

**THE HEROINES  
OF  
CENTRAL OHIO**

*By*  
*Chris Shaw Swanson*

# THE HEROINES OF CENTRAL OHIO

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THE HEROINES OF CENTRAL OHIO

*For Mom, Karen  
&  
John Leslie*

## THE HEROINES OF CENTRAL OHIO

CAST: 7 Women, 1 Man

|           |  |
|-----------|--|
| BILLIE    | 40s-60s, Club President. Grounded.   |
| SUSAN     | 30s-40s, Club Secretary. Wholesome.  |
| EVIE      | Around Billie's age, Former Club Treasurer. A spirit with a Southern accent.                     |
| MARY BETH | 30s-40s, Club Vice President. Self-possessed, gay, blind.  |
| TRACY     | 20s, At-Large Board Member. Literal and learning.  |
| CATHERINE | 50s-80s, At-Large Board Member. Wise.  |
| PLAYER    | 20s-60s, Male Muse. Charismatic and versatile. Assumes various roles, including romantic heroes. |
| LORRAINE  | 50s-80s, Honorary Board Member. A force.   |

TIME: Summertime. Present. Early Evening.

PLACE: A library meeting room, except when it flashes to the past or to a romance novel setting, both via lighting changes/minimal props.

THE HEROINES OF CENTRAL OHIO

# THE HEROINES OF CENTRAL OHIO

## ACT 1

*BILLIE is alone, anxiously pacing. The room contains a long table set diagonally with four chairs behind it. This is where the Board's executive officers sit. Two additional chairs are in the vicinity for the at-large Board members. Billie has a cigarette in her hand. Almost subconsciously, she reaches in her purse, pulls out a lighter, and tries lighting the cigarette.*

**BILLIE.** *(Catching herself, closing lighter.)* Junkie. *(She decides to take a few drags on the unlit cigarette anyway. SUSAN enters.)*

**SUSAN.** *(Playfully.)* Caught you red-handed! Billie, you know this is a no smoking building.

**BILLIE.** Since when are libraries no smoking?

**SUSAN.** If those librarians smell smoke in here-

**BILLIE.** This isn't a real cigarette, Susan. It's one of those fake jobs you use while quitting to keep your fingers busy. It's my lungs that are bored shitless.

**SUSAN.** I know how hard it is to quit. I smoked once.

**BILLIE.** *(A beat.)* One time.

**SUSAN.** Yes.

**BILLIE.** You're fanatically wholesome.

**SUSAN.** Watch out—it might be catchy.

**BILLIE.** Cover your mouth when you talk. *(A beat.)* Where the hell is everyone? It's almost seven.

**SUSAN.** They're outside, talking about Evie, the vote-

**BILLIE.** Outside? Why did we bother reserving this friggin' room then?!

**SUSAN.** Calm down. I realize this is very personal for you-

**BILLIE.** I'm calm.

**SUSAN.** You tried smoking a toy.

## THE HEROINES OF CENTRAL OHIO

**BILLIE.** *(Pause.)* Well, what are they saying? Do you think they'll vote to press charges?

**SUSAN.** It's hard to tell. Evie has everyone pretty shook up.

**BILLIE.** She'd like that.

**SUSAN.** *(Excited.)* I called Lorraine Chantain last night. As an honorary Board member, she has a right to vote, too-

**BILLIE.** Lorraine won't make it. She's too busy being successful.

**SUSAN.** She IS in the middle of writing her new book, but she said she'd still get here-

**BILLIE.** Lorraine Chantain has the key, you know. Stay home and write instead of coming to these writing support groups to bitch about not having the time to stay home and write.

**SUSAN.** Bitchin's a whole lot easier.

**BILLIE.** Amen to that.

**SUSAN.** I was thinking...Wouldn't it be wild if Evie dropped by today? Maybe with a bad check for all of the money she stole from us?

**BILLIE.** Not even Evie would have the balls to show up for this.

**SUSAN.** *(Pause/Awkwardly.)* I'm sorry, Billie. I know you and Evie were close...And especially after everything else you've been through this year-

**BILLIE.** Go round everyone up. Let's get the balls rolling.

**SUSAN.** You got it, Ms. President! *(Susan exits. Billie resumes pacing, playing with cigarette. She blows a pretend smoke ring.)*

**BILLIE.** And you thought I couldn't blow a perfect ring, Yvette. *(Pause.)* Evie, Evie. You could have at least kept the scam going until we quit smoking. We WERE going to quit together...

**EVIE.** *(Offstage.)* Sure, honey, just like the countless other times we have tried and failed...

**BILLIE.** You have me wondering if even that accent of yours is real...

**EVIE.** *(Offstage.)* Of course, the mere attempt to quit simultaneously is such a romp! How you and I have reveled in each other's nasty dementia while in the throes of nicotine withdrawal. Naturally, we were destined for such intercourse—meeting at that stop smoking seminar when I bummed a Marlboro off you. I vividly recall-

**BILLIE.** *(Interrupting.)* Lousy bitch.

## THE HEROINES OF CENTRAL OHIO

**EVIE.** *(Offstage, playfully initiating word game.)* Harlot. *(Pause.)* Well, go on. It's your turn again.

**BILLIE.** *(Rising anger throughout.)* Whore.

**EVIE.** *(Offstage, playful throughout.)* Fallen woman-

**BILLIE.** Floozy-

**EVIE.** *(Offstage.)* Tart-

**BILLIE.** Tramp-

**EVIE.** *(Offstage.)* Trollop-

**BILLIE.** Slut-

**EVIE.** *(Offstage.)* Strumpet-

**BILLIE.** *(Angry/Hurt.)* Lying Southern fried phony rotten backstabbing piece of shit!

**EVIE.** *(Pause.)* Hooker. *(EVIE enters, wearing the cloak and hat of a Pre-Civil War Southern belle, outer garments she eventually removes. Billie does not see Evie, and neither do the other women, except during “flashback” scenes. However, they do sense her presence from time to time, since the Evie the audience sees is in part the women’s individual and collective memory/perception of her. Evie speaks with sincerity.)* Did you peruse my missive? Did you read even one word of it? *(No response.)*

You need not reply, Billie girl. I'm tickled pink just to be in your thoughts—for now. *(Noticing her clothing.)* And Lord—look at this—you've made me the spittin' image of Miss Scarlett O'Hara—Margaret Mitchell's, not that Scarlett rip-off by Alexandra Ripley. *(Pause.)* Truth be known, this garb makes me feel rather like Maggie, the heroine of SOUTHERN COMFORTS, my recent trilogy of published literary fiction. My Maggie was fashioned somewhat after you, Billie. Feisty. Sensitive-

**BILLIE.** You never published SOUTHERN COMFORTS. It was all some game.

**EVIE.** The two of us. I thought we relished our games... *(Susan enters leading MARY BETH, who is blind. Both women eventually take their places at the front table.)*

**SUSAN.** I can't wait to hear what Lorraine Chantain has to say about Evie.

**EVIE.** Evie can.

**SUSAN.** Lorraine Chantain told me herself she's going to stop by. But she'll probably be late-

## THE HEROINES OF CENTRAL OHIO

**MARY BETH.** Yes, so she can make her grand entrance.

**EVIE.** Well put, Doc!

**MARY BETH.** Lorraine rarely shows up for our meetings. Unless there's something the group is not telling me...

**SUSAN.** (*Confused/Then realizing.*) Oh! I get it! Gosh, Mary Beth, you are so well adjusted to make visually challenged jokes like that...

