracy gets progressively more anxious with every word.

CARLA

And at the end of the day, the idea is to become a vessel for the story. To fully internalize the conditions of your character. To accept the story into your body and soul.

Tracy doubles over like she's going to retch.

TRACY

Oh god I don't think I can handle this.

Carla charges forward to comfort her.

CARLA

Oh, woah woah woah - it's okay, you'll do fine!

TRACY

Do you think they have like, a hidden camera in here? Is that one of these?

CARLA

No I don't think they're taping auditions.

TRACY

I don't think I'm ready! I mean I knew I might have to take a job I didn't want to get ahead, but this is like, too much -

CARLA

We can do warm ups? How about some stretches!

Carla takes a deep breath and touches her toes. Tracy rears back, horrified.

TRACY

NO!

CARLA

It's okay! Calm down!

TRACY

I just - I mean you're great and all but I don't think I'm willing to do porn!

Beat.

PORN?
CARLA

TRACY
Yeah! Isn't that what you were talking about? With the like, vessel and the like, stretches.

CARLA
No, no no! Wait, you're not - that was just fundamental theories of acting, this is
(overpowering her)
This is not for pornography!

Tracy quiets.

A pause.

*Tracy pulls up the front of her shirt to cover her bra.
Carla calms herself.*

TRACY
(realizing)
Oh.

CARLA
It really is just a private event. I get called for these all the time.

TRACY
(asking)
Oh?

CARLA
It's like, a kind of novelty thing for rich people throwing big theme parties.

TRACY
(disgusted)
Oh.

CARLA
Sometimes they want the bartenders to be in character, or they'll have actors doing an interactive show for ambiance and all that.

TRACY
(confused)
Oh.

CARLA
Yeah, I think it's weird too.

Carla leans back in her chair. Tracy puzzles, thinking it over.

TRACY

Well that's . . . bullshit! That's all we're here for - auditioning to be waiters at some fake party? It's not even a real acting job?

CARLA

Well, it has perks.

(Carla leans in, confidentially)

I'm only here because my agent told me that the host is a major celebrity.

TRACY

OOOH! WHO?

CARLA

Shhh - I don't know, but that's not the point.

TRACY

Wait, can you find out? Like is it someone who's Emmy famous? Tony famous? Oh my god OSCARS FAMOUS?

CARLA

(quieting her)

Hey!

(normally)

You're missing the point. The job is stupid, absolutely - but think of the people who might be in the crowd! This class of people - of influencers and decision-makers. If you impress them, you're in - you know? This could be big.

TRACY

Oh wow, big.

CARLA

It's is an incredible opportunity. It could change *everything*.

TRACY

Woah.

Tracy looks over to Carla, suddenly paranoid, and turns steely.

Carla notices.

She waits for a moment then rolls her eyes.

I'm Carla, by the way.

CARLA

Tracy.

TRACY

The two shake hands. It lasts too long.

Tracy tries to size Carla up.

Nice to meet you.

CARLA

Nice to meet you too.

TRACY

A gaping pause.

Even longer than that.

Tracy gathers her things closer, looking suspiciously at Carla. Carla, breaking the tension -

Look, I wanted to say, we don't have to be - I mean, we're not competing.

CARLA

Excuse me?

TRACY

We don't have to be nervous, is what I mean - about each other. We're not competing, you and me.

CARLA

We're not?

TRACY

No! Are you kidding? Look - they called us in to read together, both of us at once, which means we're reading a scene!

CARLA

Oh! Yes!

TRACY

And there's no way we're reading for the same part. I mean, we're such different demographic types, because you're -

CARLA

(long beat as Carla tries to think of anything to say other than "white")

Shorter.

TRACY

Yeah. Much shorter.

CARLA

Very short.

TRACY

Short.

A relaxed pause.

CARLA

So, just - what I mean is - . We can be friends.

Tracy beams at the word.

TRACY

Yeah, you're right. We can go in there as a team.

CARLA

A team! Yes - exactly! You and me are a team now. Ooh, and you know what - we could even both get the part and then do the job together!

