

BAMBOOZLED

Written by  
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Inspired by a true story

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## CAST

ABBY HOWARD – f, African American, 20's, hails from Rialto, California. Desperate but resourceful. Busy tracing her family line. An "Antiques Roadtrip" appraiser accused of fraud. Guilty or innocent? Read on. MOTTO: "Know the Value of Everything, Especially Family."

SAVANNAH HILL - f, African American, 30's-40's, lesbian, partnered with Delia, a grade-school teacher. Hails from Memphis. A preacher's daughter. Tennessee accent, which she tightens up (code switches) for Opal Anne. Misused and damn near fed up. MOTTO: "Fit in. Make do. Fuck these people."

ROCHELLE ASHWORTH – f, white, 50's. Ambitious lawyer, fighter, lesbian, originally from Blades, Delaware (the North). She classifies herself as an outsider. Came to Tennessee for love. Dumped, she stays for spite, determined to grow her business. Seriously on the hustle regarding her career. Standard US accent. MOTTO: "No one is innocent."

OPAL ANNE HATCHETT – f, white, 50's-60's. Old-school Southern matriarch who hosts Civil War re-enactments on her estate. Tennessee accent. Trump voter, a member of Richard Spencer's pro-white movement. A big-time fan of the 19th century and its values, Opal Anne's got no patience for white guilt. Tennessee accent. MOTTO: "The South Shall Rise Again."

## SETTING

Collierville, Shelby County, TN, February, 2017. The Law Offices of Bright & Ashworth.

PLEASE NOTE: The pace of the dialogue is fast.

- at the end of a line of dialogue indicates a cutoff.

/ in dialogue indicates the spot where the next character to speak begins speaking.

[*dialogue in italics, in brackets*] indicates unfinished dialogue, and isn't spoken.

(beat) is a short pause, like an extra breath.

"A moment" is a longer pause where unspoken communication passes between characters.

ACT ONE.

In darkness, far-off battle sounds of the Civil War, dissolving to the Confederate version of the "Battle Cry of Freedom." Music ends with a quick LIGHTS UP on a conference room. Table and chairs, a notepad and pens, ABBY's legal case file, SAVANNAH's briefcase. There is a small intercom which plugs into the table, coat rack, and a partly full trash can. ABBY and SAVANNAH are in the middle of a conversation.

SAVANNAH

Right now, you need to be concentratin' on the present: on your current-day predicament.

ABBY

/ But-

SAVANNAH

As I said, I will help you find your third great-grandmother-

ABBY

Named "Abigail," like me.

SAVANNAH

"Abigail." Right.

ABBY

To find her, I need to borrow that scrapbook.

SAVANNAH

I will help you! But this isn't the time. I won't be at the Family History Library again 'til next week.

ABBY

I'm making it my full-time job to find her .... just as soon as I win this case.

SAVANNAH

Don't let your mouth write checks your butt can't cash. This isn't Los Angeles. You're bein' sued by a powerful white woman in Shelby County, Tennessee. In fact, you are about to be like Shadrack, Meshach, and Abednego, walking face-first into the pit of fire.

ABBY

I don't know- *[who that is]*.

SAVANNAH

The trio of believers. From Daniel? Broke an unjust law, and got thrown into the fiery furnace by Nebuchadnezzar!

ABBY

Is that from "Lord of the Rings?"

SAVANNAH

(Gives up) Trackin' down a family member back to slave-era Tennessee isn't easy. Right / now-

ABBY

I'm so close, now that I know Abigail landed as a free person at Camp Nelson, in 1864. (beat) Camp Nelson. That's in Kentucky.

SAVANNAH

Don't school me, Abby. Besides, you've got bigger fish to fry. You can't research your family's line from a jail cell.

ABBY

I'm not facing jail time: Mister Bright said. (beat) So, you work at the Library, what, part-time?

SAVANNAH

Every other Tuesday and Friday nights. You have piqued my interest, I must admit. I have a little birdie working on that scrapbook; to see if we can turn up "Abigail."

ABBY

Thank you. It would mean everything to me.

SAVANNAH

It can be knock-down, drag-out overwhelming; diggin' up the past. (beat.) Now, let's talk about you. You riot?

ABBY

Excuse me?

SAVANNAH

When folks riot out there in Los Angeles. You riot? (emphasizing the "t")

ABBY

Do you mean, "protest?"

SAVANNAH

When the Lakers win the championship and there's cars goin' up in flames, do you riot?

ABBY

First of all, I'm a baseball fan.

SAVANNAH

Hey! Me too. Angels?

ABBY

Dodgers! (Both women react negatively.) Second, I live in Rialto. That's four freeway s away from L.A.

SAVANNAH

You can drive to a riot. Don't you have a car?

ABBY

I don't "riot!" Do you ... (comes up with) eat squirrel?

SAVANNAH

"Squirrel." Honey, you've got us mixed up with Utah.

ABBY

It's not fair to put people in a box just because of where they live.

SAVANNAH

Okay, okay.

ABBY

(checks her watch) Mr. Bright did this to me last time. He was twenty minutes late to the courtroom. When he made his plea to the judge, there was smoke pouring out of his pants pocket!

SAVANNAH

It's those cheap e-cigarettes with faulty batteries. That man's a walking case of pants-on-fire.

ABBY

The fire department came; they cleared the courtroom ... and the judge denied our request for a delay.

SAVANNAH

Rough. (Leaning in) Are you gonna confess?

ABBY

I didn't do anything.

SAVANNAH

Please. You did something. You take up with these bad boys, they'll leave you penniless, homeless, jobless, and showing up on reality teevee.

ABBY is coolly defensive.

ABBY

Did you read my case file?

SAVANNAH

I read it, all right. And I'm gonna give you some free legal advice: Don't count on Lady Justice being blindfolded by your moist panties.

ABBY

I may have made a mistake. I misjudged Caleb's character.

SAVANNAH

Caleb Hatchett is white.

ABBY

Mister Bright is white.

SAVANNAH

Hold up a minute: I work for Mister Bright; I'm not climbin' up his flagpole. And you don't see me facing some civil case 'cause I let my happy valley do my thinking for me.

ABBY

Where is he?

SAVANNAH

(shrugs) Running on white people's time?

She laughs; ABBY joins her. ROCHELLE strides in; briefcase, coat, scarf, glasses.

ROCHELLE

What's so funny?

SAVANNAH

I don't recall.

ROCHELLE

That will be all, Savannah, thank you.

SAVANNAH is about to say something. Doesn't. She hands the case file to ABBY and exits. ROCHELLE unwinds her scarf; tosses it over a chair; stands assessing ABBY.

ABBY

(uncomfortable) What?

ROCHELLE

You two know each other?

ABBY

I dropped by the Family History Library last week.

ROCHELLE

(sore subject) Oh, the library.

ABBY

Where's Mister Bright?

ROCHELLE moves to shake ABBY's hand.