**MARY BETH.** Billie—help. Susan called me “visually challenged” again.

**BILLIE.** Apologize, Susan.

**SUSAN.** (*Laughing.*) You guys!

**MARY BETH.** (*To Susan.*) Please get my blind butt in a chair.

**EVIE.** My sweet Susan...And Mary Beth...I so deeply miss our camaraderie...even though I appear to be here... (*TRACY enters, stifling tears. She approaches Billie to say something.*)

**BILLIE.** What's the matter, dear?

**TRACY.** (*Choking up/Holding note cards.*) It's...Um...I have these notes I'd like to...to...Excuse me. (*Tracy rushes to one of the at-large member chairs.*)

**BILLIE.** Evie does have her cult.

**MARY BETH.** Yes—the emotionally challenged. (*Evie follows Tracy, unsuccessfully trying to read Tracy's cards. CATHERINE enters.*)

**BILLIE.** Catherine! I'm so glad you could make it.

**CATHERINE.** I can't wait to get to the heart of all this scuttlebutt about Evie. She seems like such a decent woman, certainly no thief.

**EVIE.** Listen to Catherine, girls. She's one of our prized published authors.

**CATHERINE.** Although her flair for the dramatic is quite trying at times.

**EVIE.** Well, not that much of a prize...

**CATHERINE.** So today we collectively write the last chapter. Will we finish off our naughty little anti-heroine? Send her to the gallows?

**EVIE.** And she calls me dramatic. (*The PLAYER immediately appears, face covered wearing an executioner's hood. He is invisible to all the characters except Evie, unless otherwise specified. Evie sees him and gasps.*)



## THE HEROINES OF CENTRAL OHIO

**MARY BETH.** I believe it's safe to say we're all dying to find out what tonight's decision will be.

**SUSAN.** I see everyone's present. Except Lorraine Chantain. But she personally told me she'd make it. So personally, I think she will.

*(Catherine sits in other at-large member chair.)*

**BILLIE.** God, I need a smoke.

**SUSAN.** Me, too.

**EVIE.** *(To Player/Uncomfortable.)* May I help you find a seat? *(No response.)* The exit? *(No response. Billie stands at table's middle. Susan and Mary Beth occupy seats on either side of her. Susan takes notes on laptop intermittently throughout proceedings.)*

**BILLIE.** I'd like to call this Board meeting of Central Ohio's Romance Authors of America to order. *(Evie sits in empty chair up front with Board executives.)* Tonight, I move that all usual executive Board business be dealt with at next month's meeting so we can concentrate on the issue I believe is foremost on everyone's mind—whether or not to press charges against Yvette St. James.

**MARY BETH.** I second the motion.

**BILLIE.** All in favor, raise your hands. *(All of the women including Evie raise their hands except Susan.)*

**SUSAN.** Our bylaws don't allow postponing usual business. *(Billie glares, so Susan raises her hand.)*

**BILLIE.** Good. *(Pause.)* First, I'd like to read into the record the events that led to our knowledge of Evie's embezzlement of treasury funds.

**EVIE.** BORROWING of treasury funds. *(During Billie's dialogue, Player moves Evie to center of room ala escorting the prisoner to hear charges brought against her.)*

**BILLIE.** *(Occasionally referring to notes.)* On June 4<sup>th</sup>, I received a telephone call from the headquarters of Romance Authors of America in New York, informing me that our check to them in the amount of \$1200 had bounced. The check was for a half-page ad in RAA's Annual Yearbook. *(Mary Beth raises her hand.)* Mary Beth?

**MARY BETH.** It's rather ironic that our Yearbook advertisement congratulated Evie on her SOUTHERN COMFORTS trilogy being picked

## THE HEROINES OF CENTRAL OHIO

up for an HBO series starring (*Sighs.*) Carrie Underwood and Blake Shelton.

**EVIE.** Perfect for those roles, Miss Underwood and Mr. Shelton.

**BILLIE.** That's another story. Anyway, I immediately called Evie about the bad check and she said it was a bank error.

**EVIE.** I was embarrassed.

**BILLIE.** Then I didn't hear anything, she didn't return my calls or e-mails, until I got her letter about a week later telling me she had borrowed the money for personal reasons and would pay it back.

**MARY BETH.** She had borrowed all right, all \$8,483.30 in our treasury.

**CATHERINE.** (*Raising hand.*) How could she take over eight thousand dollars without somebody realizing it?

**SUSAN.** (*To Billie.*) If I may answer that-

**BILLIE.** You may.

**SUSAN.** Thanks. As our treasurer, she could draft a check without it being co-signed. (*A beat.*) We're currently rethinking that policy...

**BILLIE.** A few days ago, we received this letter from the law firm of Horowitz, Greene and Marsh promising that Evie will reimburse us in monthly installments of \$400 if we agree not to press charges.

**EVIE.** I'm good for it, ladies.

**MARY BETH.** Oh, please.

**BILLIE.** (*Showing check.*) Now hold on. Included with the letter is this money order for \$400, her first payment-

**EVIE.** There!

**MARY BETH.** There's only one minor glitch.

**BILLIE.** And what might that be?

**MARY BETH.** Evie dreamed up that letter—Neither Horowitz, Greene nor Marsh ever heard of her. I called them this afternoon.

**BILLIE.** (*Disbelieving.*) Are you sure?

**EVIE.** Oops...

**MARY BETH.** Why are you surprised? All of her other letters and contracts have proven fictitious. Evie's beloved editor at Harlequin—she bragged to everyone about insightful Bonnie Miller—Ms. Miller never heard of Evie. Neither have the people at HBO.

**TRACY.** I swear I saw her book and TV contracts-

## THE HEROINES OF CENTRAL OHIO

**BILLIE.** We're getting off track here. The issue we have to discuss is the stolen money-

**MARY BETH.** The issue is much larger than that! This woman we have embraced as a friend and colleague for eight years has—with obvious premeditation—deceived us. The money is only one aspect of it-

**BILLIE.** Well, it's the only aspect she can be legally charged with-

**MARY BETH.** I can certainly understand you wanting to protect her-

**EVIE.** Yes.

**BILLIE.** No, I don't want to protect-

**MARY BETH.** The lying has far greater repercussions than the stealing! She made our chapter, she made all of us look like fools!

**EVIE.** My God, you'd think I ate their young.

**MARY BETH.** Just give us a reasonable explanation why she did this, Billie.

**BILLIE.** *(Pause/Slowly.)* She's been going through a tough time. Her husband Frank—he's never been very supportive of her writing-

**MARY BETH.** Spare us. Most of the women here don't get much support at home. Yet how many have even contemplated stealing? A show of hands please? *(No hands are raised.)* See?

