

THE SAVANNAH SIPPING SOCIETY

ACT ONE

Scene 1

Late morning. Up-tempo jazz plays as a pin spotlight comes up downstage right on Randa Covington, high-strung perfectionist, in trendy form-fitting yoga pants and off-one-shoulder top. Hair stylishly pulled back, a rolled mat under one arm, water bottle in hand, she faces the audience and speaks.

RANDA. (*Exudes confidence, upbeat.*) It's my firm belief — and certainly any clear-thinking individual would agree — that one must approach life from a *logical* point of view. It's my mantra. For example, any time I'm asked to fill out a form that includes the phrase "in case of a medical emergency please contact —" I always write ... "a doctor." Logic! It's how I built my successful career in architecture — working twenty-four-seven and accepting nothing less than perfection from myself. So, when a new partner was to be named at McCarthy & Fowler, it was *logical* my unflinching loyalty to the firm was about to be repaid. I was so proud as I walked into that conference room. (*Beat. Then, uncomfortable.*) You know, I don't actually *remember* screaming obscenities as the security guards pried my hands from the throat of the thirty-year-old *man* who was given the partnership. But when McCarthy & Fowler filed the restraining order against me, I completely understood because ... it was *logical*. (*Shakes it off, determinedly upbeat.*) Anyway, having an excess of time to fill, logic dictates that I do something other than sit

at home alone rearranging my sweaters according to cashmere content. And I may have stumbled on to a masterful way to heal body and spirit — yoga! (*Gets into it, indicates her costume.*) Obviously I have prepared and I am ready for the adventure. *This* will be wonderful! (*Her pin spotlight goes to black as another pin spotlight comes up downstage left on the lobby/juice bar in a yoga studio — bistro table, three chairs. "Spa"/new-age music plays softly in the background. Dot Haigler, daffy and endearing, in glasses, colorful exercise pants and top, is seated in a chair, fans herself vigorously. Randa, gasping, exhausted, joins her from stage right.*) That was the most horrible thing I've ever been through! Forcing otherwise sane women to squat and contort themselves in a small room, then cranking the heat to a hundred fifty degrees?! *Really?!* What homicidal maniac thought *that* up?! (*To Dot.*) Excuse me, mind if I collapse in this chair?

DOT. Please do! You certainly lasted longer than I did. I thought "hot yoga" meant it was fun and hip. Who knew we signed up for Lucifer's little sweatshop?

RANDA. (*Laughs.*) I guess what counts is that we tried.

DOT. I agree. Honestly, I'm at the age where all I usually exercise is *caution*. (*Extends her hand.*) I'm Dot.

RANDA. I'm Randa. Good to know at least *two* of us were smart enough to get out of there alive. (*They shake as Marlafaye Mosley, earthy, boisterous, good ol' Texas gal, in baggy sweatpants, sweatshirt with sleeves cut out, staggers in stage left, near collapse, drags a gym bag behind her.*)

MARLAFAYE. The pearly gates — they're openin' up! (*Croaks.*) Must ... have ... water! (*The others are alarmed. She sinks to her knees at the table.*)

RANDA. Oh! Okay, I'll go get — (*Marlafaye grabs Randa's bottle, chugs all of it, slams it back on the table.*) Or ... just ... help yourself to mine.

MARLAFAYE. Thank god I didn't slather on the baby oil this morning. I would've come out of that hellhole chicken fried. (*Indicates Dot's fan.*) Hey, could I get a little bit of that action?

DOT. Sure. At least this way I'll burn a *few* calories. (*Fans Marlafaye, who basks in the breeze.*) So, I take it you don't work out that much, either?

MARLAFAYE. Please. If it weren't for mood swings, I'd get no exercise at all. But that's okay, 'cause it just wouldn't be fair to the women of Savannah if I was *this* gorgeous, smart, funny, *and* thin. It's a public service, really.

DOT. How very thoughtful. (*Fans.*) Gee, what a waste of a perfectly good morning. I drove in all the way from Tybee Island to get here.

Side 2 Marlafaye
Randa

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 upstage 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 pickled jalapeños. Just set it out — Velveta can stand 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. *(Horried, 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

little market, I ran into the most belligerent woman. She 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. (*Staggers 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?

End
here

Perhaps you came across it when you were in France.

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 Côtes 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.*)