ROCHELLE

I'm Rochelle Ashworth, Mr. Bright's partner. I would have been here earlier, but there was a problem at the front desk. They're threatening to strip-search every visitor, so, of course, I had to handle it.

ABBY

Strip search you for what?

ROCHELLE

Bombs, they said. There's a protest forming on the corner, in Confederate Park. It's about the proposed park renaming, and removal of a Confederate monument. (beat) It's a KKK rally.

ABBY

You have a Klan rally set to go on across the street?

ROCHELLE

No, "I" don't have a Klan rally set to go on across the street. Don't you have the Klan out in California?

ABBY

We have the L.A.P.D. (beat) Do you have any idea when Mr. Bright- *[might get here]*?

ROCHELLE

Mister Bright isn't available. I'm taking over your case.

ROCHELLE takes the case file from ABBY.

ABBY

I don't even know you. I engaged Mister Bright. I'll come back when he's here.

ROCHELLE

It might be awhile. He's gone off the wagon. (beat) He's on a bender.

ABBY

But- I paid him a retainer!

ROCHELLE

You gave him money? (recovers) Of course you did. He met you in court the other day: made some motion or other?

ABBY

Delay of trial. Which we lost.

ROCHELLE

Yes; which means you'll be tried at the earliest possible date. Because Porter was in a blackout. When I talked to him this morning, he had no idea who you were, what motion he had made, the name of the judge, or why his pants were still smoldering. Then he threw up in my briefcase. (beat) Oh, God.

ROCHELLE buzzes the intercom.

ROCHELLE (CONT'D)

Savannah? Come in here, please. (to ABBY) My bet is, he's over at Bonefish Tavern. Sticking quarters in the condom machine, and wondering why it won't play "Jolene."

SAVANNAH enters.

SAVANNAH

Yes?

ROCHELLE

I've got the deposition for the Landers case. I'll need you to put the file in order by tomorrow morning.

ROCHELLE hands Savannah her briefcase.

SAVANNAH

(gets it) Not again! Rochelle-

ROCHELLE

Sorry.

SAVANNAH

(disgusted) It's just nasty.

SAVANNAH turns to leave.

ROCHELLE

Just a minute, Savannah. Please tell Abby, here, your opinion of me.

SAVANNAH

(hesitates) With you standing right here?

ROCHELLE

Your opinion of me as a lawyer. Please. Go ahead.

SAVANNAH

(beat) Rochelle is a better lawyer than Mister Porter Bright.

SAVANNAH is finished, but ROCHELLE motions for her to go on.

SAVANNAH (CONT'D)

She signs my paycheck, and I'm gonna say she's good, whether she's good or not. But if you want to know why she's good ... She has close connections. She's in real tight with the court clerks, and friendly with law enforcement. She has, in the past, just up and pulled a "not guilty" out of the juries' ass. She slept with the court clerk who assigns / the judges-

ROCHELLE

Savannah!

SAVANNAH

I'm just sayin'. "Close connections." (beat) She doesn't drink, so that's good.

ROCHELLE

Now you know. (to SAVANNAH) Thank you-

SAVANNAH

Miz Ashworth is from Delaware. Bein' from the North, she brings an outsider's point of view.

ABBY

Okay.

ROCHELLE

Perfect.

SAVANNAH

But you gotta watch out for the way she pushes-

ROCHELLE

(to SAVANNAH) Thank you! Thank you for all of that! Please run over to the County Courthouse. Talk /to- *[the court clerk]*

SAVANNAH

I'm not runnin' over anywhere: not with those vermin marching outside.

Applause from the street.

ROCHELLE

Fine. Get ... the court clerk on the phone, and ask who's assigned to Abby's case. Tell her to seat Judge Franklin instead.

SAVANNAH

Judge Franklin.

ROCHELLE

Yes. That will be all for now.

SAVANNAH exits with the briefcase.

ROCHELLE (CONT'D)

Have you interviewed other legal firms?

ABBY

Mister Bright- and you- are my third.

ROCHELLE

Were any of those firms African-American?

ABBY

Yes. When they heard I was being sued by Opal Anne Hatchett, they told me to get a white attorney.

ROCHELLE

Good advice. You won't regret it. So ... we've just met. And look at you: You look like a crook.

ABBY

(insulted) Excuse me?

ROCHELLE

You lack sincerity. Around the eyes.

ABBY

You're wrong about that! I have a very sincere- area- around my eyes. And the rest of my face!

ROCHELLE

Your lack of honesty shows in your brow. Your eyebrows rise up, as a way of questioning if I'm buying what you're selling.

ABBY

(not sure) They do not.

ROCHELLE

Lifting the eyebrows is a sign you're "requesting approval." Often indicating a lie.

ABBY

Or surprise: that I'm being forced to defend my character to a stranger I just met!

ROCHELLE

(Regards her) Your entire attitude is mildly combative; you seem ready to contradict me. Typical traits of a petty thief.

ROCHELLE presses the intercom.

ROCHELLE (CONT'D)

Hold my calls. (presses again) Unless it's Memphis Live. (to ABBY) You have to understand that, right now, your friend Caleb Hatchett is nailing you to the wall with a staple gun.

ABBY

He's not my "friend."

ROCHELLE

You got that right. And you may not know this, but the woman who's accused the two of you of fraud ... Look. Opal Anne will come across as very sympathetic. Miz Hatchett is well-liked in this town. She's mature, comes from an old Tennessee family, is an upright citizen-

ABBY

She's a member of the United Daughters of the Confederacy!

ROCHELLE

U.D.C.? To a jury around here, that's one hundred and fifty sympathy points.

ABBY

So I'm- you're saying that I'm- *[going to lose?]*

ROCHELLE

You're black: in our judicial system, that makes you "not sympathetic."

ABBY

I'm innocent.

ROCHELLE

Nobody is innocent.

ABBY

Wonderful attitude for an attorney!

ROCHELLE

It's emblazoned in Latin on my family crest. It's embroidered on a throw pillow in my living room.

ABBY

Are you being ironic?

ROCHELLE

I'm never ironic. I'm Methodist.

ABBY

Do you ever get cases dismissed? Without a change of venue, or ... sleeping with somebody?

ROCHELLE

If I can seat the right jury. And tell them the right story.

ABBY

In a place where the KKK rallies in broad daylight?

ROCHELLE

(dismissive) They're contained in the park.

ABBY

That doesn't mean they're not dangerous!

ROCHELLE

They're handing out candy to children passing by.

ABBY

You mean they're recruiting.

ROCHELLE

And the Collierville Police are out in force-

ABBY

Excuse me if police presence doesn't make me feel safer!

A moment.

ROCHELLE

I'm afraid I've been insensitive, and I apologize. (beat) Now, let me explain to you how race works in Tennessee.

ABBY

(wtf) Seriously?

ROCHELLE

You see, the people of Tennessee can't agree on whether the Confederate flag is offensive, or a sacred badge of identity. And the state has been called the "Hate Tourist Mecca" of the United States. But the demographics are changing. In some cities, there's been an influx of the white liberal diaspora.