**EVIE.** *(To Billie.)* Tell them about the dreadful problems with my restaurant-

**MARY BETH.** How—in God's name—how do you know Evie's told you the truth? About anything? Ever?

**BILLIE.** That's not the point.

**SUSAN.** Billie's right about one thing.

**BILLIE.** Bravo for me.

**SUSAN.** The Board has a decision to make tonight. The police won't do anything about our complaint unless we agree to press charges. We have plenty of evidence. Evie sent Billie the cancelled checks.

**EVIE.** What was I thinking? Forgiveness?

**SUSAN.** After everyone has their say, we'll vote. Lorraine Chantain is supposed to stop by and say her say, too.

**EVIE.** Our most distinguished writer Lorraine detests me, and clearly these cherished friends of mine want blood. *(To Player.)* So, please, sir. Do with me what you will—and swiftly. I stand condemned and abandoned.

## THE HEROINES OF CENTRAL OHIO

**PLAYER.** (*Ripping off hood.*) Like hell you're abandoned! (*During this and subsequent Evie/Player scenes, women freeze or are faded/blacked out, as if time has stopped.*)

**EVIE.** (*Happy.*) Why, you rascal! (*Almost embraces him but stops herself.*) You ruined my exit.

**PLAYER.** On the contrary, madam. I inspired it.

**EVIE.** You know I don't believe in divine inspiration, male muses hiding under hoods-

**PLAYER.** Touch me.

**EVIE.** I said I'm not a believer-

**PLAYER.** (*Thick Southern accent/As Jefferson.*) Maggie Comfort, if I could but carry the too sweet memory of your touch into battle-

**EVIE.** I'm not playing, ghost boy-

**PLAYER.** (*Jefferson.*) Must I again wait for the moon to light your passion? (*Pause.*) I see. Only cloaked by night, beneath the shadow of the grand oak, only then, only there, will you allow your flesh to consume mine.

**EVIE.** (*Thicker Southern accent/As Maggie.*) Oh Jefferson. Our fathers won't—can't accept-

**PLAYER.** (*Jefferson.*) Our fathers? (*Laughs.*) You mean your father. My father's name, all us Taresdales, are cursed in the eyes of Atlanta society because of the accusations hurled by one Mr. Jackson Comfort.

**EVIE.** (*Maggie.*) My father believes himself just. Who else could have murdered his only brother-

**PLAYER.** (*Jefferson.*) Not a Taresdale, madam. We are not the bloodletting kind. (*Pause/Longingly.*) My lost, confused Maggie.

**EVIE.** (*Maggie.*) I will come to you tonight, Jefferson-

**PLAYER.** (*Jefferson.*) I may be dead tonight, fighting to protect you—and your Comfort family's Southern righteousness. My regiment leaves shortly.

**EVIE.** (*Maggie.*) I forbid you to go with them, Shelton.

**PLAYER.** (*Dropping accent.*) Shelton?

**EVIE.** (*As herself.*) Mr. Blake Shelton. He is ideal for your role.

**PLAYER.** Not better than me, though.

**EVIE.** Of course—he's alive!

## THE HEROINES OF CENTRAL OHIO

**PLAYER.** So am I. Just ask these delightful women friends of mine.

**EVIE.** I certainly would. But, as you know, I'm on their shit list at present.

**PLAYER.** Will you go to jail, Evie? It might be the disciplined environment you need to write your novels DOWN. To make me—and your Jefferson—eternally vibrant and real.

**EVIE.** Make YOU eternal? I'd forgo creativity altogether if that would make you vanish.

**PLAYER.** You don't mean that... (*Evie turns away. Gently.*)

Evie... Yvette, my darlin'... Well, at least good old Billie hasn't deserted me. (*Billie rolls eyes.*)... Or madcap Susan (*Susan grins.*)... Alas, my not-so-fragile Mary Beth (*Mary Beth nods.*)... Woman-child Tracy (*Tracy giggles.*)... And there's always Catherine, one of my oldest and dearest lovers.

**CATHERINE.** (*British accent as Rose/To Player.*) Hell's gate! YOU are the traitor! YOU are the low, vile wretch who betrays the crown!

**PLAYER.** (*Matter-of-factly.*) Henry the VIII may be king, but my Catherine rules 16<sup>th</sup> century England.

**CATHERINE.** (*Rose.*) The red-haired monarch will ferret you out—Lord Lieutenant Thomas by day, knave Nick the pirate by night.

**PLAYER.** (*British/Swashbuckling, as Thomas.*) Mayhap you, Rose, the king's sweet ward, privy to my dark deeds will spur on Horrid Harry's wrath.

**CATHERINE.** (*Rose.*) By the saints I will!

**PLAYER.** (*Thomas.*) Then run to your beloved king—smash all that is too indelicate and bold for such a comely court lady.

**CATHERINE.** (*Rose.*) I cannot abide you or your jesting, blackguard!

**PLAYER.** (*Thomas.*) Then dare to do as you are bidden, Rose. Flee to your king at once—while your blood is up! (*Catherine/Rose begins to leave; Player grabs and kisses her passionately.*)

**CATHERINE.** (*As herself, slowing breaking embrace.*) No...No...

**PLAYER.** (*Panting/As Player.*) What?!

**CATHERINE.** More conflict and conversation before the embrace. It's too early.

**PLAYER.** How can it be too early? Thomas is already noting the swell of Rose's magnificent breasts.

## THE HEROINES OF CENTRAL OHIO

**CATHERINE.** Swelling breasts also come later. Along with dueling tongues and throbbing members-

**PLAYER.** *(To his crotch.)* Stop throbbing! *(To Catherine.)* Tease.

**CATHERINE.** Historical romance thrives on teasing.

**PLAYER.** So it does. *(Pause.)* Yvette St. James—she is the quintessential modern day tease, isn't she?

**CATHERINE.** Let's go back to Rose's line, "foul Thomas"-

**PLAYER.** How well do you know Evie?

**CATHERINE.** Not that well, really.

**PLAYER.** Oh. I thought you brought her into the group.

**CATHERINE.** *(Defensive.)* No, it wasn't my idea-

**EVIE.** She encouraged me like a mother-

**CATHERINE.** We rarely spoke-

**EVIE.** I met her at a book signing...At Barnes and Noble... *(Reenacting past.)* Miss Catherine Joyce. *(Hands Catherine book.)* Could you...Um...I am deeply moved by your work, Miss Joyce.

**CATHERINE.** *(Past.)* Why, thank you dear. To whom shall I inscribe this?

**EVIE.** Me. Yvette. No—put down Evie. My friends call me Evie. Not to be presumptuous-

**CATHERINE.** If you befriend my work, you befriend me. *(Catherine autographs book.)*

**EVIE.** I hope if I ever sell my romances, I will be as gracious as you are.

**CATHERINE.** You write romances?

**EVIE.** Dabble...Actually, I'm quite taken with the Civil War genre, as well as its devastating aftermath.

**CATHERINE.** Have you submitted any manuscripts to publishers?

**EVIE.** No. No. Well, once. The people at Avon rejected it.

**CATHERINE.** Of course—initial efforts are supposed to be rejected. A rite of passage. I have an idea, Evelyn-

**EVIE.** Evie.

**CATHERINE.** Evie. Come to the next meeting of Central Ohio's Romance Authors of America. The forty of us share intimate writing and publishing secrets, critiques of each other's work, potluck dinners-

**EVIE.** I'm not very good in a group environment-

THE HEROINES OF CENTRAL OHIO

**CATHERINE.** You'll love it. We are all bright and articulate—like yourself. You must attend our next soiree-

**EVIE.** Oh my. Miss Joyce is asking me to a soiree-

**CATHERINE.** My real name is Catherine Stanorovich. Can't imagine why my editor renamed me Joyce. I also write under the pseudonym Miranda Turner for Harlequin—but we'll just keep that under our two historical hats, won't we?

