

THE DEVIL IS IN REVERSE

By Natalie Marie Savage

NAME: Natalie Savage

WHERE ARE YOU FROM: Elizabeth, NJ

BIO: Natalie is a professional SAG/AFTRA actress in television and film. She especially enjoys working behind the scenes on the crew as the Stand-in for Melissa McCarthy on her movies or standing-in for any number of the amazing leading ladies on Orange is the New Black for the last 6 seasons. Up until March 12 she worked steadily throughout New York, New Jersey and Philadelphia and was in rehearsal for a play when the business came to a complete shut down. While unemployed she takes zoom acting workshops to stay sharp and is building a home recording booth to branch out into working remotely on Voice-Overs. She sees the Bake-Off Challenge as a fun new way of letting her voice be heard.

This Natalie's very first attempt at play writing.

WHAT'S KEEPING YOU POSITIVE?:

physical activity (home workouts, yoga, dancing, walking, hiking bike riding) nature direct sunlight, meditation, laughing out loud, loud rock-n roll, staying hydrated ;) Cheers

CHARACTERS

JOSEPHINE 40s African American or mixed race ethnically ambiguous no nonsense street wise tells it like it is A Spiritual Advisor can turn creole accent on and off, gives readings on the front porch of her home.

THEO young adult African American (son of Madame Josephine) Second Line trumpet player in funerals and parades (may also double as the devil in the dancing scene) (may also play hotel clerk

CELESTE 50s widow looks youthful appears upbeat but actively struggles to hide her loneliness with friendliness and her sadness with humor.

TIME

Nov 4, 2019

PLACE

The front porch of private home New Orleans, Louisiana

Celeste strolling appears to be turning off a main rd onto a quiet side carrying a rectangular case in one hand she hears the Second Line brass section go by for a funeral procession she thinks about her late husband we can tell by the sudden change in expression that washes over her as she stops suddenly in front of the porch and looks back as she fidgets with the wedding bands that she now wears on a chain around her neck. She observes...

A young man runs out of the house buttoning up his shirt

THEO

Bye Bye Momma I'll see you tonight

JOSEPHINE (talking in a modern day matter of fact tone)

You get right back here son, aren't you forgetting something important?

THEO

Awww Moms, I don't have time, I'm late! Besides I'm too grown to be giving my Momma a kiss every time I leave the house.

MISS JOSEPHINE

No such thing as too old to kiss your Mother - but I was talking about your trumpet, You forgot your trumpet inside the house...

THEO

Oh you're right (runs in and back out with trumpet) Thanks, Love ya Moms

JOSEPHINE

And Theo Don't Dare come back Home tonight without that trumpet! (under her breath) That boy would forget his dang head if it weren't sewn on.

CELESTE smiles delighted to find herself in the middle of someone else's day to day and away from her own sad thoughts and memories for a moment

JOSEPHINE (notices her and in an affected creole mystic voice speaks)
Come here Madame, do not be afraid, Spirit has messages for you from beyond.
(sensing Celeste's hesitation) I'll offer you a special deal today because Spirit tells me there is something you need to know and that is the reason you have found your way to Madame Josephine today.

CELESTE
Madame Josephine? Is that your name? (intrigued)

JOSEPHINE
\$20.00 psychic reading and I let you pick 3 tarot cards. Come, sit.

CELESTE
(an aside) hmmm I could drop \$20 sitting at the beer garden but I'd only be overhearing conversations of the living. This could be more entertaining, I'll give it a shot.
(Celeste comes up onto the porch and sits at the table and waites)

JOSEPHINE
Money up front please

CELESTE
Oh yes of course (puts \$ on the table)

JOSEPHINE (she waves sage around closes eyes and begins) I call upon the protection of our ancestors to allow into our realm only those spirits who come with messages of light and love for our own well being. (opens eyes begins rubbing a crystal between her hands) Spirit, what brought this woman here today? What brings her here today? I'm hearing it was the name, it's my name, I'm hearing It's nice to hear you say my name again. You were drawn here because you heard his name?

CELESTE
That's correct Madame Josephine, His name is, was, Joseph. (aside) It felt good to speak his name out loud again.

JOSEPHINE

(genuinely impressed by this confirmation she watches Celeste play with the wedding bands around her neck)

I am hearing this was a sacred union with a soul mate who has crossed but he wants you to know he watches over you and will wait for you on the other side. I keep hearing heavenly body Celestial being that though you feel it was not long enough the time you had together were like moments of heaven on earth. Spirit keeps saying “the name the name is heavenly Celestial”.