ABBY

Moving someplace warmer and cheaper? That's not a "diaspora."

ROCHELLE

What I'm saying is ... You have a fighting chance. (beat) I met his attorneys. Your ... Caleb. He's got three lawyers, by the way.

ABBY

Holy crap.

ROCHELLE

It was a smart decision to separate your case from his. His legal team is slime.

ABBY

Caleb Hatchett is worse than slime. He's smegma.

ROCHELLE

Well, you would know. You need to be aware that you're in a hell of a lot of trouble. But I will fight for you, and I will win. (beat) You don't trust me; I can tell. Ask me anything.

ABBY

When a person of color cuts you off in traffic ... what do you call them?

ROCHELLE

(long pause) "Jerk." (ABBY is skeptical.) That's not true: I call them an asshole. We're not all hicks in white hoods down here, Abby.

ABBY

We're not all gangbangers in hoodies, Rochelle. (beat) What's your strategy?

ROCHELLE

First, I need to decide if I can put you on the stand. I'll assume you did not underappraise Opal Anne's family heirlooms.

ABBY

Her nephew committed the fraud, and set me up in the process. It's all in my file.

ROCHELLE

(refers to file) The statement you gave Porter is thin on specifics. How did you come to meet Caleb Hatchett? Did he approach you, or the other way around? You met / at a-

ABBY

At a taping, in Anaheim. Of Antiques Roadtrip: that's a TV show.

ROCHELLE

You're an appraiser for them.

ABBY takes a belt buckle from her backpack.

ABBY

Caleb asked me to evaluate this. A genuine, Haiman-made, Confederate two-piece belt plate. You'd call it a "buckle." He knew an artifact like this would interest me.

ROCHELLE

So, he lured you into putting him on the show?

ABBY

He said he'd read about me in Antiques Monthly, and that he admired my expertise. Said I was a treasure that PBS didn't appreciate.

ROCHELLE

You were a diversity hire?

ABBY

No! Are you this rude to all your clients?

ROCHELLE

I'm just seeking information. Opposing counsel will ask.

ABBY

Do you watch the program?

ROCHELLE

I loathe antiques.

ABBY

Let me tell you something: There is no question I'm an expert at appraising Civil War-era antiques, including being able to identify fakes! I have two certifications: one from the Antiques Society of America, and one from the Hanford / Institute!

ROCHELLE

Don't get excited-

ABBY

This buckle that Caleb gave me? See the patina? An antique patina is easy to counterfeit: you just soak the object for a couple of days, in human urine.

ROCHELLE puts the buckle down, quickly.

ABBY picks it up.

ABBY (CONT'D)

But this? You can't fake this deep mustard color. And it's a nice, heavy belt plate. See the edges? Many fakes are beveled, but this one's knife-sharp. A sign of authenticity.

ROCHELLE

Is it your story that this buckle is part of Opal Anne Hatchett's collection? The one involved in the alleged fraud?

ABBY

No, this belt plate was a gift. From Caleb. That ... first day we met. (remembers) He, um. He said he was, "in the neighborhood." Which-

ROCHELLE

He wasn't.

ABBY

What? Of course not; he lives in Azusa. Oh, he was smooth. He tells me how brilliant I am, how much he admires me, gives me a gift. He was grooming me.

ABBY stows the buckle.

ABBY (CONT'D)

Caleb Hatchett is a con man. He tricked me, and he tricked his aunt, Opal Anne. Get him on the stand, and we'll see who's telling the truth.

ROCHELLE

I can't put him on the stand. He'll bat his eyelashes, and "yessum" and "no-umm" me in his caramel-coated accent-

ABBY

What accent? He's from San Gabriel Valley-

ROCHELLE

Then, when I put you up there ... the jury will see he's white, and you're not. You'll fold your arms in defiance, with your thief's brow rising up, and Bang! Gavel down, in favor of the plaintiff.

ABBY

(thinks) He was the only person, outside of my grandmother, who ever told me they read about me in "Antiques Monthly." (realizes) That's how he targeted me: He read in my profile that I was looking for my third great-grandmother, Abigail! That she hailed from Shelby County-

ROCHELLE

He probably ran your license plate and pulled your credit report, too.

ABBY

He seemed honestly interested. He was respectful.

ROCHELLE

He was a bunch of red flags, sewn together and waving in the breeze. I have questions.

SAVANNAH enters, holding a red scrapbook.

ROCHELLE (CONT'D)

When I buzz you and say "Hold my calls," that means don't interrupt-

SAVANNAH

I know what your buzzer means, Rochelle. But Mister Bright needs your assistance in the lobby, to avoid an impromptu cavity search. I'm not talkin' 'bout his teeth.

ROCHELLE

That man is in constant need of rescuing. (to ABBY) Excuse me.

ROCHELLE exits. Applause from outside.

ABBY crosses to the window. SAVANNAH sets the red scrapbook on the conference table.

ABBY

Some white supremacist is giving a speech.

SAVANNAH

Sayin' you and I need to die, proolly. (points) That's the monument in question. General Nathan Bedford Forrest: slave trader, KKK Grand Dragon, and Confederate hero. "Memorial" my ass. They should dynamite the god-blessed thing.

ABBY

Or put it in a museum.

SAVANNAH

When you find a worm in your apple, do you save the worm under glass to remind you that you almost swallowed a worm? No, you do not. You put that worm in the trash. "If your hand offends you, cut it off," sayeth the Lord.

ABBY

Okay, that's ... needlessly violent. And history is important.

SAVANNAH

That memorial isn't about "history." It was put up in 1925, to publicly intimidate. Where's the memorial to the black Union soldiers that man massacred? (beat) Why am I arguing with you? You make your living off Confederate antiques!

ABBY

Civil War antiques. (beat) It's complicated.

SAVANNAH

You're as conflicted as a hen chompin' on a drumstick.

ABBY

You have no room to talk: You work in the Justice System! (proud) I was the first African-American appraiser on Antiques Roadtrip.

SAVANNAH

So it's for the paycheck.

ABBY

No! It's to help people find themselves in their history. Imagine having a whole treasure trove that leads you back to where you come from. People from all over the country, lining up with these ancient rifles, boots; even cannonballs-

SAVANNAH

White people, carry in' heirlooms from a war fought to keep people like you and me in chains.

ABBY

There's Union artifacts, too. (beat) I don't own a single family heirloom. I envy those people, if I'm honest. Every time I face one of them, it's like .... looking across the great divide. There are people who know their past ... and people who have to guess. (beat) Every piece is haunted by what came before, and what happened, after.

SAVANNAH

And then you come along ... and give it a price tag. God bless America!

Sounds outside.

SAVANNAH (CONT'D)

These hateful crackers are evergreen; it wasn't just the election made them lose their minds. Scurry in and out of the floorboards like rats.

