

Sins of the Father

Written by

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FADE IN:

INT. THE STEVELAND HOUSE FOYER - DAY

The outside light shines into the foyer as the front door opens. The beams glimmer off of the family pictures on the wall.

JALEN STEVELAND, 30s, African-American, tall, black sports coat and a flat cap, rushes in with shaky hands and wide eyes.

He runs down the hall.

INT. THE STEVELAND HOUSE DINING ROOM - DAY

A bottle of vodka, an envelope, a letter opener, and a box with a broken lock sit on top of a table. The other end of the table has photos of a woman and man during different stages of their relationship scattered around it. A tobacco brown buffet sits off in the corner with framed pictures on it. Stevie Wonder's If It's Magic is playing on repeat.

JESSICA STEVELAND, 60s, African-American, short, gardening vest and jeans, drinks from the bottle of vodka. Her eyes fill up with tears.

FRANK STEVELAND, 60s, African-American, tall, torn hawaiian shirt, jeans, sits across from Jessica. He slowly reaches out his hand.

FRANK
Sweets, take my hand.

Jessica takes another drink from the bottle. She stares at the envelope.

JESSICA
Shut up! You don't get to call me
that anymore.

Jalen rushes into the room. He looks across the table at the vodka.

Startled, Jessica grabs the envelope and pulls it towards her. She looks up at Jalen.

JALEN
Ma, why do you need that?

Jessica looks at Jalen. Tears roll down her cheeks.

JESSICA

You shouldn't be here!

She picks up the bottle and takes another drink. The bottle fumbles as she sets it down on the table. She uses her forearm to wipe her mouth. Her eyes shift back towards Frank.

Jalen's hands tremble, his voice cracks as he talks.

JALEN

Ma, you haven't drank in years.

Jessica lowers her head and touches her wedding band. She gazes at it for a moment and then at the bottle.

JESSICA

The habit is easy to pick up again
when you find out your marriage is
a lie.

Jessica staggers out of her seat and stumbles over to the buffet. She picks up a framed wedding picture.

Frank watches her as she stumbles back to her chair. Beads of sweat form on his forehead.

Jalen positions himself closer to Jacy.

JALEN

Pops, what did you do?

Jalen looks across the table at the box. He looks at the pictures in front of him, and picks one up.

JALEN (CONT'D)

Pops, who is in these pictures with
you?

Jessica quickly lifts her head up. She throws the wedding picture across the room. The glass breaks as it hits the floor.

JESSICA

That bitch! That's who.

She swoops up the letter opener.

Jalen takes a deep breath. He shakes his head, and stares at Jessica.

JALEN

Ma, what are you going to do with
that? Whatever this is, I can help
you through it.

Jessica shakes her head, and clutches the bottle of vodka.

JESSICA

This is helping me just fine.

She places the letter opener in front of her with one hand, and continues to clutch the vodka with her other hand. Jessica starts to sing as the song repeats itself.

JESSICA (CONT'D)

If it's magic then why can't it be everlasting?

Frank picks up a picture and sighs. Leaning back in his chair, he places his hand on his head and looks up at his son.

FRANK

Her name is SUSAN CHAMBERS. We've been seeing each other for some time now.

Jessica chuckles as she spills some vodka across the table.

JESSICA

Seeing each other?

She takes another swig from the bottle. Her eyes roll to the back of her head.

JESSICA (CONT'D)

That's what people do with tramps now? Seems like you've been doing more than that.

JALEN

Ma, I'm sure he can explain this. Pops, tell her it was a mistake.

Jessica takes the box and shoves it towards Jalen.

He opens it. There are letters inside with dates from 1975 all the way up to the present year. His eyes dart towards his father.

JALEN (CONT'D)

You've been with her since before I was born!

JESSICA

Those were inside an old tool box. I never go in there, but I needed a screwdriver to fix the handle on my hoedag.

Jessica pauses to take another drink. She looks Frank in his eyes. Sobbing, she wipes her eyes. Her speech is slurred.

JESSICA (CONT'D)

He wasn't around to fix it. He was never around.

FRANK

I didn't want you find out like that.

JESSICA

You obviously didn't want a lot of things!

She rises to her feet while holding the letter opener. The light from the chandelier reflects off of the blade of the opener.

Frank stands and backs away from the table.

Jalen reaches his hand out towards the letter opener.

FRANK

I didn't want to hurt you. A man gets lonely! I always came home to you.

JALEN

Listen to him. Ma, you don't have a clear head right now.

Jessica looks at the pictures of Frank and Susan.

JESSICA

Jalen, leave!

JALEN

I'll leave if you leave with me. Ma, I'll help you straighten this all out.

Jessica stares at her wedding band again. She grabs her hair and tightly grips the letter opener.

JESSICA

You never loved me, never wanted me!

Jalen stands in between them with his hands outstretched.

Jessica keeps shouting.

JESSICA (CONT'D)
You love her! You want her!

JALEN
Pops, tell her! You need to tell
her you love her.

FRANK
I don't know what to do anymore!
Sweets, I know I can't fix this.

Jessica slams her fist on the table.

Jalen snatches the envelope that is sitting in front of
Jessica's seat at the table.

Jessica crouches down and flips the table. The letters and
pictures fly into the air. The bottle of vodka crashes to the
floor.

Frank cowers to the ground with his hands shielding his face
from the broken glass.

Jalen grabs his mother.

JALEN
Ma, please stop!

Jessica slopes into the chair. She looks over at Frank and
smiles.

JESSICA
I want to hurt you just as much as
you hurt me.

She hands the letter opener to Jalen.

JALEN
What's this for?

JESSICA
Hand it to your father. Give him
that envelope too.

FRANK
This isn't one of my letters.

JESSICA
I know, it's one of mine.

Frank swipes the opener across the envelope and pulls out a
document. Tears roll down his face as he drops the paper to
the floor.

Jalen slowly reaches for the document.

JALEN

Is this true?

JESSICA

Jalen, I told you to leave. It was only meant for him to see.

Jalen looks at the document again as a single tear trickles down his face. He sees the words paternity test typed across the top, and his Uncles name typed below.

JALEN

It says Todd Steveland is a 96 percent match.

Looking at her ring, Jessica leans over on the edge of her chair and takes it off. She throws it at her husband.

If It's Magic plays again in the background.

FADE OUT.