CELESTE

Celestial (chuckles) well my name is Celeste (shyly) and well when we were alone together, and well you know, he would tease and call me a heavenly body (blushing)

JOSEPHINE (at this point she loses the phony mystique to her speech and goes right to home girl the way she spoke to her son and never goes back to the fake accent.

Celeste notices it and is delightfully amused and appreciating her candor)

I’m a tell you right now Miss Heavenly Body, if this turns into some interdimensional phone sex kind of thing I am gonna have to charge extra. That’s not not part of the \$20 reading.

CELESTE (giggling) No no I promise! Please don't stop. I think he just said that so I would know it's really him I'm talking to.

JOSEPHINE (off and on shuffling cards as she channels)

Right, hmm ok you say so but I’m not so sure. I gotta tell you I don’t like where this conversation is heading. Oh no Spirit I am NOT gonna tell her THAT! Really? Really? (back to Celeste) Well I’ll be darned still waters run deep y’all. Here I thought you were just some sweet little lady but this Spirit has got the hots for you, talking about all this sexual inuendo Guuuurrrll Gurl Bye, I can’t.

CELESTE

Wait please, there must be some mistake just tell me, please?

JOSEPHINE

Well, I do not condone talk like this in a professional environment but since you paid your money already here goes I’m just gonna have to put it out there: (places her hands over her eyes and blurts out)

Spirit keeps talking about putting his mouth on something and using his fingers to play with something and the beautiful noise it makes and Oh Lord forgive me but I keep hearing the word Blow.

CELESTE

(burst out laughing then see's Josephine's face and explains Oh I'm sorry. IT'S A TRUMPET! He's talking about the trumpet, he was an amazing trumpet player it was his passion!

JOSEPHINE

(falls back into her chair and fans herself) Oh Thank You Jesus! Whewee that's a relief (the two woman explode in laughter) I was praying: Spirit please don't make me Whoopie Goldberge to this Demi Moore Patrick Swayze couple (laughing/bonding) I did not sign up for that foolishness! A trumpet player, well I'll be damned. Just like my boy Theo.

CELESTE

I noticed, I took it as a good omen.

JOSEPHINE

He's very talented, gifted is what they tell me. Theo says "Mama one of these days I'll be writing the score for a major motion picture and you'll be my date when I accept my Academy Award."

CELESTE

Wouldn't surprise me. You know Josephine, I'm on the board at Columbia College in Chicago, that's where Joseph and I first met, and they are starting a new program that Theo might enjoy. It's an intensive 7 week summer program concentrating on musical scores for movies and television starting at the school and including a few weeks at a Hollywood studio. We are really looking to hand pick the best candidates seeing as this is the first year of the program...

JOSEPHINE

Hold on now Shut the Front Door! I said Shut the Front Door! You better not be playin with me Celeste. I know all about that program that's all Theo talks about ever since his musical director came back from Chicago filling his head with all these crazy ideas!

CELESTE

Maybe not so crazy. I am on the board, I could see to it personally that his application gets priority consideration. A personal recommendation from an alumni goes a long way. Theo has had professional training then?

JOSEPHINE

I tell you all that boy thinks about is music. He's had lessons since he was barely big enough to hold that Trumpet private lessons, band lessons, self taught lesson, why that boy must know how to play just about every instrument you can think of thanks to You Tube he's even got his own channel where he teaches beginners. Now he's taking music composition at the college.

CELESTE

In that case I'll get him an application and we can get the process started. I can't see anything that could stand in his way.

JOSEPHINE

I see my boy - (yells) THEO! (to Celeste) Will you look at that handsome Young man.He is truly my blessing. Come over here I've got some news to tell, come over here and say hello to Miss Celeste.

THEO

Good afternoon Miss Celeste, nice to meet you.

CELESTE

Theo I understand you are quite a talented musician and my Alma Mater is looking for a select group of dedicated individuals to participate in a summer program dedicated to scoring music for motion pictures. I'd like to help you with the application process and personally recommend you if you are interested?

THEO

IF I'm interested?! Mom, that's the course I told you about! Can I? Is it alright with you? I don't understand how...

JOSEPHINE

Hush Child of course you can go you are meant to go! What does your Momma always tell you?