ABBY

Rochelle said they're renaming the park?

SAVANNAH

The name of everything is so very important around here. It's not "The Civil War," it's "The War of Northern Aggression." We're not living in the "South," it's the "mid-South." It's not "slaves," it's - get this - "field hands." City fathers decided "Heritage Park" gives a better connotation than "Confederate Park." KKK disagrees.

Sounds of chanting.

ABBY

(fishing) Do you like working for Rochelle?

SAVANNAH

I hate that god-blessed intercom. But ... we do what we have to do. Right now, I got too much month left, at the end of my money.

ABBY

(back at her) So, it's for the paycheck.

SAVANNAH

My career situation is ... a work in progress. (beat) Get away from that window! They don't deserve your attention.

ABBY moves away.

SAVANNAH (CONT'D)

I tried to tell you before, Rochelle likes to push her clients. I need to warn you-

ABBY

I appreciate your concern, but I need somebody to push for me. Don't you trust her?

SAVANNAH

She's good. Just ... settle your case. (beat) By the way, my little birdie walked over the book you asked about. To help you find your-

She hands the red scrapbook to ABBY, who grabs it, begins to read.

ABBY

Abigail, yes! Thank you, Savannah.

SAVANNAH

I hope it's useful.

ABBY

(leafs, reads) Listen to this: An ad from the Nashville Record, 1861. (reading) "Fifteen dollar reward. Runaway Negro boy, aged 19, named Henry. Stoutly made, rather sullen countenance."

SAVANNAH

(sarcastic) Now what ever could have made Henry "sullen," I wonder? Wait, you're looking for-

ABBY

(leafing) Yes. My third great-grandmother. When Abigail landed at Camp Nelson, she had her baby daughter with her: that's my grandmother's grandmother, Ayone. (Ay-own)

SAVANNAH

So, it's a two-fer. It's four hundred miles to Camp Nelson.

ABBY

My grandmother learned their names from her grandmother: It's not much, but it's a start. Maybe Abigail ran away, and her ... whatever ... put an ad in the paper.

SAVANNAH

Shouldn't take long to comb through that.

ABBY

Fingers crossed. There was nothing in the courthouse, Freedmen's Bureau, cemetery database, records of slave sales-

SAVANNAH

We've got plantation tax records at the library. These planters got write-offs for every enslaved person, so most of 'em kept good notes.

ABBY reads, turns a page. Looks up.

ABBY

My grandmother died last year.

SAVANNAH

I'm sorry. Don't worry, we'll find Abigail. (beat. Fishing) We were planning to get these runaway ads up onto the national website. Lots of black folks are tryin' to find their histories, like you. But we haven't been able to afford it.

ABBY, absorbed, reads.

SAVANNAH (CONT'D)

It's a long and difficult task: to trace our ancestors. It breaks my heart when somebody comes up empty. Puttin' up our archives on the internet will help thousands find their families. So far, as I said: we haven't been able to afford it.

ABBY

(beat) Are you asking me-?

SAVANNAH

If Rochelle wins, or gets the case dismissed, maybe you could make a little donation. Especially if the library helps you in your search. It's the least you / could-

ABBY

I don't have any extra money! I can't be making donations your library-

SAVANNAH

I just thought-

ABBY

You "just thought" I cheated that woman! I don't have a lot of money. I owe money! My motel bill alone...! I mean, I'm- I'm very grateful. I wish I could help you.

SAVANNAH stares at ABBY.

SAVANNAH

Abby, I would not go admitting to anybody that you owe money.

ABBY

They'll find out, though, won't they?

SAVANNAH

You poor thing. You gamble? Some people cannot walk away from a poker game, no matter / how *[hard they try]*-

ABBY

(insulted) I don't gamble!

SAVANNAH

If you're a compulsive shopper, that's really none of my business.

ABBY

It was my dad. He wasn't doing well, last year.

SAVANNAH

(sympathetic) Drug addict?

ABBY

He had an aneurism! And a very expensive hospital stay. Butt out.

SAVANNAH

Pardon me for carin'.

ABBY

His medical bill... If I was going to pull a con, believe me, I'd have picked an easier mark than that Hatchett woman!

Angry, ABBY reads a page in the scrapbook.

SAVANNAH

They'll subpoena your bank account as part of discovery.

ABBY

(ignoring her, reads) "Run away or stolen: a mulatto girl named Harriet, 22 years old, rather chunky made. From the circumstances of her going off without the slightest provocation, it is thought she has been persuaded and conveyed off by some white man."

SAVANNAH

(referring to Caleb) "Some white man." Figures. (beat) You've gotta skim; if you read every single ad, you'll be here through the weekend.

ROCHELLE reenters.

ROCHELLE

Crisis averted. Porter's asleep in his office. Thank you, Savannah.

SAVANNAH doesn't leave.

ROCHELLE (CONT'D)

That will be all, then.

SAVANNAH

Abby, would you like a cup of coffee, right about now?

ABBY

I could use a cup, yes.

SAVANNAH

Fetch me one, too, then. Black.

ABBY

Um, wouldn't you be the office coffee-getter?

SAVANNAH

No.

ROCHELLE

(to ABBY) Help yourself. There's a pot in the other conference room.

ABBY

(beat) Okay.

As ABBY exits, she gestures "Don't tell" to SAVANNAH.

ROCHELLE

Did you call the court clerk?

SAVANNAH

She's checkin'. (meaningful) She says "hi." What d'you want Franklin for?

ROCHELLE

Judge Franklin and I went to the same school. And she's a transplant. She'll be open to ... whatever motion I might make.

SAVANNAH

I have a strategy idea, Rochelle.

ROCHELLE

(shutting the topic down) Until your license is reinstated, I'm afraid you can't do any legal work at all. We could both be disbarred-

SAVANNAH

(beat) May I respectfully remind you that the reason I got my license pulled-

ROCHELLE

Was your own fault.

SAVANNAH

It was a mess. That you made.

ROCHELLE

Regardless, we're stuck with the outcome. It is what it is. (beat) Getting the charge thrown out on a technicality qualifies as a success.

SAVANNAH

Except my Delia- *[got fired]*!

ROCHELLE

There's plenty of blame to go around. You know no one bothers us at Red's. Why you and Delia went partner dancing at Minglewood Hall is baffling to me.

SAVANNAH

And why you felt the need to turn into some Bible-Belt version of Gloria Allred is all a mystery to me! To hold a news conference-

ROCHELLE

Resentment shrivels the soul.

SAVANNAH

And unemployment depletes the wallet!

ROCHELLE

I have no desire to rehash the arrest, or Delia being let go, or anything else. We have Abby's case to worry about-

SAVANNAH

Rochelle, as a lesbian, you should have understood what that news conference could do to her! To us. Instead, you acted to bolster your own ego.

ROCHELLE

It all worked out. (sincere) I'm sorry. (beat) Let it go, Savannah.

A moment. SAVANNAH bides her time.