**EVIE.** My historical hat is duly fastened.

**CATHERINE.** What will you change your name to? When you're published?

**EVIE.** If I get-

**CATHERINE.** (*Correcting her.*) WHEN you get-

**EVIE.** When I get published, I shall remain true to Yvette St. James of Atlanta—no matter what pressure is applied on me to change it.

**CATHERINE.** I applaud your resolve! I applaud... (*To Player, conceding.*) So perhaps I did bring Evie into the group. What of it? We rarely spoke after that-

**EVIE.** (*Reenacting past.*) And now, Catherine, they want to hold back the release of my three SOUTHERN COMFORT novels until the promotion of the HBO series begins next spring.

**CATHERINE.** I couldn't be happier for you! (*Evie's glum.*) What's wrong?

**EVIE.** I worry about how my relatives—how my husband Frank—will react to the demands on my time. They're talking about guest TV appearances, and of course the book tour-

**CATHERINE.** Damn them all—you've worked hard for this. You deserve it!

**EVIE.** How did your relatives treat you when you were first published?

**CATHERINE.** No one was quite brave or honest enough to voice their envy or disgust except...

**EVIE.** Who? (*Pause.*) Please.

**CATHERINE.** My only child. Joseph. He didn't want his then recently divorced mother writing trash. He would have preferred I continued writing technical manuals for machining and grinding lubricants.

**EVIE.** It's not trash-

## THE HEROINES OF CENTRAL OHIO

**CATHERINE.** Tell HIM. I doubt he's read even one of my novels. I wasn't destined to write HAMLET or KING LEAR. I was just destined to...to write.

**EVIE.** I'm relieved you didn't forsake your gift for him.

**CATHERINE.** It's really not that gloomy. Joseph and I have a very civil relationship. (*Proud.*) My son's done remarkably well. He owns his own CPA firm. When we're together, holidays mostly, we chat about his work, his wife Jodelle's work—she's a chiropractor...It's better than nothing.

**EVIE.** (*To Player.*) Play the son.

**PLAYER.** No. He's too dull.

**EVIE.** Play the son.

**PLAYER.** I'm not his type-

**CATHERINE.** Play my son or we'll both go back to writing technical manuals!

**PLAYER.** Don't even kid about that...mom. (*Reenacting past, Player assumes the role of Joseph Stanorovich as he answers phone in his office.*) Oh. Yes. Send her in, please.

**EVIE.** Mr. Stanorovich?

**PLAYER.** (*Joseph.*) Miss St. James. I'm so pleased to meet you. Please sit down.

**EVIE.** I'll cut to the chase. I am not here to interview you for the Dispatch. I'm not a reporter. Just a friend of your mother's.

**PLAYER.** (*Joseph.*) Is she all right?

**EVIE.** Oh, yes. She is fit in every respect-

**PLAYER.** (*Joseph.*) That's good.

**EVIE.** Except one.

**PLAYER.** (*Joseph.*) Is she having...financial problems?

**EVIE.** (*Laughing.*) Heavens no! Your mamma just sold her seventeenth novel.

**PLAYER.** (*Joseph.*) Why are you here?

**EVIE.** Have you read any of your mother's works?

**PLAYER.** (*Joseph.*) Her "works" as you call them are geared to women.

**EVIE.** Then your spine-aligning wife. Has she read them?

**PLAYER.** (*Joseph.*) My wife reads literature.

**EVIE.** So she HAS read your mamma's books. What a relief.



## THE HEROINES OF CENTRAL OHIO

**PLAYER.** (*Joseph.*) No, she hasn't. Excuse me, but I have a very busy morning.

**EVIE.** Allow me to call your attention this astonishing array of your mamma's book reviews-

**PLAYER.** (*Joseph.*) I really don't have time to-

**EVIE.** Quote—Harlequin's Miranda Turner has produced yet another sizzling page-turner with *DESIRE'S GATE*—Unquote. *Romantic Times*.

**PLAYER.** (*Joseph.*) I have to ask you-

**EVIE.** Yes, your mother is Harlequin's Miranda Turner. But we'll keep that under our three historical hats, won't we?

**PLAYER.** (*Joseph.*) I must ask you to leave-

**EVIE.** Quote—Catherine Joyce is a romantic national treasure—Unquote. I wrote that plug myself. And it's being printed on the inside cover of Catherine's latest effort, *CAPTAIN OF HEARTS*.

**PLAYER.** (*Joseph.*) Miss St. James—if that's your real name-

**EVIE.** Yes, I'm Yvette St. James of Atlanta, author of *SOUTHERN COMFORTS*, a forthcoming HBO series starring—drum roll—Miss Carrie Underwood and Mr. Blake Shelton.

**PLAYER.** (*Joseph.*) Good for you. But I don't need to hear about my mother's books-

**EVIE.** Then you're not the least bit interested in your momma, refusing to acknowledge the very soul and stories of her being-

**PLAYER.** (*Joseph.*) I don't need to acknowledge her stories-

**EVIE.** I beg you-

**PLAYER.** (*Joseph.*) Because I lived through them. God only knows how many men my mother... That woman tore apart our family. She nearly killed my father. The last thing I need is all that trash thrown up in my face again.

**EVIE.** I'm so sorry... I didn't know...

**PLAYER.** (*Joseph.*) She really didn't ask you to come here then.

**EVIE.** Scouts honor. Her novels may be a bit too dicey for you to traverse just yet, but these reviews... (*Extends reviews to him.*) Do try and read these...

**PLAYER.** (*As himself/In present.*) That son role had more meat on it than I thought it would.

## THE HEROINES OF CENTRAL OHIO

**CATHERINE.** Evie lied to get into Joseph's office. Lying must come easy to her. And to stick her nose into my family affairs like that...

**PLAYER.** So you'll vote to prosecute.

**CATHERINE.** I'm...I'm not entirely displeased with the end result of her deception.

**PLAYER.** Evie improved mother/son relations?

**CATHERINE.** Not in the slightest. My reviews couldn't ease Joseph's pain and resentment—I deserve that guilt.

**EVIE.** You deserve forgiveness.

**CATHERINE.** At least now he's aware that my highly adventurous past, rounded out and softened with courts and kings and the kind of unconditional love I've chased after and...and never quite secured, he knows my trashy life looks good on paper. I like that he knows it was good for something...even though that doesn't change a thing...