JOSEPHINE & THEO (together)

Never ever question

Divine intervention

THEO

How much will it cost? Can we afford it? Mom I swear I'll pay you back every penny.

CELESTE

There is no charge. It's a scholarship program. All you need to bring is your Trumpet!

THEO

Thank you so much Miss Celeste. Mom I promise to make you proud.

JOSEPHINE

You do that every day Theo. I love you, now get back in the parade.

THEO

(Racing off with his trumpet yelling) Hey everybody I've got THE BEST Mom in the whole world and if you don't believe me you can stop by Madame Josephine's porch for some predictions or to talk to your dead relatives... (trailing off as the two ladies half laughing half crying embrace)

CELESTE

I see Theo is as big a fan of you as you are of him. That is beautiful! I know how that feels. I know that we are very fortunate. Some people never experience that in this lifetime. Josephine, I'm very glad I met you today, It's obvious that you have a gift. Thank you for sharing it with me today, this has been quite an enlightening experience. I think I'll go home and open this bottle of wine and reflect and enjoy some memories.

JOSEPHINE

Hold up now, not so fast Sister Sledge. I promised you a 3 card tarot reading remember? You were meant to come together with me today for a very special purpose. Joseph knows you want to honor his legacy, he wants me to assure you he feels he lives on through you, but there is more to be revealed (fanning out the deck). Pick 3 cards and place them face down. In front of me (Celeste does and Josephine turns over the 1st card)

The Sun let me read this "the universe is coming together in alignment with your path and moving things forward for you" (turns over the next card)

The Devil Card in reverse

CELESTE

Oh no, that sounds bad

JOSEPHINE

No reason to fear girlfriend, the Devil IN REVERSE signifies you have come out of a time of sadness and re-aligned with your higher good.

CELESTE

I have? Yes, I think you're right. I can't remember the last time I laughed this hard. I think this is what my therapist meant when she told me to live in the moment instead of lamenting the past or fearing the future. It feels good to be connected to life again!

JOSEPHINE

Honey that devil knows he can't get you down no more that's why he's high tailing it out town, I see him like Michael Jackson doing the moon walk backing right out of your life. I'm hearing you singing that MC Hammer song "Cant touch this" (both laughing) Oh he tried his best to keep you in a dark place of anger pity depression fueling those fires with alcohol and shady low vibing people who came around you trying to bring you down to their level but it didn't work because ...what's this? You see what this is don't you? (picks up the sun card) This is you Mon Petite you ARE the sun and your're on a path now to shine your light and love onto others. "Can't touch this" that's what your energy told the devil! (closing her eyes) Spirit is telling me he's proud of you. It wasn't easy losing your true love, but you must remember that he is still with you even though he cannot be in the physical form for the remainder of the journey he wants to live on through you. He says it is time to celebrate.

(we hear the music as another parade approaches)

CELESTE

I love the beautiful way you honor the dead with a parade of music and dance in New Orleans. I wish I could have given that to Joseph, he would have loved that, he deserved that..

JOSEPHINE

(seeing Celeste's eyes begin to water)Then let us give him that now!.

(She motions to Celeste to get up and gives her one of the frilly parasols she has decorating her porch. Josephine teaches her the moves of the dance they go back and forth across the porch and down the stairs. Celeste catches on instinctively adding moves as though she's been dancing like this her whole life)

For Joseph Laissez bon temps rouler!

JOSEPHINE AND CELESTE (together)
Laissez bon temps rouler Joseph!

JOSEPHINE (back to the table)
One more card for you to pick (Celeste chooses)
The Moon Card! There is a secret that will soon be revealed!

CELESTE
That's impossible, Joseph and I had no secrets (Josephine makes a face) really we were each other's best friends we shared everything with each other (Josephine crosses her arms and makes another face) What? It's true I'm telling you.

JOSEPHINE
Seems to me that you and your love had a pretty magical connection, right? Well you can't have magic without a little mystery, a surprise, maybe even a secret? I'm just sayin, you know what I'm sayin? Hey don't shoot the messenger!

THEO
(walks onto the porch silent with head hanging afraid to make eye contact mumbling)
Mom I'm sorry

JOSEPHINE
Son what is wrong?
Where is that Trumpet of yours?
You have got to be more careful, just go back
And retrace your steps, I'm sure one of your
Band mates found it

THEO
No Mom you don't understand
I promise I'll find a way to replace
it, I know I need it to get in the
summer program, but if you
could see his face I had to do it

THEO
Mom listen to me! I didn't lose my trumpet, I gave it away!