ROCHELLE (CONT'D)

I'm on the clock with Abby's case. You want to help her, don't you?

SAVANNAH

You'd better settle. She's got some sob story over her finances, a motel bill, and a mountain of medical invoices, for her father. From an aneurism.

ROCHELLE

An aneurism is two hundred sympathy points.

SAVANNAH

It's also motive for her to undervalue the Hatchett collection, sell it, and pocket the difference. (silence) She called Opal Anne a "mark." Then she switched the subject.

ROCHELLE

I'm going to move for a dismissal: it's not a big investment of my time.

SAVANNAH

They're not gonna give you a dismissal, and you know it. Some Yankee museum in Pennsylvania got genuine Confederate artifacts, a white woman was deceived, and a black woman prolly did it.

ROCHELLE stops talking as ABBY enters with two mugs of coffee. Gives SAVANNAH hers. Long look from ABBY: *Did you tell on me?*

ROCHELLE

(indicates a seat) Please, Abby. I've been considering your statements, and I'm at a loss. You see, when a jury hears hoof beats, it will assume horses, not zebras.

ABBY is puzzled.

SAVANNAH

She's sayin' we think you're lying.

ROCHELLE

(a look. To ABBY) You're accomplished, and intelligent, and yet your claim is: you were tricked. The story doesn't add up. The jury will have no choice but to conclude that you undervalued the collection, and kept almost a million dollars.

ABBY

If I did that, I'd be standing trial in a criminal court!

ROCHELLE

There will be law enforcement officers at your civil trial. Sitting in the back row, listening, and deciding whether the case is strong enough to bring criminal charges.

SAVANNAH

Local prosecutors. The FBI.

ABBY

(worried) I'm a good person!

SAVANNAH

It's beside the point.

ROCHELLE

Didn't you have any suspicions about Caleb?

ABBY

No! (Thinks.) Not at first.

ROCHELLE

After you became romantically involved?

ABBY

Once we ... once we were together, it became very hard for me to say "no" to him.

ROCHELLE

Caleb said he had a way for you to pay your father's medical bills, didn't he?

ABBY glares at SAVANNAH, who sips her coffee.

ABBY

When Caleb found out about my father ... He visited the hospital every day. He'd bring snacks; a pillow and blanket. He bought my dad a "Get Well" balloon with a puppy on it.

ROCHELLE

You make him sound like a fine, decent young man.

ABBY

This one time, he- (acting touched by the memory) He made me heart-shaped bacon.

SAVANNAH

You are a grown ass woman! (hmpfs) "Heart shaped bacon."

ABBY

We've all loved people who ... maybe we shouldn't. We've all loved people who weren't perfect!

SAVANNAH

We haven't ended up in court over it! (beat) Mostly.

ROCHELLE

(this is personal) Sometimes the person, and the love, turn out to be a sham.

SAVANNAH

Trust.

ROCHELLE

You believe they care for you, or ... love you. You rearrange your whole life-

ABBY

Yes! Because you want to be near them.

SAVANNAH

(re ROCHELLE) Foolishly, you up and move eight hundred miles on the off-chance your giddy red-headed girlfriend will- *[take up with you]*

ROCHELLE

I deserved better.

SAVANNAH

You move too fast emotionally, Rochelle-

ROCHELLE

Do you mind?

ABBY

(in Caleb's defense) He gave me a promise ring.

SAVANNAH

Now you've torn / it-

ROCHELLE

A "promise" ring is a brush-off! An engagement ring is a commitment. A promise ring means nothing!

SAVANNAH

Means about as much as an onion ring.

ABBY

(interested) Who broke up with who?

ROCHELLE

We're not discussing me right now!

ABBY

I can tell: you understand. When you're in love, they're your whole world. You can't imagine life without them. And you want to do whatever they tell you to! Right?

A dubious look between ROCHELLE and SAVANNAH.

ROCHELLE

Let's please get back on topic. (to ABBY) Who cheated Mrs. Hatchett?

ABBY

It was Caleb. He's the one who suggested I assess his aunt's collection.

ROCHELLE

Did he ask you to under-value her things?

ABBY

He said, "In Shelby County, Tennessee. There's a trunk. Family antiques, in mint condition." I was coming here, anyway, for the show. And I thought, I'll accept a small percentage of the appraised value, if she plans to sell.

ROCHELLE

Abby, this is exactly what Opal Anne Hatchett asserts in her complaint. That means you did aim-

ABBY

No! Not to defraud. To appraise, for a small, perfectly acceptable fee.

ROCHELLE

How can we prove that?

SAVANNAH

Opal Anne's attorney will have to show intent.

ROCHELLE

(to ABBY) Go on.

ABBY

Caleb said he'd been in contact with the Civil War Museum. And he told me, "They want my aunt's collection as a centerpiece."

ROCHELLE

Why wouldn't he bring his aunt the museum's offer?

ABBY

He said Opal Anne wanted an independent opinion. She'd seen me on TV. Caleb begged me, as a favor to him- (beat) I wanted to do research on my family, and his aunt's place is right here. So-

ROCHELLE

He asked you to falsely appraise the collection.

ABBY

Yes! He told me he loved me. He asked, "How can we ever start a family? We're strapped all the time. And you're on the road six months of the year."

SAVANNAH

She cannot be telling this to a jury-

ABBY

He tried to involve me, but I refused! Then he- He apologized. He never mentioned the idea again.

ROCHELLE

Are you completely comfortable with that story?

ABBY

It's not a "story."

ROCHELLE

Opal Anne has your appraisal certificate in the amount of sixty thousand dollars. And there is a collection in the Gettysburg Civil War Museum-

SAVANNAH

General Andrew Hatchett's-

ROCHELLE

Yes, the General's memorabilia, for which the museum paid a million dollars. There's a bill of sale made out to someone who doesn't seem to exist, and a sum of money transferred to an offshore account ... that's since been closed.

ABBY

They can look in my credit union checking account! The trunk Caleb showed me, in Opal Anne's attic: The items in that trunk were worth sixty thousand dollars.

Short pause.

ROCHELLE

Your brow. Stayed down. That's good.

ABBY

You saw the buckle. Caleb was always buying artifacts at these Civil War reenactments.

SAVANNAH

The re-enactments on Opal Anne's farm?

ABBY

Yes. She gathers these men-

ROCHELLE

Hard-core reenactors. Twice a month, Spring through Fall; I am aware.

ABBY

And they cosplay different battles from the Civil War.

SAVANNAH

(laughs) It's really just a chance for the boys to cuddle each other at night on the battlefield, same as the Confederates did. "To keep warm," they tell themselves.

ABBY

Caleb invited me to stay at his aunt's estate. He said: if I did a re-enactment first, I would get on his aunt's good side.

SAVANNAH

That seem wise to you?

ABBY

Their "Authenticity Committee" confiscated my wristwatch and my cell phone-

ROCHELLE

No watches or phones in the 1860's.

SAVANNAH

What regiment did they put you in?