**EVIE.** Oh, but dear, success changes EVERYTHING... (*Library meeting returns.*)

**BILLIE.** Catherine. (*Pause.*) Catherine?

**CATHERINE.** (*Disoriented.*) What?

**BILLIE.** You had something to say? About Evie?

**PLAYER.** (*To Evie.*) I think she's on the fence.

**CATHERINE.** I think I'm on the fence. Perhaps if you could tell us what she used our money for...

**BILLIE.** Mostly to pay off bills—credit cards, utilities, cable TV-

**MARY BETH.** Including every movie channel. But most intriguing to me is the myriad of intellectual publications Evie suddenly subscribed to—National Enquirer, Star, Globe, People Magazine, TV Guide-

**SUSAN.** PEOPLE is very expensive a year.

**MARY BETH.** Especially people like Evie. She and her husband bought that deli on Morse Road. They must have money to spread around.

**PLAYER.** (*To Mary Beth, gently.*) M-B, M-B, come out and play with me.

**MARY BETH.** (*Aside, to Player.*) I'm in a meeting.

**BILLIE.** For what it's worth, Evie told me their deli was in trouble-

**MARY BETH.** Talk about the pot calling the kettle black...

**EVIE.** (*To Mary Beth.*) Why are you so angry, Doc?

## THE HEROINES OF CENTRAL OHIO

**TRACY.** (*Emotional.*) I'm sure she showed me her contracts from Harlequin and HBO-

**PLAYER.** And woman-child speaks!

**BILLIE.** She probably forged them.

**MARY BETH.** Probably?! It's obvious she copied Harlequin's stationery and cribbed terminology, maybe from some of our letters and contracts. We're all fairly generous sharing our materials with one another. The HBO logo—she could have copped that from the TV Guide. We know she subscribes.

**TRACY.** Why go through all that work to trick us?

**SUSAN.** Maybe she was more interested in impressing us than tricking us.

**TRACY.** But I was always impressed with Evie, weren't you? I looked up to her. Like I wrote here. (*Reading.*) Evie couldn't have helped me more. She gave me confidence...hope... (*Women again are frozen/blacked out. Evie and Tracy reenact past.*)

**EVIE.** (*Indicating legal pad.*) When shall we review my rather copious notes concerning your novel, dear?

**TRACY.** (*Depressed.*) Catherine Joyce already told me OLD FAITHFUL needs a whole lot of work.

**EVIE.** Writing is rewriting-

**TRACY.** And Lorraine Chantain gave it a two. You probably know her critiques have a one to ten grading scale.

**EVIE.** It's legendary. (*Pause.*) Did these esteemed colleagues of ours give you any specific pointers—direction?

**TRACY.** Lorraine's two is pretty direct—it says quit writing, OLD FAITHFUL sucks. Big time.

**EVIE.** Those women don't know everything-

**TRACY.** Oh, yes they do. They're published. Not losers like us.

**EVIE.** (*Slightly bristles.*) Of course. I almost forgot. Well, this loser still intends to have a winning weekend of writing—and you should, too. (*Evie starts to leave.*)

**TRACY.** Wait. You said you have some notes for me?

**EVIE.** Oh, my notes are clearly worth no more than the yellow legally lined paper they are written on. Let our published sisters be your guides.

## THE HEROINES OF CENTRAL OHIO

**TRACY.** Evie—please. I’m sorry. I guess it’s true when they say it’s hard not to take criticism of your writing personally.

**EVIE.** That’s why I serve as a club critiquer rather than a critiquee. I keep my work solely to myself. (*Pause/Hedging.*) And to my editor, of course.

**TRACY.** You have an editor?! For what publishing company?!

**EVIE.** I’m in negotiations with...I’d rather not say just yet to avoid jinxing the enterprise. We Southern women are very superstitious.

**TRACY.** Wow. That’s really great. Congratulations.

**EVIE.** Congratulate yourself for being brave enough to share your maiden writing voyage with others-

**TRACY.** My boat sunk-

**EVIE.** It did not. You’ve given birth to a delightful contemporary novel.

**TRACY.** Look, not even I’m stupid enough to believe-

**EVIE.** You’re not stupid, but that doesn’t mean you don’t need to nurture your idea so it will mature into a fully fleshed best seller. For example, when Melissa begins working at Morton Corporation for its owner, Randall Morton the Third, she’s this blunt but rather reserved little secretary-

**TRACY.** Administrative Assistant-

**EVIE.** Yet just 20 pages later, we find Melissa stripped butt naked on Randall Morton the Third’s desk, and the two of them proceed to...What was the delicate way you phrased it?

**TRACY.** Randall’s love train roars into Melissa’s wet, slippery tunnel, exploding with the force of Old Faithful itself, only sideways. I worked on that line for days.

**PLAYER.** All aboard! That’s one brainstorming session I’ll never forget.

**TRACY.** (*Flirting with Player.*) Neither will I.

**EVIE.** Honey, you must first pave an emotional and sensual path for such...explosions.

**TRACY.** My how-to book says as long as the heroine and hero get together at the end, it’s OK for them to have sex earlier on-

**EVIE.** Yes, but not before they experience exquisite almost unbearable moments of confused loyalty and longing and lusting and...well...loving.

**TRACY.** I basically think Melissa and Randall are too horny for each other to wait for anything.

## THE HEROINES OF CENTRAL OHIO

**EVIE.** Have you ever thought of writing pornography?

**TRACY.** I'd probably flunk that, too.

**EVIE.** You haven't flunked. Your novel is a hoot—full of refreshing dialogue.

**TRACY.** Really?

**EVIE.** But the romantic atmosphere...Have you ever been in love?

**TRACY.** Not exactly. I'm petrified of picking up a disease.

**EVIE.** What I mean is, have you ever had a big crush on some fella? When you dreamed about him all of the time? Fantasized?

**TRACY.** There was a guy in high school, a buff big football player I liked. I used to picture him naked in my mind. But he never gave me a second thought, naked or clothed.

**EVIE.** Draw on your desirous feelings for him then...Let's rethink Melissa and Randall's first intimate encounter, adding emotional and sensual texture to it. You pretend you're Melissa, and I'll be Randall Morton the Third. *(Player clears throat.)*

**EVIE.** *(To Player.)* Alright. You be Randall Morton the Third.

**PLAYER.** Another stuffy corporate type, eh? This time, could he be a bullfighter on the side? Or maybe a race car driver? Or an R&B artist?

**TRACY.** Sure!

**EVIE.** No. Randall's busy enough running a major corporation and keeping his horniness in check.

**PLAYER.** His hands ARE full.

**EVIE.** Let's set the stage. Melissa has just dramatically saved Randall's life, pushing him out of the aim of a masked gunman, just days after helping him foil his cousin's diabolical scheme for a corporate takeover. It's almost midnight as they return to the empty offices...alone. *(Player and Tracy dramatically act out the roles of Melissa and Randall, exaggerating even the small nuances; Evie narrates.)*

**PLAYER.** *(Randall.)* I...I can't thank you-

**EVIE.** Randall hesitates-

**PLAYER.** *(Randall.)* Enough.

**EVIE.** Randall gently caresses Melissa's silken hair, overcome by the depth of his gratitude and a sudden yearning to draw her near.

