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There's a white man at the door. DOREEN

Huh? Uh oh. MISS SHEELY

What's the matter? DOREEN

Don't look at him! He might recognize you. MISS SHEELY

Who is he? DOREEN

How'm I supposed to know? How many white men we got comin' in here? MISS SHEELY

Then how's he gonna recognize me? DOREEN

Go wait in the kitchen. MISS SHEELY

Miss Sheely— DOREEN

Don't argue with me, girl! Now go! MISS SHEELY

DOREEN goes into the kitchen.

MISS SHEELY opens the door. GENE is about thirty,
Texas white trash.

I help you, sir? MISS SHEELY

Yeah. I'd like somethin' to eat. GENE

We ain't open yet. MISS SHEELY

I beg your pardon? GENE

I said we ain't open yet. MISS SHEELY

Says you're open for lunch. GENE

MISS SHEELY

That's right. We'll be open at lunch time.

GENE

Well, it's lunch time now.

MISS SHEELY

Says who?

GENE

Says that clock right there on the wall.

MISS SHEELY

That clock ain't workin'.

GENE

Sure it is. I see the second hand movin' and everything ... See that? Thing just moved.

MISS SHEELY

Well—it ain't set right. It's fast.

GENE laughs.

GENE

Listen, lady, this some kinda April Fool's joke or somethin'? It ain't April Fool's, is it?

MISS SHEELY

No, sir, it ain't April Fool's.

GENE

(entering)

Well, listen, I just want somethin' to eat. So how 'bout I sit down at this here counter and have me some lunch?

He sits down.

MISS SHEELY

That ain't your car down the road?

GENE

What car?

MISS SHEELY

One in the river.

GENE

What'd someone put a car in the river for?

MISS SHEELY

I'm askin' you.

GENE

Well, you're askin' the wrong guy. I hitchhiked.

Hitchhiked. MISS SHEELY

Yeah. GENE

From where? MISS SHEELY

Los Angeles. GENE

You hitchhiked from Los Angeles all the way to Mississippi. MISS SHEELY

Not in one shot, no. Had to stop off in Arizona and New Mexico. Texas. Louisiana. And now here. Say, where am I, anyway? GENE

'Bout ten miles from Philadelphia. MISS SHEELY

Philadelphia? Thought I was in Mississippi. GENE

Not Philadelphia, Pennsylvania. Philadelphia, Mississippi. MISS SHEELY

Philadelphia, Mississippi? GENE

Yes, sir. MISS SHEELY

Didn't know they had a Philadelphia down here. Folks in Pennsylvania know about this? GENE

Don't know and don't much care. Now you want somethin' to eat? Or you just come in here to talk my ear off? MISS SHEELY

Man can't have a little lunchtime conversation? GENE

Might help if he had some lunch in front of him. MISS SHEELY

Okay, so what'll it be? GENE

What you want? MISS SHEELY

She points to a menu on the wall.

MISS SHEELY pauses, then goes to the window to spy on him.

DOREEN comes out of the kitchen.

DOREEN

Never seen that man before in my life.

MISS SHEELY

Well, he could work for the Sheriff for all we know.

DOREEN

Or the Klan.

MISS SHEELY

Girl ...

DOREEN

I'm just saying. He doesn't exactly look like a Civil Rights worker.

MISS SHEELY

Ain't everybody got to be part of the NAACP to be decent.

DOREEN

So what's he want?

MISS SHEELY

So far, just a steak.

DOREEN

Then what's the big deal?

MISS SHEELY

The big deal is: people don't always come clean right from the start. Especially if they got somethin' to hide.

DOREEN

There you go contradicting yourself again.

MISS SHEELY

Say what?

DOREEN

You just said he's decent. Now you're saying he's trouble.

MISS SHEELY

All I'm sayin' is we don't know *what*—

GENE comes back in.

GENE

You know, I was wonderin'—

He halts, intrigued by DOREEN, who looks defiant.

GENE

You the head chef she's been hidin' back there?

MISS SHEELY

No, she ain't no chef. She just passin' through.

GENE

Oh yeah? Me, too. Where you headed?

MISS SHEELY

She ain't headed nowhere. She just passin' through.

GENE

Well, if she's passin' through, that sorta implies she's goin' somewhere, now don't it?

MISS SHEELY

She don't wanna talk about it.

GENE

How 'bout you let her answer her own questions? What are you, her press agent or somethin'?

MISS SHEELY

Sir?

GENE

(laughs)

Hey, look, I'm just waitin' on my steak, that's all.

He sits back down.

See you got a church out back.

MISS SHEELY

The diner and the church is together. That's right.

GENE

So is the church out back the diner, or the diner out back the church?

MISS SHEELY

Well, I suppose it depends on how you wanna look at it.

DOREEN

The church came first. Then the diner.

MISS SHEELY looks admonishingly at DOREEN to quiet her.

GENE

Who runs it?

MISS SHEELY

The Reverend Sherman Strong.

GENE

“The Reverend Sherman Strong.” I like the sound of that. He a big fella?

MISS SHEELY

Why?

GENE

Just wonderin'.

MISS SHEELY

He's a man of character, if that's what you mean.

GENE

Guess he'd *have* to be, for doin' that type of work.

MISS SHEELY

Why's that?

GENE

Oh, you know. All that talkin'. And gettin' people to listen. I mean, there's plenty of people talk all day long but nobody listens to 'em. Gettin' people to listen: that's the tough part.

DOREEN

That's why it's called preaching.

MISS SHEELY shoots another look at DOREEN.

They don't quit till people start listening. No matter who they may be—or what color.

Pause.

GENE

Well, I wouldn't know.

MISS SHEELY

You ain't a Christian?

GENE

No, ma'am.

MISS SHEELY

Well, why in the world ain't—?

The REVEREND enters, displeased by the presence of a white stranger while his daughter is out in the open.

REVEREND STRONG

Good afternoon, sir.

GENE halts and turns around slowly.