

RANDA. Oh, no. Men haven't been in the picture for years. I'm a dyed-in-the-wool career gal, devoted my whole life to it. No, I don't have a — (*They notice Dot.*)

DOT. (*Fiercely*) I told you we were waiting too long! You wasted the best years of our lives. Now you've left me all alone in a strange city with a drawer full of sexy underwear that's absolutely useless to me! A woman has needs! (*Slaps the doll repeatedly.*)

MARLAFAYE. (*Gently pulls doll away.*) Whoa. Kinda early in the day for that much information, Dottie. You okay?

DOT. (*Refreshed.*) You know, you're right. That little dolls a real winner. Oh, come on, Randa. Take a crack at it. Feels great!

RANDA. Oh, no, I haven't been involved in a relationship for years. I'm sure there's no *therapy device* for my particular situation. It's career-related. You see, I was recently the victim of a vicious corporate downsizing.

MARLAFAYE. I am so sorry. How many employees did they fire?

RANDA. (*Confident façade shatters. Sobs.*) One! (*Wails.*) They gave my job to a thirty-year-old twit. He wears bow ties! (*Grabs doll, screams as she smashes its head repeatedly against the table.*)

MARLAFAYE. Hey, now! Easy, girl! That doll's got to last me another couple months. (*Marlafaye pulls the doll away.*)

RANDA. (*Calms down.*) I ... don't know where that came from, but I feel much better now. I'm fine. (*Beat. Grabs the doll, gives it another whack, Marlafaye snatches it from her.*) Okay, now I'm fine.

MARLAFAYE. Wow! We may have bombed out of hot yoga but we sure let off some steam here today, right, girls? (*Shoves the doll into her bag.*)

DOT. I say good for us! And I don't think we bombed out here at all. Maybe we were meant to meet each other.

RANDA. Yes, maybe. It's ironic because I always avoid places like this. I'm starting to think the only way I'll ever expand my social horizon is to hire a life coach or find a miracle worker.

MARLAFAYE. Well, you won't catch *me* here again. I'm done with this exercise bull. I only joined this stupid class because my ex-husband bragged about how he and his trophy wife go to the gym and how he's lost fifty pounds since our divorce. He asked if I know what his ideal weight is and I said, "Sure. Four pounds *includin'* the urn." (*They laugh. She checks her watch.*) Gotta go. It was great to meet y'all.

RANDA. Yes, it *really* was. Another fifteen minutes and I would've invited you both over for drinks at my place. (*Laughs.*)

MARLAFAYE. Sounds great! Happy hour, six o'clock Friday night. DOT. I'm in! (*To Randa.*) You get the wine, we'll bring the nibbles. (*She and Marlafaye exit stage left.*)

RANDA. (*Completely blindsided.*) What?! But we don't really ... uh ... okay ... (*Tries to get into it. Calls.*) Great! The more the merrier! (*Light crossfades to black as downstage right pin spotlight comes up. Randa crosses into it, faces audience.*) Um ... when I was thinking about widening my horizons I didn't *exactly* see the process beginning with me chatting up two sweaty escapees from a New Age death trap. But ... maybe Dot's right. Maybe we *were* meant to meet each other. Of course Dot's a bit more mature and Marlafaye is ... well, she's *definitely* the person I'd want on my side if I were to find myself, say, in a *bar fight*. But I have to wonder if the three of us have anything in common. Now I'm questioning why I agreed to get together with them again. Frankly, I'm just not seeing the *logic* in it. But, maybe that's part of opening myself to new experiences, like ... *hot yoga*. (*Beat. Then, horrified.*) Oh god, what have I done? (*Blackout.*)

## Scene 2

*A few days later, late afternoon. Up-tempo country swing plays for only a few bars. Downstage left pin spotlight comes up on Marlafaye, now dressed in casual pants and shirt, carries an oversized purse.*

MARLAFAYE. Know how you get that tingly feeling when you're fallin' in love? That sensation that washes over you and kinda gives you the shivers? Well, *that* is common sense leavin' your body. That's what happened to me on that black day I met Waylon Mosley. Waylon was the kind of guy you could count on to do the right thing ... once he'd tried everything else. And the man had no sense of humor. He'd turn to me in bed and say, "Marlafaye, I'm about to make you the happiest woman in the world." And I'd look at him and say, "I'm gonna miss you, Waylon." I mean, not even a *smile*. (*Sighs.*) Life in Tyler, Texas, was no bed of roses ... ironic since its claim to fame is being the *Rose Capital of the World*. I landed a job straight out of