**TRACY.** *(To Evie.)* She really has to keep her clothes on here?

## THE HEROINES OF CENTRAL OHIO

**EVIE.** For now. Melissa quickly turns away, afraid if her eyes meet Randall's, they will betray the aching desire slowly consuming her disease-free body. She speaks softly.

**TRACY.** (*Melissa.*) Does saving your life mean I'll get a good performance review?

**EVIE.** Randall laughs (*Player/Randall laughs.*), spontaneously encircling her with his muscular arms. Melissa trembles at the unbelievable pleasure aroused by the contours of his hard angular physique pressed close. Then gazing at Melissa with an alarming intensity, Randall gently cups her face in his hands, bringing her mouth within a whisper of his.

**TRACY.** (*Melissa.*) I'm sure your wife would have tried to save you, too.

**EVIE.** Randall's arms drop, as thoughts of his deceased Alexandria—her beauty, grace and compulsive cleanliness—flood his being. Melissa, embarrassed, wishes she could recall her words, painfully aware that her mouth, breasts and limbs are now throbbing, pounding, quaking with hunger for his touch.

**TRACY.** (*Melissa.*) Sorry I brought up a corpse-

**EVIE.** With one finger, Randall silences her dewy sensual lips.

**PLAYER.** (*Randall.*) Shhhhhh.

**EVIE.** For the first time since his wife's tragic window washing accident two years before, Randall's memories of Alexandria are wiped away without warning, overwhelmed by the vital beauty standing before him. Being a former buff big high school football player, Randall can't stop himself from imagining Melissa unclothed and uninhibited, ready—even eager—to be tackled then devoured by the inferno of his burning flesh. Randall speaks with a voice that is thick, hoarse and low. (*Player pauses, wrestling with Evie's "voice" direction.*)

**PLAYER.** (*Randall.*) William, your fiancé. He's a very fortunate man.

**EVIE.** William! Melissa hadn't given a thought to her fiancé William all evening. He must have left the restaurant by now, their reservations were for nine-ish. He will forgive her, poor, poor William, so anxious to make Melissa his bride. Unlike rich, rich Randall here, so anxious to make Melissa—well, to "make" Melissa. Then, almost shyly, Randall clutches—and steadies—Melissa's quivering hand.

**PLAYER.** (*Randall.*) May I ask you something?

## THE HEROINES OF CENTRAL OHIO

**EVIE.** Melissa's breathing quickens.

**TRACY.** (*Melissa.*) Spit it out.

**PLAYER.** (*Randall.*) May I kiss you? Just once?

**EVIE.** To Melissa's surprise, Randall blushes, awkwardly gazing down at his feet. He's so vulnerable and sweet, she muses, not to mention pigeon-toed! But then Melissa reminds herself that ultimately Randall is the staid corporate executive type—even if he does bull fight a little on the side, not the least bit artistic like her William, an aspiring dog groomer. Yet William never once excited such a rush of passion, such a need to surrender, within her.

**TRACY.** (*Melissa.*) Yes, you may kiss me once. For the road.

**EVIE.** Melissa's lips part slightly in wet anticipation of Randall's kiss.

**TRACY.** (*Melissa/To Evie/Softly.*) Now?

**EVIE.** Now. (*Tracy attacks Player, dipping him backward in a passionate embrace.*)

**PLAYER.** (*As Player/Recovering.*) You just aced your performance review... (*Library meeting resumes with Tracy addressing the group.*)

**TRACY.** OLD FAITHFUL was my first of four novels turned down by every publisher known to romance. But thanks to Evie's belief in me, I'm working on my fifth, confident that one of these days I'll sell my stories and never have to style and color other people's hair again—except my mom's. (*Emotionally.*) I'm hurt...I'm really hurt Evie did this stuff to us. But when I weigh it all, she helped me more than she ever hurt me. And maybe that's the best we can ever expect from other people—and they can ever expect from us. So I hope, like me, you'll vote not to press charges.

**EVIE.** (*Moved.*) So simple yet true...

**BILLIE.** Thank you, Tracy. I'm sure everyone here joins me in wishing you luck with your current novel.

**EVIE.** I think I'll ask Tracy if she'd like me to pass her novels on to my editor Bonnie Miller. It can't hurt.

**PLAYER.** It can't?

**CATHERINE.** (*Raising hand.*) Billie. You know Evie better than any of us. You two gals even vacationed together, right?

**BILLIE.** Yes, Evie and I were...friends.

**EVIE.** Like sisters.

THE HEROINES OF CENTRAL OHIO

**BILLIE.** But as far as knowing her better than any of you...Hell, I'm in the dark here, too.

**EVIE.** Don't shut me out, Billie.

**MARY BETH.** I'm sorry, but I can't accept that there's such a great deal of complexity here. Evie's a congenital liar. If we let this go, the woman is likely to dupe another group—perhaps mystery writers next time-

**EVIE.** (*Contemplating.*) Mysteries...

**TRACY.** Don't you think she's learned a lesson from this?

**PLAYER.** (*To Mary Beth.*) M-B, M-B-

**MARY BETH.** No, I don't.

**PLAYER.** Come out and play with me-

**MARY BETH.** I would guess-

**PLAYER.** WORD play with me, Miss Elizabeth-

**MARY BETH.** I would wager-

**PLAYER.** (*Nodding.*) Wager-

**MARY BETH.** She doesn't care a bit-

**PLAYER.** A BIT?

**MARY BETH.** (*As Elizabeth/British.*) Not a WHIT whether society thinks her wicked-

**PLAYER.** (*As Richard/British.*) I daresay you are right, Miss Elizabeth. (*Library fades to "Regency" period...*)

**MARY BETH.** (*Elizabeth.*) Or if she sullies our family's reputation—and father, a vicar!

**PLAYER.** (*Richard.*) Her bold liaisons are legion.

**MARY BETH.** (*Elizabeth.*) But to abandon us during the London Season, Richard—that is the unpardonable wrong!

**PLAYER.** (*Richard.*) Unpardonable and improper!

**MARY BETH.** I shall not reconcile with my sister-

**PLAYER.** No, she is incorrigible-

**MARY BETH.** (*Elizabeth/Pause.*) Until I find her. I so miss my twin Sophia, her carefree, uncowardly spirit. Mark my word, she set off for the country—maybe Chedford with some rogue. Will you help me find her, Richard?

**PLAYER.** (*Richard.*) I'll arrange a trip for us on the morrow.



## THE HEROINES OF CENTRAL OHIO

**MARY BETH.** (*Elizabeth.*) For us?! Cannot you see how my reputation would be in tatters if a single male like yourself would accompany me?

