

I AM THE GUMBO

AFTERNOON

(Filo and Teenie enter, Filo stripping off his clothes)

FILO

I would like somebody to explain to me the difference between hangin' a man quick, with a rope, from a tree an' hangin' a man slow, with a tie, in a church cuz *mais* I don't see no diff'rence!

(Filo plops down on the steps and removes his shoes as Teenie picks up after him)

TEENIE

Filo, believe me, there's lots you don't see.

FILO

Well, if I die I want to be buried in my navy blue jump suit.

TEENIE

When you die...you'll be buried in this and this.
(meaning his coat and tie and throws his shoes at him)
---and these!

FILO

(catching a shoe)
You may be right, Teenie. These been killin' me for years.

(Teenie calms quickly. is now contemplative)

TEENIE

Maybe we shoul'da had a wake.

FILO

Wake? Teenie, my sister had the cancer. She was sick with it for...well, it was a five year wake. An' don't you think she didn't enjoy it neither.

TEENIE

Ah -- they came in from everywhere. Even California.

FILO

Yah, my little brother Roland. After all, Bernice was his sister too....But you know -- no matter how far dey go, or what it is that dey do out dare. No matter what kinda awful and peculiar foods dey got to eat -- they'll always come home to Louisiana. For dirty rice....

TEENIE

---crawfish bisque, hogshead cheese....

FILO

---pickled okra, hot boudin...

TEENIE

---etouffee....

FILO

---ice cold beer, jambalaya. Funerals...

TEENIE

(echoing)
...funerals....

FILO

---and...
(mysteriously & evocatively)
---gumbo.

(Teenie gathers up the discarded clothing)

MARGUERITE

(offstage:passionately)
Oh Teenie! Teenie!

FILO

Well here comes Marguerite. Now for some fun...

TEENIE

Filo!

FILO

What I want to know is if she is still my sister-in-law since she an' Roland's separated.

TEENIE

Filo, you don't need to know nothin' an' you be nice to Marguerite.

(Marguerite enters dramatically,
embracing Teenie)

MARGUERITE

Oh Teeie! Teenie!

TEENIE

Marguerite....

MARGUERITE

Well! All I can say is that she looked terrible.

TEENIE

Marguerite, she was dead.

MARGUERITE

Well all the same you think Mr. Ransonet coulda done something with her, you know, with some rouge or a bit of eyeshadow mabe even some lipstick.

TEENIE

She never wore that kind of stuff when she was alive. I don't think her funeral would have been the time or place to start. I'll get some coffee.

(Filo has just been itching for his
chance)

FILO

(craftily)
Say, Marguerite....

TEENIE

(offstage)
FILO---!

FILO

Poo-yie! Sometimes I think dat woman's got ears on the both sides of her head!

MARGUERITE

Ah, Filo, you won't be able to upset me today. Thanks be to St. Anthony of Padua for the return of lost articles. Ten yeas is a long time to be separated but Roland's come back! And to me. I'm sure of it.

(This is a challenge to Filo, which he takes up with relish)

FILO

Ooooooh, well, what did Roland say to you at the funeral?

MARGUERITE

Well...

FILO

Did he sit with you?

MARGUERITE

Not exactly...

FILO

---in fact, if he woulda sat any further from you he'd of been in the hearse. Idn't dat right? Marguerite?

MARGUERITE

Filo---! Before this day is through, Roland will be standin' right here waitin' *pour moi*. I know it. I know it because it is me what brought him back. *C'est tout!*

(Teenie has returned with a tray of coffee)

TEENIE

How can you be so sure? Not more candles?

MARGUERITE

Candles to St. Anthony of Padua helped bring him back. For our difficult marriage, candles to Saints Helen, Monica, and Edward. And for his protection against insanity and disaster while in California, candles to St. Dynphna and Genevieve.
(lowering her voice)
And as a extra precaution, candles to St. Aloysius of Gonzaga...for safety against---
(spelling it)
A-I-D-S.

FILO

Candles, candles, candles. Now I know why Father Deyeteyer keeps a fire extinguisher behind the Blessed Mother.

TEENIE

Filo!

MARGUERITE

(mysteriously & confidently)
In addition to all of that I've taken...other steps.

FILO

Then why don't you take some more steps in that direction...

TEENIE

FILO!

FILO

Or ---- I could take some "other steps" in this direction.

(which he does, into the house)

(Marguerite first checks that Filo's exit is legitimate then that there aren't lurking Saints)

MARGUERITE

Teenie, between you, me, and the Saints: I *made him* come back. Twice a year I been sendin' Roland a gumbo.

TEENIE

Margueite! You've poisoned him! An' he's come back to die!

MARGUERITE

No-no-no! He's come back. To live! With me!