TRACY

That would be nice!

CARLA

I think so too!

A brief pause.

Carla scoots over into one of the several chairs that separates them, decreasing the distance between them.

CARLA

Are you like - okay?

TRACY

Yeah - what do you mean?

CARLA

Just - your leg has been shaking since you got here.

Tracy looks down. It is shaking.

TRACY

Fuck!

She puts her hands on her leg to try to stop it.

CARLA

I'm sure it'll be fine - you'll be so good in there -

(beat)

Partner.

Tracy smiles.

TRACY

Thanks. I just - I dunno, I haven't been to too many of these. I'm kinda new.

CARLA

(explaining)

You're green.

Tracy snaps her hand to her face.

TRACY

Oh my god I thought I put on foundation to cover that! Dammit!

CARLA

No, no! Green as in "new" - like you're a new performer.

Tracy calms down.

TRACY

Oh. That. Yeah, I am new.

Carla reaches out to calm her down.

CARLA

There's nothing wrong with that. I remember my first audition, the nerves, the stress. It's totally natural, you get over it with time.

Tracy smiles and nods.

TRACY

You're right - you're totally right. Maybe I'm new, but you know what - new just means you have a lot to learn. And I'm ready to learn it.

CARLA

Yes! Exactly.

Carla scoots over and points to Tracy's headshot.

CARLA

I like your head shot.

TRACY

Oh! Gosh, thanks. I wasn't sure if it was a good picture, but my acting teacher told me -

CARLA

It's definitely a good shot. Look at it, the way your eyes show, and your cheekbones. It's perfect.

TRACY

Oh, thank you, that's such a relief. I love yours too!

CARLA

Oh, this old thing? Ugh, I feel like it barely looks like me anymore.

Carla holds up her head shot and smiles. She looks exactly like the picture, down to the pose, hairstyle, and outfit.

CARLA

See what I mean?

TRACY

Yes?

Suddenly, as Carla is handling her resume, her folder falls open and resumes spill into a pile in front of her.

TRACY

Whoopsie.

CARLA

Shoot!

Carla goes to her knees to gather the resumes.

TRACY

Let me help!

Tracy joins her on the ground.

CARLA
Wait! Please, you don't have to!

TRACY
Oh come on!

CARLA
Well, thanks.

Tracy spots one of the resumes. She freezes, and bolts up.

TRACY
Woah.

CARLA
What?

Tracy holds up a resume, reverently.

TRACY
You trained at -

Carla tries to take the resume back from her.

CARLA
Oh boy! Yeah, sorry about that. That thing is so embarrassing.

Tracy dodges her and holds on to the resume.

TRACY
Embarrassing? It's amazing! You played Hamlet! Hamlet??!!

CARLA
In a gender-bent production at OSF.

TRACY
You preformed off Broadway!

CARLA
Oh, just two seasons.

TRACY
You did an international tour in Singapore!

CARLA

Saya lakukan.

TRACY

This is incredible!

(she looks more closely at the resume)

What's this though, I've never heard of this play. "The Life and Times of Mrs. Juliann Tillman"?

Carla lights up and takes the script back, tenderly.

CARLA

Oh, that was my thesis project at Grad School. A solo show - do you know Juliann Tillman? She was a freed-slave turned abolitionist, and one of the first female preachers at A.M.E. It was an honor to get to play her, I wrote the script myself.

TRACY

Wow, you've - wow.

CARLA

Oh, stop it. I'm sure you've done great things too! Huh? Like . . .

Carla picks up Tracy's resume and searches it.

TRACY

Well, I dunno, I have - um . . .

Beat.

Carla desperately scans Tracy's resume.

CARLA

Those three months as Princess Ariel at Disneyland! That's something.

TRACY

Doing the whole tail thing did really build up my core strength -

Tracy leans on her chair and flaps her legs.

CARLA

See, you look *just* like a mermaid, it's uncanny! And you did the whole summer session, it's like doing a professional run!