nursing school and worked for Flip Gawler, perhaps the most egotistical doctor in the lower forty-eight and you *know* that competition is stiff. Thirty years I'd slave all day for one jackass, then go home and sleep all night with another one. That was my life, carved in stone. It never occurred to me to ask for anything better. But on the very day I found out Waylon had dumped me for Little-Miss-Rinse-And-Spit, I had the good sense to jump up and grab the curveball Fate had thrown me. So I burned those ugly scrubs, set my sights on Savannah, and left the bad memories behind. I became a rep for a liquor distributor, which is not all that different from being a nurse — a visit with me always makes my clients feel better — and I've been here four months. It's my town now. *(Beat.)* Sure, it's a little lonely. Nobody promised that startin' a brand new life at fifty-seven would be easy. But I'm workin' on it and thinkin' positive. I get that from my daddy. He always said to bury him in his four-wheel-drive pickup — because "It ain't never been in a hole it couldn't get me out of." *(A few bars of country swing play as the pin spotlight goes to black. Marlafaye turns and walks into the light as it comes up on Randa's beautifully appointed second-story verandah of her lovely home. The upstage and stage left exterior walls are butter yellow clapboard with white trim. A door to the kitchen is on the stage left wall. Just downstage of the door is a small cart that serves as a bar. A wicker sofa with brightly colored cushions sits center stage, in front of two interior windows on the upstage wall. Slightly downstage, right and left of the sofa, is a pair of comfortable wicker armchairs. A coffee table is in the center of the seating. A potted palm tree sits at the stage right end of the sofa. An occasional table with a fern on it sits further stage right of the potted palm. A white balustrade extends downstage from the far right upstage wall, with side stairs leading to the street below. Architectural "gingerbread" ornamentation, hanging baskets, and potted greenery complete the Southern elegance of the space. Calls:)* I have arrived — let the party begin! *(Looks around, impressed.)* Man alive, you've got one heck of a house. And your porch! This is what I'm talkin' about!

RANDA. *(Calls from offstage.)* Actually, here it's called a *verandah*.

MARLAFAYE. Yeah? So this is *Randa's verandah*? *(Laughs. Randa, in a frilly blouse, skirt, heels enters with a bouquet, sets it on coffee table.)*

RANDA. As long as Randa can keep paying the mortgage, it is. What epicurean delight have you brought?

MARLAFAYE. My signature dish — pimento cheese, chock-full

of pickied jaiapenos. Just set it out — viveve! Call status up to a nuclear blast.

RANDA. And yet you never hear that in their ad campaign. Well, this will be ... nice with the Gruyère and thyme *cheese* straws I'm making. MARLAFAYE. Bonus! *(Looks around.)* Yeah, sure is a pretty place, everything's so neat and clean. I'm not like that. Instead of cleaning my house, I just turn off the lights. And tell you what, you are brave inviting two strangers over. *(Picks up a small silver candlestick.)* Dottie and I could be a couple of kleptos for all you know. *(Sets it down, walks to stage right railing, looks out.)*

RANDA. Oh, don't be ridiculous. I'm a great judge of character. *(Unseen by Marlafaye, she quickly takes the candlestick to upstage right table, shoves it into the drawer.)*

MARLAFAYE. You see that car out there? It drove past me twice while I was looking for a parking space. Isn't that Dottie? *(Randa joins her.)* RANDA. Yes, it is. And I keep waving to let her know she's at the correct address, but she doesn't see me. *(Buzzer dings offstage.)* Oops! I've got to check my cheese straws. Would you help get her up here? *(Hurries out.)*

MARLAFAYE. Sure. *(Waves, shouts.)* Dot! *(Louder.)* Dottie! *(Hollers.)* Look up! Park that *heap* and get your *butt* in here! Time to *par-tay*! *(Randa races in.)* Hey, I'm pretty sure she heard me.

RANDA. *(Horrified, covers.)* Yes ... I'm sure the whole neighborhood did.

MARLAFAYE. So, you found another job yet?

RANDA. No, but I'm sure something will turn up. *(Determined.)* In fact, I thoroughly believe a much better position is out there waiting for me.

MARLAFAYE. That's the spirit! Lucky you're not one of those pathetic crybabies who calls the old boss beggin' for your job back. All that does is convince the folks you used to work for that you're a spineless fool and they were right to have kicked you to the curb. RANDA. Please. Who would be that desperate? *(Beat.)* So you really think I shouldn't have called?

MARLAFAYE. Shug, I'd say me and my pimento cheese got here just in time. *(Pulls container from purse.)* You know how some people forget to eat? Well, I'm a big advocate of eatin' to forget. Dive in. *(Hands it to her.)*

RANDA. In that case, I hope you brought a lot because I had a dreadful experience this afternoon I just can't shake. At my favorite

the market, I ran into the most deplorable woman. One was in the express lane, five-items-or-less, with *eight items!* I kid you not. And when I tactfully called it to her attention, she was vulgar and insulting and loud. It was terrible!

MARLAFAYE. (*Is she for real?*) Wow ... where's the National Guard when you need 'em?