ABBY

I was a ... civilian. They made me dress up like- like an enslaved person.

SAVANNAH

That is some next-level white nonsense.

ROCHELLE

It's incredibly offensive.

SAVANNAH

What did they make you do?

ABBY

When Opal Anne Hatchett blew her whistle, I had to run this Bible up the hill, to where the Confederate chaplain would pray for the troops. I was supposed to curtsy, and wait for the prayer. Then, run the Bible back to the house, and get ready to serve tea.

SAVANNAH

Did they pull any shenanigans like ... try and make you sing?

ABBY shakes her head.

SAVANNAH (CONT'D)

Clean the silver? Do windows?

ABBY

Miz Hatchett had me take messages out to her troops.

ROCHELLE

(for use in court) Did anyone shoot at you?

ABBY

No. But ... Coming back down the ridge with the bible, I lost my footing and rolled to the bottom. I got a bruise on my hip the size of an ostrich egg!

ROCHELLE

She was trying to humiliate you. If any one took a photo? That's three hundred sympathy points.

ABBY

Caleb stood up for me, but- he's ... timid in front of his aunt. Anyway. The next day, he took me to the attic to appraise Miz Hatchett's antiques. That's when he conned me.

ROCHELLE

Can you prove that?

ABBY shakes her head.

SAVANNAH

Abby, will you excuse us for a quick minute?

ABBY

I don't see why I have to step out- *[every five minutes]*

SAVANNAH

I'll fetch you when it's time to talk strategy.

ABBY

(beat) Don't take long. (to ROCHELLE, firm) If you won't believe me, I'd better reconsider

ABBY exits. SAVANNAH turns on  
ROCHELLE.

SAVANNAH

Rochelle, you cannot accept this case. You will lose, and that woman will drag us on Yelp.

ROCHELLE

Not going to happen.

SAVANNAH

Porter Bright already has us down to two stars!

ROCHELLE

You're the reason she's here. You brought her in, and I appreciate your efforts-

SAVANNAH

You mean me bringing in clients of color? And every other client you've got?

ROCHELLE

What I mean, is that Abby was your referral-

SAVANNAH

To settle a simple civil case! But this is shaping up as something entirely different! If you put her on the stand-

ROCHELLE

I may not need to do that. I have a more promising idea.

A moment. SAVANNAH suspects the worst.

SAVANNAH

Does this "more promising idea" involve large pictures of you ... on the front page of the Tri-State Defender?

ROCHELLE

The system is unfair, and she'll need extra help. Forgive me, but I'm her lawyer. Not you.

SAVANNAH

(this is a low blow) I am advisin' you in an informal capacity.

ROCHELLE

You need to trust my judgment.

SAVANNAH

You said that about mine and Delia's case. And our household is living with the consequences.

ROCHELLE

I don't understand your need to blame me. Whatever happened to personal responsibility? (beat) Next time, choose a mixed dance club.

SAVANNAH

It is mixed ... once we show up! We got tired of driving sixty-five god-blessed miles to listen to Red's K. D. Lang mixtapes.

ROCHELLE

K.D. Lang is an authentic musical genius. And Red's is safe. / If you-

SAVANNAH

Yes, I'm sure that you and your Tinder hookups prefer Red's. But Minglewood Hall has the best DJs.

ROCHELLE

Then, at the very least, keep your hands off her ass!

SAVANNAH

Really, Rochelle? You think it's appropriate, talkin' to me like that?

ROCHELLE

Don't get defensive-

SAVANNAH

Then quit acting like I'm the problem! (pause) When the D.J. starts up "Always and Forever," hands on your partner's ass is not optional. It's a requirement.

ROCHELLE

Do the hokey pokey next time. You should know better.

SAVANNAH

There were dozens ... dozens, hell, a whole ocean of white couples with hands-on-ass in that club. Gay and straight. Yet, somehow, Delia and I are the only ones got arrested and hauled out of there.

ROCHELLE

You broke the law.

SAVANNAH

You ever break the law, Rochelle? Smoke some weed, buy beer from a runner 'cause it was Sunday?

ROCHELLE

Yes. But ... (she trails off)

SAVANNAH

Yeah. "But." They arrested us on a half-baked, vaguely-worded statute, designed to oppress! "Creating an offensive condition." Two people in love? It boggles the mind!

ROCHELLE

This is Collierville.

SAVANNAH

I slipped up. I forgot simply being a woman of color makes me a "Jezebel" in their eyes. I thought, for a second, I was livin' in the 21st century!

ROCHELLE

(sympathetic) It's not fair. And Delia losing her job wasn't fair, either.

SAVANNAH

If you had closed out the case quietly, that would have been the end of it. But no, you had to ring up every media outlet from here to Chattanooga!

ROCHELLE

I hoped we had moved past this.

SAVANNAH

How are we gonna do that, when it was your publicity that got Delia fired? I need to know what you have planned for Abby.

ROCHELLE

I got the charges dismissed! Through excellent lawyering. It made no sense to keep a victory like that a secret ... especially when we can really use the business! (silence) Fine. I believe I've been very generous in keeping you on. I value you, Savannah, as a sounding board. (beat) I am going to see this through, no matter what.

SAVANNAH

I get it. You have been rolling up and smoking "To Kill A Mockingbird" again.

ROCHELLE

Don't you dare-

SAVANNAH

That bumbling, bungling, blundering-

ROCHELLE

You know how I feel about Atticus!

SAVANNAH

His closing argument was disgraceful! His client couldn't have committed the crime. Where did he sum up the evidence? Nowhere!

ROCHELLE

I won't stand by while you insult Atticus-

SAVANNAH

I am speaking truth. "Do your duty," my ass. Asking an all-cracker jury to "search its conscience?" In Alabama?

ROCHELLE

So he was being high-minded!

SAVANNAH

Did he win his case?

A moment.

SAVANNAH (CONT'D)

I'm suggestin' that you set aside your dreams of being up on some silver screen like the god-blessed reincarnation of Gregory Peck. Settle Abby's case quietly.

ROCHELLE

I have been given a chance to put the whole Confederate antiques market on trial!

SAVANNAH

That's not who's gonna be on trial.

ROCHELLE

Once we get Judge Franklin onboard, you can pack the courtroom with your black friends-

SAVANNAH

Bring your own black friends! Oh wait, that's right- you don't have / any!

ROCHELLE

You are not the arbiter of the law in this office. You type my papers and screen my calls!

SAVANNAH

(Stung, then pulls it together) I do. And as I do those things, I keep my eyes open. I watch you push your clients- right off a cliff, leaving 'em battered and busted-up on the rocks below!

ROCHELLE

Objection: argumentative.

SAVANNAH

Look around you. Downtrodden people are being turned against, rather than given a helping hand. The most vulnerable. People who can't fight back are being scapegoated in this country!

ROCHELLE

Those same people will rush to support Abby, once they hear her story.