TRACY

My boss almost learned my name -

CARLA

And think of all the joy you brought to those kids!

TRACY

A toddler laughed so hard he threw up in the middle of my song once -

CARLA

Exactly! And everyone starts somewhere.

TRACY

I guess.

CARLA

Besides, our resumes don't matter.

(she tosses both aside)

We're a team now - and totally unstoppable.

TRACY

Yeah. A team.

They smile.

CARLA

Sorry to ask, but do you mind if I warm up? Always helps me focus, relax - you know?

TRACY

Yeah, no problem. I should probably do some of that too.

Carla stands with incredible ceremony. She inhales deeply, using her arms to accentuate the flow of oxygen.

CARLA

Pah Pah PAHHH! Buh buh BAAAH! Ta ta TAAH! Duh duh DAAAH! Peter-piper-picked-a-peck-of-pickled-peppers.

Carla begins an intricate warm up, complete with stretches and corresponding vocal activities.

In response, Tracy wipes her hands off on her jeans, and uses her fingers to pull her tongue in a circle around her mouth.

*Seeing Carla's routine, she contorts, trying to match it.
The whole thing gets strange and gyrate-ey.*

*MEL, the casting director, walks in, cellphone in hand.
He finds both women in compromising positions.*

Beat.

MEL

I hope I'm not interrupting anything ladies.

Tracy scrambles to get up, frazzled.

TRACY

No! We were just -

Carla rises gracefully.

CARLA

Warming up!

MEL

Oh. How nice. Well I'm sorry to have kept you two waiting for so long, but I had a call to take - the boss just loves to check in.

Tracy gets excited.

TRACY

Oooh - the boss? You mean the person whose party it is?

MEL

Yes, and kindly *lower* your eyebrows. As an international star, I'm sure you'll understand that she wants to maintain confidentiality until the position is filled.

TRACY

She?

CARLA

Of course.

Carla shoots Tracy a look. Tracy calms herself down.

Mel goes to the casting table and settles himself in, putting his phone back in his bag and moving notes around.

MEL

I'll take your resumes now.

Sure!

CARLA

Carla scoops up her folder and her bag, tosses her hair, and strides over, to give Mel her resume. Tracy fumbles a few steps behind.

MEL

Thank you. So, ladies, how are you two today? Doing well?

CARLA

Great! And you?

TRACY

(beat) Great! And you?

The women each give each other a quiet thumbs up, snapping immediately out of it before Mel turns to face them. He takes their resumes and reads information off a clipboard.

MEL

So, Miss Kinney and Miss Banks, thank you for being here. You can call me Mel. My mother named me Melvin, but we don't speak of that.

Both women laugh charmingly - but Mel shoots them a steely look, and they immediately fall silent.

MEL

Well, as I'm sure you know, this is something of a unique position - but a very promising one in my humble opinion. There's a lot of potential here.

(Carla beams)

You know, ladies - I've never performed myself, but I've spent seven years now as a personal assistant, and I ask you, what better way to learn about the human condition? I mean truly - the things I've seen!

Carla and Tracy, in a panic, begin to bubble over in agreement (lines may be improvised.)

CARLA

Yes! My how interesting -

TRACY

Ooooooh - things like what?

He cuts off their response with a wave of his hand.

MEL

How kind. As I was saying, we're looking for performers who are comfortable with improvisation, who have a firm grasp on character work, and aren't afraid of performing in some unconventional environments.

CARLA

Absolutely.

TRACY

Wow, that's a lot of things.

MEL

And, just a heads up, if you do book the job, there could be a bit of research involved. It's a period piece.

CARLA

(thrilled)
Ooooh!

TRACY

(terrified)
Ahhhhh!

CARLA

(in a perfect British accent)

Oh, is it a Jane Austen - era romance? Two outcast lesbians finding each other in an era of sexual repression?

Carla and Tracy shuffle into the perfect pose for the scenario she's describing.

Mel shuffles through his sides, looking for pages to give to the women.

MEL

No, but that would make a great Christmas party.

