

The Cooking King

A Ten-Minute play

By Sharon E. Cooper

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Production History: *The Cooking King* was produced by the Milk Can Theatre Company's "Potluck Plays" in the Spring 2007. Each playwright brought in a recipe and then randomly selected a different recipe. "The Cooking King" was inspired by the recipe "cold asparagus patina." The original director was Riv Massey and the cast was as follows:

Susan: Marta Kuerston
The Cooking King: Chris Catalano
Paul: Matt Stapleton

The play was rewritten in The CRY HAVOC Company. In the summer of 2009, the play was one of forty plays (chosen from over 700 submissions) produced as part of the Samuel French Off-off Broadway Short Play festival. Kitt Lavoie was the Director; Jenny Kirlin, Associate Director. Becky Sterling played "Susan." Chris Comfort played "The Cooking King" and Josh Bywater played "Paul."

The Cooking King is published in *The Best 10-Minute Plays, 2010* (Smith and Kraus. Lawrence Harbison, ed.)

CHARACTERS

The Cooking King, M. Any age	Host of a nationally syndicated cooking show
Susan, F. late 20s/early 30s	Married to Paul, a "stay at home Mom," looks like she hasn't slept well in a long time
Paul, M. late 20s/early 30s	Teaches high school History, married to Susan

SETTING

Susan and Paul's living room. The suburbs.

TIME

The present.

Playwright's Note: It is important that Susan is the central focus in the play and that the surreal nature of the piece is addressed. In the production for the 2009 Samuel French Off-off Broadway Short Play Festival (directed by Kitt Lavoie), this was accomplished by placing Susan and the couch center stage and the Cooking King character behind her, so when she paused or changed the channel, she motioned in the direction of the audience but the Cooking King responded behind her.

Lights up to a woman sitting next to a bassinet. She selects her show, “The Cooking King” and hits play. We hear music from the show and the Cooking King appears.

COOKING KING

Welcome to the Cooking Corner. I’m your host, and your friend, The Cooking King.

SUSAN

(leaning into the bassinet) That is my favorite part.

She restarts the show. The Cooking King “rewinds” and—

COOKING KING

Welcome to the Cooking Corner. I’m your host, and your friend, The Cooking King.

She “pauses” him.

SUSAN

Don’t you think he’s handsome?

She hits “play.”

This is a new one--

COOKING KING

Today, we are going to make asparagus patina.

SUSAN

What’s patina?

COOKING KING

You may be wondering what patina is.

SUSAN

How did you--

COOKING KING (overlapping)

In modern English, it means the film of green oxidation on copper or bronze.

SUSAN

Eeww.

COOKING KING

It's not as bad as it sounds. Now don't put away your cooking tray!

SUSAN

I won't.

COOKING KING

When we come back--

She hits "fast forward" on her remote, and we see the Cooking King fast forward.

SUSAN

Gone are the days of commercials.

COOKING KING

Welcome back to the king that cares. Don't forget to pre-heat the oven to 425. You can do it.

She doesn't. She never cooks.

SUSAN

(to the bassinet) I had one of those easy-bake ovens, and on Saturday mornings, your mum-mum and pop-pop would watch cooking shows with me.

COOKING KING

Take cleaned asparagus, pound in the mortar--

SUSAN

Pop-pop was a chef. When he left for work, he'd wear a wide mustard tie; he wanted to enter the restaurant as a king.

COOKING KING

Add water, beat thoroughly.

SUSAN

He would say, "What is on the menu today?" And I would say, "Strawberry Shortcake soup, banana seat delight"; I liked making up--

COOKING KING

Now do pay attention.

SUSAN

(to the Cooking King) Oh. Sorry.

COOKING KING

Because now we need a sieve!

SUSAN

Sieve, do I own one of those?

She “pauses” the show. The Cooking King freezes.

SUSAN

Beginnings are so much more interesting than what’s in the middle. Maybe we should have cupcakes for your first birthday! The Cooking King had a special once--

She starts another show.

COOKING KING / SUSAN

Welcome to the Cooking Corner. I’m your host, and your friend, The Cooking King.

COOKING KING

Today, we are going to make a delectable delight—creamy cupcakes with custard frosting. These are great for Christmas, birthday parties or just if you need a little treat.

SUSAN

I need a little treat.

COOKING KING

I know what you’re thinking.

SUSAN

You do?

COOKING KING

You don’t have time to cook cupcakes from scratch—well now, you don’t have to! Just watch as I take these--How’s it going out there kids?

SUSAN

It’s going. I’m ready.

COOKING KING

Don’t you wish they were already done?

SUSAN

Don’t you wish we were married to the Cooking King? He would come home from work and—

COOKING KING

Boy do I have treats for you!

SUSAN

My Cooking King husband!

The Cooking King, as her fantasy, comes out of the television.