SAVANNAH

You don't understand the system. There's a thumb on the scales of Lady Justice-

ROCHELLE

Are you telling me you believe Abby?

SAVANNAH

Rochelle, you act like them cuttin' off my license has cut off my good judgment. You know that's not true.

ROCHELLE

Of course not.

SAVANNAH

I get that we can't behave exactly like we did before I lost my license, but you don't have to treat me like... (beat) You've been buzzin' me a lot on that intercom. That's all.

ROCHELLE

It's ... for efficiency.

SAVANNAH

You take to it like a pig to mud, though. This case could be like the time we wore down that businessman ... (can't recall) The one who built a fence onto his neighbor's yard?

ROCHELLE

Tuggles!

SAVANNAH (CONT'D)

Ron Tuggles!

SAVANNAH (CONT'D)

We were a team! You handled the depositions-

ROCHELLE

I was masterful. Once I got the wife wound up, she couldn't stop blabbing-

SAVANNAH

And I negotiated the settlement. Inside of an hour, that man was beggin' to bring down the fence with his own hands! We walked out of there, heroes.

ROCHELLE

We crushed it.

SAVANNAH

We've got to pull together, again, this time. For Abby's sake.

ROCHELLE

(beat) Not with a settlement.

SAVANNAH

Rochelle, I happened to go onto the internet, and / I read a study-

ROCHELLE

Not another study-

SAVANNAH

A scientific report. That found black people are wrongfully convicted up to twelve percent of the time. That's what your client is up against.

ROCHELLE

Twelve percent seems low. I trust Judge Franklin.

SAVANNAH

Is Judge Franklin hangin' out at Red's? You got "close connections" with her? (silence) I knew it. You're going to use this case to promote yourself.

ROCHELLE

You have no basis for that allegation. Publicity attracts new clients for the firm-

SAVANNAH

If you prevail!

ROCHELLE

I cannot personally fix our broken justice system!

SAVANNAH

It's not broken! It's chugging along exactly as designed. (beat) If you cause harm, I swear... (beat) Do you think after all the promotion you dredge up, Abby would ever find work as an appraiser again?

A moment. ROCHELLE considers.

ROCHELLE

I understand. Post-trial publicity was damaging to you, so it's off the table. I'll do what's best for my client. Now. Will you please call Abby in, and leave us alone for a minute?

SAVANNAH pauses. Exits. ROCHELLE begins making notes in a notebook. A moment later, ABBY enters with her red library scrapbook.

ROCHELLE (CONT'D)

Abby, after hearing what you have to say, I have an idea about how to proceed. Please, have a seat. (silence) I've got to start wheels in motion, and I'll need your cooperation.

ABBY

What do you want me to do?

ROCHELLE

As you've probably noticed, Collierville is not a particularly enlightened area of Tennessee. The people here ...

Chanting outside. They look at the window.

ROCHELLE (CONT'D)

Carry a certain degree of bias. That means we've got to take drastic measures to change the probable course of your trial.

ABBY

"Drastic measures?"

ROCHELLE

Let me explain. We're facing a critical moment in our nation's history. We've elected a deranged deadbeat who's packing the Oval Office with white supremacists. And here you are: a young black woman, caught up in some kind of funny business involving the Confederacy, instigated by your white boyfriend.

ABBY

(Pause. Stares.) Was that the explanation?

ROCHELLE writes in her notebook.

ROCHELLE

Bear with me. (thinks) Let me ask: how do the antiques that you appraise gain value?

ABBY

Like anything ... their value goes up and down. Once I determine a piece is authentic, I look at how rare it is, the shape it's in, who owned it, the value of similar items, its desirability-

ROCHELLE

"Desirability," right. When it comes to Confederate, or, say, Nazi, or other offensive memorabilia, doesn't the ideology behind these items also affect their value?

ABBY

You mean, collectors who honor the Confederacy are willing to pay more, and that drives up the price? Sure. But these antiques ended up in a museum.

ROCHELLE

(writing) A museum paying market rates. Those rates: over-inflated by bigots. (thinks) Abby, you've been dealt with unfairly. For example, you were mistreated by your employer, inside a hostile work environment.

ABBY

Antique dealers are actually very considerate-

ROCHELLE

They made you appraise Confederate heirlooms!

ABBY

Except I chose that area of expertise, before I ever *-[worked there.]*

ROCHELLE

You were forced to engage in degrading role-play on Opal Anne's property. An Authenticity Committee confiscated your wristwatch, and your phone. Taking someone's iPhone is both cruel and unusual-

ABBY

They took everybody's phone-

ROCHELLE

Then you fell down an embankment while impersonating a slave. You sustained a disabling hip bruise. You're being sued by a woman who believes the Lost Cause is something to be celebrated. Who is making fistfuls of money, even today, off the Confederacy. The Confederacy: a bunch of slavery-supporting traitors!

Sounds outside.

ABBY

I don't defend the Confederacy, and I didn't defraud Opal Anne. But I don't understand what you're driving at, when you talk about "drastic measures."

ROCHELLE

We've got to minimize Opal Anne's influence before we go to trial. We can do that, through my very skilled campaign of carefully-planned news content. Pointing out that woman's complicity in the corrupt Confederate collectibles market.

ABBY

Are you trying to argue ...that Miz Hatchett's profiting from the sale of Confederate heirlooms ... is the real crime?

ROCHELLE

Yes. Right: that's the real crime. A white woman is making a killing from the sale of racist artifacts! And that's just one of a very, very long list of injustices. There are so many others, over hundreds of years: Slavery. Jim Crow. Um... You know ... uh...

ROCHELLE taps her pen, having run out of items.

ABBY

(obviously) Being denied the right to vote.

ROCHELLE

Those are the real crimes. Appalling injustices that have never been made right.

ROCHELLE jots down the list.

ABBY

Like being systematically robbed of our history and our heritage? Violence against us. Police brutality, beatings, murder-

ROCHELLE

Whoops; hang on. We want to be provocative ... but we don't want to be divisive.

ABBY

Pointing out facts is divisive?

ROCHELLE

What I'm saying is: we need to gain exposure, and persuade people, but we don't want to create a blackl- bl- a backlash. Let's stick to economic injustices.

ABBY

(thinking) Okay, what about red-lining? All kinds of housing discrimination. Segregation. Predatory lending. The racial wealth gap-

ROCHELLE

(writing) What's that: that wealth gap.

ABBY

Rochelle, this country built its wealth during the Industrial Revolution. And the foundation of that wealth was cotton slavery. Yet our share of the wealth is just over one percent. It's barely budged since the Civil War.

ROCHELLE

Good one! (Thinks ABBY's done) Thank you; I can work with these.

A moment. ABBY, a little worked up at ROCHELLE's assuming that's all, resumes ticking off items.

ABBY

There's also chronic poverty. Disinvestment in black neighborhoods. Unfair treatment in employment. Higher unemployment rates. General Sherman's pledge of forty acres and a mule: a promise broken just a few years after it was made. And I think it's fair to mention: a justice system that is systematically unjust to people like me.