CARLA

(now in a schmaltzy twenties voice)

Ooh - ooh! So, is it the roaring twenties - two outcast flappers ditching their small-time town to sling liquor in the big city?

Again, Carla and Tracy create the scene.

MEL

Not quite.

TRACY

Then what?

Finally, Mel finds the papers he was looking for.

MEL
Think more, Antebellum era.

Tracy nods, Carla is hesitant.

CARLA
Seriously?

TRACY
Great!

Carla is perturbed, but optimistic.

CARLA
You know, I actually did a solo show based in the Antebellum era, I've done a lot of research that would probably be very valuable to -

MEL
That's nice -

He hands sides to both women.

MEL (CONTINUED)
Ms. Kinney, you'll be reading for Miss Susanna Abbott.

TRACY
Sure!

MEL
And, Ms. Banks, if you could read for -

CARLA
(reading from her sides)
Colored Serving Woman Four.

MEL
Yes! Thank you!

CARLA
(quietly)
What happened to the first three?

Mel elaborately sets the scene, adopting poses for each new character he introduces.

Tracy copies each pose as he does it, and he periodically looks to her, waiting for her to ooh and ahh at his plot points.

MEL

So, ladies, a little background. Tracy, you're playing the sweet aristocrat, a young woman coming into her own. Your father is a general in the war, and your mother is the lady of the house, and you're having a party today to celebrate your grandfather's birthday, but your dearest mother has fallen ill, so now it's up to you to embrace your womanhood and make sure the party goes off without a hitch so you can make your whole family proud!

TRACY

Wow! Oh my gosh, this is great.

Mel approaches Carla - who prepares to go through the same routine of pose and imitation.

MEL

And, Ms. Banks, you'll be reading for a serving woman in the house.

Carla deflates. Mel goes back to his papers. She musters a smile and approaches his desk.

CARLA

Yea, okay, cool, great. So - quick question. Uh, is there anything else I should know about her? Like, her position? How long she's been with the family, anything like that?

Mel references a page on his desk.

MEL

Ummm. I think your character's mother works in the house too.

CARLA

Really? Alright. That's interesting. There are generational ties at play, that's something. What's my mother's name?

Beat.

Mel shuffles through papers on his desk for a long beat, searching for a particular page.

Finally he finds it, and reads:

MEL

Serving woman one.

CARLA

Oh.

Carla walks away from Mel and pours over the script.

MEL

Alright ladies, why don't you take a minute, familiarize yourself with the script.

TRACY

Sure!

The women take a moment with their respective scripts, furiously marking in the margins. Carla flips through the pages, concerned.

CARLA

Mel?

MEL

Yep?

CARLA

Just to make sure, it says that, during the scene, my character is -

MEL

Churning butter, yes.

CARLA

Okay. So, are we thinking, one of those old-fashioned churners?

MEL

Precisely. The kind where you really have to put your back into it.

Mel takes one of the waiting chairs and sets it up in the middle of the room for Carla.

CARLA

Alright.

MEL

Oh! And I just remembered, hold on just a moment!

Mel darts out of the room.

Taking advantage of the private moment, Carla leans over to Tracy.

CARLA

(angry)
Can you believe this?

TRACY

I know, it's like a dream!

CARLA

What - ?

Mel returns with a rack of costumes. It has one, large hoop skirt, a parasol, and a DRESS - white and ragged.

MEL

Alrighty! So, we have some of the costume pieces rented already! Just in case you wanted a bit of inspiration.

TRACY

Oooh! Pretty!

Tracy darts for the rack and picks up a fan and a hoop skirt, which she wriggles into.

Carla looks at the rack, which is almost bare - except for the white DRESS and a few strips of fabric hanging around it.

Carla picks up a corner of the fabric, dissatisfied, and puts it right back down.

Mel sits behind the table and prepares himself.

MEL

Can we begin, ladies?

TRACY

Sure!

CARLA

I mean, I guess.

MEL

Okay. Whenever you two are ready.

Carla and Tracy take a moment, and nod to each other.

Aaaaand, scene!