TEENIE

Whatever did you put into that gumbo?

MARGUERITE

(manical, in a good way)

It's what I *took out*.... Each gumbo was a little less than the one before. First, I left out the parsley. Then, the celery...

TEENIE

Oh no!

MARGUERITE

Oh yes. An' that was just the start. Then I used a pinch less of red pepper one year, even less the next. What a challenge! For ten years cookin' gumbos that seemed exactly like the one before - but always less - an' never enough for him to notice until there was nothin' left in his gumbo but a yearning. To be fulfilled. By me! An' year before last: I used a bottled roux.

TEENIE

Not from scratch? How could you? Marguerite, that's cruel.

MARGUERITE

Is it? Well, Teenie, the last gumbo I sent to him, I used *leeks*.

TEENIE

That don't sound good an' I don't even know what leeks are. Marguerite, you've tortured that poor man.

MARGUERITE

Well, there's only so much you can ask the Blessed Saints to do.

TEENIE

That he's come back can't be denied but its the gumbo that did it an' its a gumbo he'll be lookin' for.

MARGUERITE

Don't you understand? I am the gumbo!

TEENIE

Well --- I wouldn't be waitin' for Roland in black.

MARGUERITE

Oh *mais* Teenie, you're right!

(Marguerite rushes offstage. Teenie shouts after her:)

TEENIE

Put on something bright. And sunny! And young!!

(Teenie looks after Marguerite, then goes inside)

(a burst of CAJUN MUSIC)

(then Roland wanders on, hesitant and unsure. Filo pops out of the house holding a can of beer in each hand and wearing his navy blue jump suit)

FILO

Roland!

ROLAND

Is she here?

FILO

I think I just seen her jump over the fence. She's safe away inside her house now.

(just to be certain, Roland scans the direction Marguerite left)

ROLAND

Well...well, Filo... Whatcha doin' with 2 beers?

FILO

Teenie's been after me. She's been sayin' "Filo, one more beer an' you gonna drop dead!" So -- I take two!

ROLAND

(existentially)

Filo, I don't know why I'm here....

FILO

Uh --- you want a beer?

ROLAND

(wandering off)

No. I....want....gumbo....

(after a pause, Marguerite bursts in
wearing chain-gang orange)

MARGUERITE

Roland! ... Roland? ... Where's Roland?

FILO

As close as I can figure it, he's lookin' for gumbo.

MARGUERITE

He should be lookin' for me. Which way? Where's the nearest
gumbo?

FILO

Prob'ly nex' door.

MARGUERITE

That's me!

FILO

The other nex' door.

MARGUERITE

(rushing to that side)

Oh *mon dieu*! That's Nadine Rochon! Filo! Do you know what
that means? That's perfect! O, what a day!

(Marguerite throws herself all over
Filo as Teenie enters)

MARGUERITE

Teenie, guess what?

TEENIE

You're hugging Filo. You lost your mind?

MARGUERITE

No-no-no! Do you understand that at this moment, Roland is prob'ly eating a bowl of Nadine Rochon's gumbo. How that poor woman can put so many ingredients and so much time into a gumbo an' make it come out with no taste is beond me. But one spoonful of it will send Roland into these arms! At last, my plan is complete.

(Marguerite encloses her opened arms onto herself as Roland saunters on eating from a large bowl)

ROLAND

This is by far the best gumbo I have ever eaten.

(a great big PAUSE)

MARGUERITE

What?

ROLAND

I been away way too long. Since when did Nadine Rochon finally learn to cook? Because...

(Marguerite snatches the bowl from Roland)

MARGUERITE

WHAT??? No no no no no!

(she tastes the gumbo then hands it to Teenie who also will taste it and thence to Filo)

Oh, Roland! She hasn't changed! YOU HAVE! It's all my fault!

I've murdered your taste buds. Ruint you for life! It wasn't

supposed to work this way! You'll never be a Cajun again!

RUINT! RUINT! RUINT---!

(Marguerite rushes off)

(Roland takes the gumbo from Filo and tastes it)

ROLAND

If Nadine hasn't changed, then this gumbo is...

TEENIE

---completely tasteless.

FILO

---brother, so plain it's practically a prairie.

ROLAND

(one final taste)

Oh *mon dieu!* *C'est magnifique!*

(Roland stands transfixed, spoon
halfway between mouth and bowl.
Teenie pries them from him. Filo
pokes at him until he manages to
speak)

ROLAND

There's only one thing to do.

FILO

Take this beer?

ROLAND

No.

(slowly moving away)

I am going to climb up into this live oak tree an' I ain't
comin' down until I'm a Cajun again...or dead. Not that
there would be much dif'rence.

(he returns to pluck Filo's beers from him)

It may take a while.

(BLACKOUT)