**PLAYER.** (*Richard.*) Like myself?

**MARY BETH.** (*Elizabeth.*) If I did not observe the proprieties-

**PLAYER.** (*Richard.*) Not all men are scoundrels-

**MARY BETH.** (*Elizabeth.*) True enough-

**PLAYER.** (*Richard.*) Do you think me some unscrupulous dandy?!

**MARY BETH.** (*Elizabeth.*) Richard, I know you are vexed. But for appearances sake-

**PLAYER.** (*Richard.*) For appearances sake, I shall invite my mother as chaperone.

**MARY BETH.** (*Elizabeth/Pause/Uneasy.*) The Countess of Worthington?

**PLAYER.** (*Richard.*) Pity.

**MARY BETH.** (*Elizabeth.*) Surely you are funning...

**PLAYER.** (*Richard.*) Such a pity.

**MARY BETH.** (*Elizabeth.*) I shall feel...awkward-

**PLAYER.** (*Richard.*) So shall mother.

**MARY BETH.** (*Elizabeth.*) I am grateful for your offer, but... (*Lying.*) but my back—tis a trifle sore of late. I must rest...on it. So be off with you, Richard!

**PLAYER.** (*Richard.*) You do not think to banish me. (*Pause.*) You do think to banish me. Then I shall say adieu, Miss Elizabeth.

**MARY BETH.** (*Elizabeth.*) God speed you on your way... (*Player/Richard exits.*) To mother's... (*Player/Richard immediately returns.*)

**PLAYER.** (*Richard.*) Shall I pose as your brother instead?

**MARY BETH.** (*Elizabeth/Laughing.*) So it was a bouncer, you unprincipled, arrogant rake!

**PLAYER.** (*Richard.*) I shall take great pains to see you enjoy your travels, dear sister...

**MARY BETH.** (*Elizabeth.*) I would be sunk beyond reproach if we are found out-

**PLAYER.** (*Richard.*) Highly unlikely. I have your eyes.

**MARY BETH.** (*Elizabeth.*) And that is all you shall have of me, my Lord.

**PLAYER.** (*Richard.*) Again, pity.

**MARY BETH.** (*Elizabeth.*) Then to the country, brother Richard?

## THE HEROINES OF CENTRAL OHIO

**PLAYER.** (*Richard.*) To the country, fair sibling! (*To Mary Beth/As himself.*) Evie was so taken with THE VICAR'S TWIN DAUGHTERS, your first published regency-

**MARY BETH.** My second published regency-

**PLAYER.** She immediately signed up for your creative writing course at the University-

**MARY BETH.** That's when she began calling me Doc-

**PLAYER.** The last assignment of the course was to create a short work—a story, playlet, a poem-

**EVIE.** I don't like where this is headed...

**MARY BETH.** Yes. And Yvette chose poetry... (*Reenacting past, Mary Beth sits in her office; Evie hesitates joining her.*)

**PLAYER.** (*To Evie.*) Go on. She won't bite.

**EVIE.** (*To Player.*) Maybe not you... (*Evie enters Mary Beth's office.*) Hello Doc!

**MARY BETH.** (*Coolly.*) Evie. I'm glad you stopped by.

**EVIE.** I couldn't bear waiting another minute to hear what you thought of my piece. Did you hate it?

**MARY BETH.** Actually, I was quite surprised by your...piece.

**EVIE.** Really?!

**MARY BETH.** I'd like to hear it again, in fact.

**EVIE.** How sweet.

**MARY BETH.** Since my assistant is gone for the day, perhaps you would do me the honor. (*Mary Beth hands the paper to Evie.*)

**EVIE.** (*Pause.*) Why not?! (*Reading.*) The Last Magnolia of Summer.

(*Pause.*) The last magnolia of summer, is left blooming alone; Since all of her lovely companions, are now faded and gone. Can I leave her, poor lone one, to pine on the stem? With her loved ones all sleeping, she should sleep now with them.

**MARY BETH.** Go on.

**EVIE.** So kindly I scatter, her blooms over the bed, where her friends in the garden, lie scentless and dead.

**EVIE & MARY BETH.** When true hearts lie withered, and fond ones are flown, Oh! Who would inhabit this bleak world alone?

**EVIE.** (*Moved.*) Mary Beth. You've memorized it.

## THE HEROINES OF CENTRAL OHIO

**MARY BETH.** Tell me. Why did you choose magnolias? Why not the Cherokee Rose? That's your beloved Georgia's state flower, isn't it?

**EVIE.** I wanted to evoke and pay homage to the South as a whole, so I decided-

**MARY BETH.** Cut the crap, Evie! I have your poem right here. *(Mary Beth throws book in front of Evie.)*

**EVIE.** Oh, my piece hasn't been published yet...

**MARY BETH.** You plagiarized 'TIS THE LAST ROSE OF SUMMER. I doubt very much Thomas Moore would have appreciated you ditching his rose for a magnolia.

**EVIE.** You suggested in class we tap outside resources-

**MARY BETH.** I never suggested you suck the lifeblood from them!

**EVIE.** I didn't intend-

**MARY BETH.** And to choose a poet alive during the 1800s, my regency period. I almost think you wanted to get caught.

**EVIE.** Now there you are mistaken, Doc.

**MARY BETH.** I am?

**EVIE.** Thomas Moore was a writer during Catherine Joyce's period—the 1500s. Henry the Eighth had the man decapitated, poor soul.

**MARY BETH.** You've got the wrong Thomas, Yvette! Your Thomas Moore did write during the early 1800's—in Ireland. He was a contemporary of Lord Byron-

**EVIE.** Are you sure?

**MARY BETH.** His last name is spelled with two O's. Sir Thomas More, Henry the Eighth's Chancellor, has one O.

**EVIE.** And no head. I mean...eventually. I suppose you'll have to give me a detention.

**MARY BETH.** I'm supposed to turn you over to the University Board for an investigation and disciplinary hearing. If I don't, and word of this breach gets around, I'll be opening up myself to an inquiry.

**EVIE.** Couldn't you tell I tried changing it, putting it into my own words?

**MARY BETH.** By replacing a few thy's, thee's, and thou's?! *(Pause.)* I'll give you a D.

**EVIE.** Oh, Mary Beth! Thank you!

**MARY BETH.** Just withdraw from the University-

## THE HEROINES OF CENTRAL OHIO

**EVIE.** (*A beat.*) Consider it done.

**MARY BETH.** And keep this incident between the two of us.

**EVIE.** Cross my heart. (*While leaving.*) I will always be grateful to you, Doc—you have my word on it! You have my word!

**MARY BETH.** As long as it's yours... (*End of scene/Return to present.*)

**PLAYER.** And you still can't understand why Mary Beth is so angry?

**EVIE.** (*Pause.*) There's more. I stopped back at her office about a week later- (*Again, Evie and Mary Beth reenact past. Evie enters Mary Beth's office.*) Doc? It's Evie. Again.

**MARY BETH.** Oh, Evie. I have an appointment-

**EVIE.** I won't stay. I just thought I'd let you know I have ceased matriculating, as promised.

**MARY BETH.** I'm sorry it had to turn out that way-

**EVIE.** Don't be. I'll have more time for my writing—SOUTHERN COMFORTS Book Two is almost finished.

**MARY BETH.** Good luck. I'll see you at the next meeting.

**EVIE.** Yes. Until then. (*As Evie leaves, she crosses Player portraying extrovert Ian. He's juggling several large wallpaper books. Stopping to check her phone, Evie overhears Player/Ian and Mary Beth in her office.*)

**PLAYER.** (*Ian.*) Mary Beth, hear me out before you say anything. I have found some irresistible wallpaper patterns, and I am itching to describe them to you, starting with my top picks for the nursery and the hallway leading up to it. Oh—and I brought along sample books so you can feel the various textures-

**MARY BETH.** Ian—you're jumping the gun-

**PLAYER.** (*Ian.*) I'm jumping for joy because these new prints—the botanicals especially—are not only trendy yet timeless, they're also gender neutral—since you want to be surprised sexually. (*A beat.*) That came out wrong.