(Gasps)
JOSEPHINE
I am sure I did not hear you correctly.

THEO
The little 10 year old boy who's Mother the funeral was for, well he came up to me and asked if he could try out my trumpet. You see he's never played one before but he

watches my youtube instructional videos and he practices on one of those little plastic toy flutes. I felt so sad for him losing his Mom and all so I said sure. Mom, you won't believe this but when I handed it over to him he proceeded to play taps flawlessly every last note! This boy is a prodigy if he can learn like that with a toy and a video Imagine what he'll do with real lessons and his own trumpet!

JOSEPHINE

So you gave him your trumpet?

THEO

I did and I told him to practice everyday and I'd come by and give him lessons 3 times a week. Please don't be mad. I just couldn't imagine anything worse for a boy than growing up without his Moms. Playing music makes me so happy I'm just hoping it will do the same for him especially when he's missing his Mom.

JOSEPHINE

Do you remember what I told you earlier today Theo?

THEO

I know, "don't dare come home without that trumpet".

JOSEPHINE

Not that, I said you make me proud every day. Well today I'm as proud as a peacock.

CELESTE (gets up and picks up her bag)

THEO (sitting on the steps)

Good bye Miss Celeste I really did appreciate your generous offer about the school program.

CELESTE (places the case next to him)

This is for you Theo someone told me to give it to you.

THEO (opens the case to find a beautiful new trumpet)

Mom look at this it's like the one I always show you the pictures of!

(Josephine looks perplexed)

CELESTE

I was on my way to the pawn shop today but couldn't do it. That's when I turned around and ended up in front of your house. On one hand I couldn't bear to part with Joseph's trumpet but seeing it sitting there not being played just depressed me. It was dead and needed someone to breathe life into it again.

JOSEPHINE

We can't afford to pay for this.

CELESTE

What you and Theo have given me today is priceless. This instrument has no value if it is not being played. Your boy Theo has grown into a man of empathy and compassion, there is no one better suited to carry on Joseph's legacy. Joe wants him to play it, I know that's why he brought me here today. (to Theo) You have an exciting future ahead of you! Starting with that 7 week summer music program!

THEO

Miss Celeste, you forgot you left something in the lining pocket here I thought maybe it was sheet music but it's just some old envelope, here you go.

CELESTE

(reads aloud) 25th Wedding Anniversary Fund? She looks at Josephine, This is Joe's writing and today would have been our 25th Wedding Anniversary!

JOSEPHINE

What are you waiting for? Open it!

CELESTE (hands shaking takes out a stack of \$1000.00 bills and begins counting while Josephine and Theo jump around dancing singing "money money money money - money " by the O'Jays) THERE'S TWENTY FIVE THOUSAND DOLLARS IN HERE! One thousand for each year we were married! Oh My God! How did he manage to surprise me with a gift on our anniversary when he's no longer alive? And how in the world did he keep it ...

CELESTE and JOSEPHINE (in unison)

A secret! A Secret?

CELESTE

You told me he had a secret I wouldn't believe you! How do you do that? You're amazing!

JOSEPHINE

It's not me. I'm telling you it's Spirit coming through me y'all.

THEO

I keep telling her she ought to have her own youtube channel. People will pay for a subscription to hear her readings.

CELESTE

Theo is right. Come on what do you say? I can help you set it up. There's a whole lot more traffic on line you'll ever see on this side street.

JOSEPHINE

But I like doing it on my front porch.

CELESTE

I think the front porch is a good gimmick

JOSEPHINE

It's no gimmick it's who I am fo realz

CELESTE

I know you are and that's why viewers will love you! How about "Fo Realz Front Porch Spiritual Guidance" ok maybe it the name needs some work (laughter as the lights dim continued banter over the sound of Theo playing Joseph's trumpet) And for goodness sake Josephine leave off the "madame" and that phony Voo Doo affect you put on with your voice when you start the reading..

JOSEPHINE

I'm sure I don't know what you're talking about!
How much money do you think I could really make?

CELESTE

At least enough to put us up at the Beverly Hilton when we visit Theo this summer (they squeal with excitement)

JOSEPHINE

Oh pool boy bring us another round of cocktails

CELESTE

And I could use some suntan lotion rubbed on my back...

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