COOKING KING

A warm walnut apple strudel drizzled with caramel. If you want--

SUSAN

I want.

COOKING KING

--wow—Can't you just taste them in your mouth?

SUSAN

Yes.

COOKING

How's the little apple strudel?

SUSAN

She missed you today.

Susan touches the bassinet. Her back is to the Cooking King. He holds her from behind.

COOKING KING

Are you ready?

SUSAN

Yes. Oh yes. I'm ready Cooking King!

She turns to him, but he is already gone, back in the television.

COOKING KING

Then make sure you have all the proper equipment. A cook without her pans is like a princess without her crown. You know what we say.

Susan mouths the next line as the Cooking King speaks.

COOKING KING

Don't put away your cooking tray.

The front door opens. It's PAUL, Susan's husband.

PAUL

Hi.

COOKING KING

Now let's get back to business and--

Susan turns off the volume on the show. The Cooking King continues silently. She moves the bassinet out of Paul's sightline as he hangs up his coat.

PAUL

Hi honey. How was your day? You know, you'd think students would learn to study by the time they got to high school. It's like, if sixty percent of the class fails the test, is it the students' fault or the teacher's fault?

SUSAN

I don't know.

PAUL

Right, right! You are right!

He hands her a necklace.

I know there are no set rules of what you give your wife when--

SUSAN

It's pretty.

Paul notices the television is on with no volume.

PAUL

Were you watching that all day?

SUSAN

No. I did—other things.

PAUL

I think we should go out.

SUSAN

I'd rather order in.

PAUL

Come on, it's been three months. I'll take you for white pizza. Remember, that's where we went on our first date. After the dance. Let's pretend it's our first date again.

SUSAN

I was so scared you were going to kiss me and so scared you weren't.

PAUL

Tonight I'm more of a sure bet. Come on—

He tries to move her towards the door. She moves away.

SUSAN

One time, when I was five, both of my parents thought the other one was home. Mom touched my blueberry barrettes and left. I walked through the house, calling "Mom, Pop!"

PAUL

What does this have to do with--

SUSAN (continuous)

I was holding my little spatula and pretend eggs. I flipped the three channels on the television. If a good cooking show had been on, I would have been okay—

COOKING KING

(Starting slowly) Nooowwww thiiis part is tricky—

SUSAN

What did you do to the television?

COOKING KING (overlapping)

Whhaatt hhaappennnsss neexxttt---

PAUL / SUSAN / COOKING KING

I didn't touch the television. / What is wrong with this? / I'm your welcome, And welcometothe cooking—Cooking King, Cook, Cook Cooking King--

Paul grabs the remote and turns off the television. The Cooking King falls forward so that he disappears.

SUSAN

No!

She rushes downstage towards the television and tries to turn it back on. It doesn't work.

PAUL

It's just a television program!

SUSAN

No it's not.

PAUL

Susan, for three months, I've wanted to come home to some sense of normalcy. You know, when you come home and say "How are you honey?" And we fall onto the couch laughing--I want to share a white pizza outside of this apartment.

SUSAN

What if you had been home that day?

PAUL

What if you hadn't been distracted by the Cooking King?

SUSAN

I can't believe you just said that.

Paul approaches her. He stands behind her and holds her in a similar way as we just saw with the Cooking King.

PAUL

This is about you and me. You and me on a Caribbean cruise where we could see each other's feet in the water. You and me and a bucket of baby blue paint because it reminded you of the sky. You and me.

They face each other. He sees the bassinet.

Not you and me and the Cooking King and this--

He tips the bassinet over; it falls.

Don't!

SUSAN

He lifts the blanket.

Susan, it's just a blanket.

PAUL

The blanket falls to the floor.

No it's not.

SUSAN

She folds the blanket, carefully.

PAUL

I am trying. I went to the bereavement group alone. I cook alone. I live with you but I live alone. I can't do it anymore. Come out with me.

Maybe he's getting through to her. He waits.
She puts down the blanket. A moment.
Susan steps towards the television.

We have to get the television fixed.

SUSAN

Paul looks back. Maybe he'll say something.
He changes his mind. She doesn't seem to notice he's leaving as she taps the remote.
It's working again. We hear and see the Cooking King doing his opening.

COOKING KING

Welcome to the Cooking Corner. I'm your host and your friend, The Cooking King.

Paul is gone. She laughs with relief at the TV. She straightens her hair. The Cooking King takes off his chef's hat.

COOKING KING

Today we're going to try something different. I know, I know, you love the Cooking King. As you should. But we're going for a whole new whoppin' might o' delight.

Susan looks towards the door.

You can do it.

She turns back to the Cooking King and picks up her necklace.

COOKING KING

Now let's get back to business and . . .

Susan hits "mute" on the remote, puts on her coat and moves towards the door. The Cooking King is left alone in silence, continuing the program as the lights fade.

Blackout.

End of play.

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