RANDA. Exactly! And we wonder how a civilization collapses? (*Dot, in a summer dress, enters side stairs with a large purse, bag, four library books.*)

DOT. (*Staggered slightly.*) Okay, what's spinning — you, me, or the entire room? (*Marlafaye and Randa hurry to help.*)

RANDA. Are you alright?

DOT. I'm fine, dear. I couldn't quite make out the number on your house and had to keep circling the block and it made me a titch dizzy. But, I'm here now and so is the fromage. (*Hands Randa a shopping bag.*)

RANDA. Ah ... guess you can never have too much cheese.

MARLAFAYE. *Fromage*, right! I was tryin' to remember what it was you taught all those years.

RANDA. Oh, you taught *French*? I adore all things French. (*Dramatic.*) *Voulez-vous asseyez pas et se reposer votre grenouille?*

DOT. Actually, I don't have a little frog that needs to rest, dear, but I certainly could use a sit-down. (*Perches on sofa.*)

RANDA. Guess I am *un peu* ... um, rusty. Truth is, I'm a bit out of practice at being a hostess, too.

MARLAFAYE. And I'd offer to help you ... (*Hints.*) if I weren't so darned parched.

RANDA. Drinks! Of course. I'll be right back. (*Exits with the cheeses. Marlafaye takes the books from Dot.*)

MARLAFAYE. So, they got you drivin' the bookmobile now, Dottie? DOT. Oh, with Ross gone and so much time on my hands, I've practically lived at the library. I need to return these tomorrow but didn't want someone to break into my car and steal them.

MARLAFAYE. Yep, they keep it pretty quiet about all those folks breakin' into cars to steal large-print library books. (*Checks them.*) Whoa, mama! These are some pretty steamy titles.

DOT. Well, Ross is the one who died, not me. (*Randa enters with an opened wine bottle and three glasses on a tray. Sets it on the bar.*)

RANDA. It just so happens, I'd selected a fabulous French wine for tonight. (*Hands Dot the bottle. Re: label.*) Does that look familiar?

IT TAKES YOU CARE TO READ YOUR OWN ...

DOT. Dear, I taught high-school French in Oklahoma. The only Paris I ever got to visit was the one in Texas. (*Tries to read label, holds it as far away as she can. Marlafaye takes it, walks bottle across the room.*)

MARLAFAYE. How about now, Dottie? Any better?

DOT. (*To Randa.*) You don't happen to have that label in large print, do you?

RANDA. It's a Côte du Rhône Grenache. (*Pours a bit in each glass.*) My brother, Alden, he-who-can-do-no-wrong, recently took a break from walking on water and raising the dead to get married. This was served at the dinner. It's an absolutely unforgettable wine. (*They sip, faces contort. Revulsed, struggle to swallow.*)

DOT. And it still is! (*Marlafaye runs to the balustrade, spits over the side.*)

MARLAFAYE. (*Yells down to the street.*) Oops! Sorry, Sister!

DOT. This strikes me as more of a vinaigrette in search of a salad. RANDA. I don't know what happened. I let the wine breathe.

MARLAFAYE. Maybe you should've given it *CPR*.

RANDA. This is a disaster! I must've bought a bad year. And it's all I have. (*Takes glasses and bottle to lower shelf of bar.*)

MARLAFAYE. (*As she strides to her purse.*) Remain calm, citizens.

There's no need to fear ... (*Pulls a fifth of bourbon from her purse, strikes superhero pose.*) Whiskey Wonder Woman is here! I give you ... Kentucky bourbon at its finest! (*Opens bottle, takes a sniff.*) Ahhh.

DOT. Wow. All I have in my purse is keys, lipstick, and Gas-X.

MARLAFAYE. Yeah, but a good liquor rep is *always* prepared.

RANDA. Marlafaye, you are my hero! The nursing profession's loss is our gain. (*Hurries to bar, grabs three clean glasses.*)

DOT. None for me. I never drink hard liquor. Back when we were dating, I overheard Ross say he thought women who drank hard liquor looked cheap.

MARLAFAYE. Well, unless Randa's brother brings Ross back from the other side, I say throw caution to the wind and have yourself a snort.

DOT. Oh ... well, maybe just a smidge. (*Randa pours, hands a glass to Marlafaye, pours another, hands it to Dot.*) Mmm ... maybe just a smidge more. (*Randa pours again then pours a glass for herself.*)

MARLAFAYE. Girls, here's to livin' single and drinkin' doubles! (*They touch glasses, sip. Dot gasps, coughs.*)

DOT. Fire! I'm on fire! Water, quick! (*Grabs Randa's glass, drinks, goes into another coughing fit.*) Not water ... bad idea! (*Gradually gets her breath. Marlafaye pats her on the back.*)