**MARY BETH.** I told you I'm not making any decor decisions until we get through the first trimester-

**PLAYER.** (*Ian.*) Oh, sweetie—I get that, I do. But these months are going to fly by, and a little pre-baby pre-planning will pave the way for- (*Evie can't help but burst in.*)

**EVIE.** A baby! How blessed we are!

## THE HEROINES OF CENTRAL OHIO

**MARY BETH.** Evie?

**PLAYER.** (*Ian.*) I'm over the moon about it, too!

**EVIE.** Are you the lucky father?

**PLAYER.** (*Ian.*) Lucky uncle. I'm her fiancé's brother.

**EVIE.** Fiancé? Dr. Mary Beth is getting married? We have lots to celebrate!

**MARY BETH.** Ian, this is Evie. She's a member of my writer's club.

**PLAYER.** (*Ian.*) I was told this baby news was for "family ears only." You must be someone special-

**EVIE.** Guilty as charged! And I couldn't help but overhear you kids chitchatting-

**MARY BETH.** Of course you couldn't.

**EVIE.** Aren't you elated wallpaper is making a comeback? That means my papered living room is again tres chic!

**PLAYER.** (*Ian.*) You will die when you see these stunning new botanicals—and the geometric plaids. They both scream baby!

**MARY BETH.** With the walls screaming, how will baby nap?

**PLAYER.** (*Ian.*) Mary Beth, you are trying to kill our buzz—

**MARY BETH.** I appreciate your enthusiasm, but nursery talk is off the table for now. I mean it.

**PLAYER.** (*Ian.*) Are changing tables off the table? I found a vintage one on eBay that would be ideal for-

**MARY BETH.** Take your books and go!

**PLAYER.** (*Ian, collecting books.*) Stick in the mud. But Uncle Ian's bubble is not easy to burst!

**EVIE.** Neither is Aunt Evie's! I look forward to seeing you at the wedding and meeting your brother.

**PLAYER.** (*Ian.*) I only have one sibling—that I know of. My sister Megan.

**EVIE.** (*Dawning.*) Oh.

**MARY BETH.** Yes, I'm gay. And yes, I'm marrying Megan—in a very small, casual ceremony—

**PLAYER.** (*Ian.*) And yes I'm wearing an azure tux because that is as informal as I'm willing to go.

## THE HEROINES OF CENTRAL OHIO

**MARY BETH.** Evie, we're only inviting a few relatives and a handful of close friends.

**EVIE.** Fine with me—as long as Ian here saves me a dance that night!

**MARY BETH.** There won't be dancing—

**PLAYER.** (*Ian.*) That's what you think! You're on my dance card, Evie! Party on, girls! (*Player exits, leaving behind a book.*)

**EVIE.** (*Calling after him.*) You left your botanicals—!

**PLAYER.** (*Ian, responding.*) I know!

**EVIE.** Doc. Female, blind, gay, pregnant. Talk about the motherlode!

**MARY BETH.** Megan's the pregnant one. My assignment is keeping her brother in line.

**EVIE.** They're both labors of love I'm sure.

**MARY BETH.** They are.

**EVIE.** When you write about a boy meeting a girl, do you envision a boy and girl or two girls mixing it up?

**MARY BETH.** I envision all the money I'm going to rake in from book sales.

**EVIE.** Hot damn! I envision that, too!

**MARY BETH.** Please don't share my news with the other club members.

**EVIE.** Why? We are all genuine friends of yours. It won't matter to anyone that you're gay.

**MARY BETH.** Tell the world I'm gay—that's no secret. But the baby news—Megan and I want to keep that close until we get through this first trimester. Please respect that, Evie. Please. (*Library slowly returns.*)

**EVIE.** (*Present.*) And I did respect it. I did. I never told anyone about the baby. Not even my best friend Billie. Not even Billie.

**MARY BETH.** (*Addressing members.*) Hindsight, even mine, is twenty twenty. There were clues. Yvette's little white lies. Her not so little lies we shrugged off as amusing idiosyncrasies.

**EVIE.** You shrugged off nothing. You made me quit school.

**MARY BETH.** Because it never occurred to us that someone who worked so hard ingratiating herself into our lives would in any way jeopardize that bond. Perhaps that's why her betrayal is so mystifying to Tracy and Billie—to most of us.

**EVIE.** *I felt betrayed when I didn't get a wedding invite!*

## THE HEROINES OF CENTRAL OHIO

**MARY BETH.** What is abundantly clear is our responsibility to take legal action. Someone has to make her stop—long enough to get the message that any meaningful relationship has as its anchor honesty. If Evie isn't somehow forced to internalize that, I am certain she will continue to amuse and abuse others until no one is left in her...garden. And, indeed, she is the last magnolia on the stem, inhabiting this bleak world...alone. (*Long pause. Player reaches out to Evie in an attempt to comfort her.*)

**EVIE.** (*Pulling back.*) No. (*Susan whispers something to Billie.*)

**BILLIE.** Susan just informed me that she has cupcakes and punch in her van for us.

**SUSAN.** We had to bake a bunch for my Brownie troop tomorrow, anyway.

**BILLIE.** And here I thought you were a girl scout by now.

**SUSAN.** I meant my daughter's-

**BILLIE.** We know. I motion that we take a short treat recess. All in favor, get your asses out to Susan's van. (*Everyone begins to exit except Billie, Evie and Player. Susan escorts Mary Beth out.*)

**SUSAN.** (*To Mary Beth.*) I'm getting a little worried that Lorraine Chantain might not show up.

**MARY BETH.** We'll save her a cupcake, just in case.

**SUSAN.** That's a yummy idea! (*Billie takes a few drags from her fake cigarette, gives up and heads for the exit.*)

**EVIE.** Strapping on the old feedbag for cupcakes? (*Billie stops.*) It is impossible to give up smoking and not take up gluttony. The two of us used to hit the buffet circuit when we tried quitting before. I remember one time we- (*Billie resumes walking.*) Face it, Billie! You can't quit without me and I can't quit without you! (*Billie stops. Without turning, she hands her cigarette to Evie.*)

**BILLIE.** Here. Give this a shot. It's almost as phony as you are. (*Billie exits. Player approaches.*)

**PLAYER.** (*As Jefferson.*) I...I will always be true, Maggie Comfort. I will never desert you. (*Player takes the fake cigarette from Evie, puts it in his mouth, pulls out matches or lighter, and succeeds in lighting it. He then places the cigarette in Evie's mouth. She takes a few drags as the lights dim.*)

THE HEROINES OF CENTRAL OHIO

**END OF ACT 1**

***THE PLAY IS NOT OVER!! TO FIND OUT HOW IT ENDS –  
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