ROCHELLE scrambles to complete the list.

ROCHELLE

We'll argue that the plaintiff is targeting you, a woman of color, because she condones, and is determined to preserve, every one of these injustices!

ABBY

That's a very interesting strategy. (beat) Can we wake up Mr. Bright? Because I think you're crazy.

ROCHELLE

If you tell your story on the stand, in this town? You will be found liable. Opal Anne's lawyer need only show a "preponderance of the evidence" in her favor. This is the way to win!

ABBY

By pointing out facts? You just said that's divisive.

ROCHELLE

I'll speak out against the bigotry that makes these antiques valuable. I'll touch on this list of unredressed crimes. With you by my side ... dressed nicely ... (thinks) No. I want you front and center. (beat) You're very well-spoken.

ABBY

(wtf!) Before I walk out that door-

ROCHELLE

It's a compliment-

ABBY

Let me get this straight: your strategy is to argue "unredressed crimes" in front of my jury?

ROCHELLE

Oh, no, no! We won't say that at trial. This is all pre-trial. We say it on TV.

ABBY

You want to say it on TV. In this racial climate, in this county, with the current administration in the White House?

ROCHELLE

I admit we're taking a slight chance.

ABBY

It's not "taking a slight chance!" It's betting money on a three-card monte game on some street corner in New York City!

ROCHELLE

I haven't been clear! I'm sorry. I was focusing on the means, not the end. (starting again) We create intense pre-trial publicity. We pollute the jury pool. Then, we tell the judge we can't seat an impartial jury because of it. It practically guarantees you a change of venue!

ABBY

But- (thinks) You're the one doing the polluting.

ROCHELLE

Not at all! That rally polluted it first. And, mark my words, Opal Anne's attorney -- the blowhard -- will be making a racist rant on the steps of the courthouse before we can dispatch our first press release.

ABBY

Do you understand the risk, Rochelle?

ROCHELLE

The real risk, Abby, is having your trial here, in town. Change of venue is your best hope.

ABBY

Are you at all familiar, with, like, the news? Can you see what's going on outside your own window? Challenging Confederate 'anything' is only going to make these ass[holes]- these people- more angry!

ROCHELLE

Making the locals more angry is precisely how we'll get a change of venue. I'll move for Memphis. It's been rated a more liberal city than Bridgeport, Connecticut.

ABBY

Is that good?

ROCHELLE

Yes! And with the trial relocated to Memphis, everything changes. The population is majority African-American. We'll seat an all-black jury-

ABBY

You're sure of that?

ROCHELLE

Knowing her leanings, Judge Franklin will look favorably on my motion. (beat) There's plenty of precedent. Take Bill Cosby. His judge just ruled he can get jurors bussed in from another county. And the police officers who beat Rodney King: California v. Powell, et al.? Because of pre-trial publicity, the judge moved their case to Simi Valley.

ABBY

That didn't turn out well!

ROCHELLE

But the defendants were acquitted. (beat) Abby, you need a not-liable verdict in your suit, so the FBI will see it has no case. Doing everything we can to get a change of venue is the only sensible strategy. (silence) What other option do you have?

No answer comes.

ROCHELLE (CONT'D)

The question is: can you afford to pay Opal Anne Hatchett a million dollars? (beat) I'm afraid I'm going to have to push you on this.

ABBY

(beat) Give me a minute.

ABBY thoughtfully holds the scrapbook.

ROCHELLE

Well?

The door opens and SAVANNAH rushes in.

SAVANNAH

I tried to get her to wait outside. She wouldn't listen! It's Opal Anne Hatchett!

OPAL ANNE pushes past SAVANNAH.

ROCHELLE

Opal Anne!

OPAL ANNE

(ignores SAVANNAH) Rochelle, are you aware that your lobby security guard has 'bout the coldest pair of hands in the mid-South?

ROCHELLE

What are you doing here, Opal Anne? Where is your lawyer? You shouldn't be here without your lawyer-

OPAL ANNE

I am here to discuss the theft of my property, and the property of General Andrew Kirby Hatchett of the Fifth Tennessee Infantry Division- (points at ABBY) by that con artist, and thief!

Sound cue: Civil War tune, distant battle sounds. BLACKOUT. INTERMISSION.

ACT TWO.

A few minutes later. Lights up on ROCHELLE and OPAL ANNE. Chants outside the window.

OPAL ANNE

I came all the way over here in this bitter-cold weather- (silence) And now you refuse to speak to me?

ROCHELLE

I can't speak with you, Opal Anne, because you're represented by counsel. Next time you have something to say to me, bring your sociopath attorney with you.

OPAL ANNE

My goodness, Rochelle, without the swaddling of soft, sweet, good manners, a visit with you would be well-nigh unbearable.

ROCHELLE

I'm not talking to you.

OPAL ANNE

Let me alleviate your anxiety. I have asked my family attorney to step aside from this case. I do not believe he is the right man for the job.

ROCHELLE

Who's your counsel, then?

OPAL ANNE

You're lookin' at her.

ROCHELLE

(Is this a positive development?) You're representing yourself? That's ... abrupt.

OPAL ANNE

I s'pose you may call me "Esquire." (laughs) At any rate, you and I certainly may speak to each other. Attorney to attorney.

ROCHELLE

I don't intend to settle. There's no need for a conversation.

OPAL ANNE

As my own attorney at law, I have a list of several items that I need to discuss with you.

ROCHELLE

We have a saying in the legal profession: "Anyone who represents herself has a fool for a client."

OPAL ANNE

No need for discourtesy! (beat) Oh. I see. You're still sore at me. (Silence) For voting against your membership in the D.B.W.A.

ROCHELLE

I am not! (beat) You did more than just vote.

OPAL ANNE

I made a recommendation. The committee made up its own mind, independent of my influence.

ROCHELLE

The Downtown Business Women's Association is a terrorist organization.

OPAL ANNE

(laughs) You'd join in a heartbeat if we'd have you! Aw. Are the ladies shunnin' your behind?

ROCHELLE

That- cult- controls networking and business referrals in this town-

OPAL ANNE

Poor thing: you scabbling for clients?

ROCHELLE

I don't know where you would get / that idea-

OPAL ANNE

Maybe if you showed up at church on Sunday, you could chase 'em down in the pews.

ROCHELLE

Opal Anne. I am as eager to praise Jesus as the next person, but your church is not welcoming to me.

OPAL ANNE

Pick 'em up in jail, I guess. (beat) Rochelle, you are aware that the objections people have to your chosen lifestyle are bible-based.

ROCHELLE

My chosen / lifestyle-

OPAL ANNE

You are snug as a bug in a rug with one Savannah Hill.

ROCHELLE

She works for me.

OPAL ANNE

You hired one of your own kind.

ROCHELLE

It's not your business.

OPAL ANNE

You are wearin' those pantsuits on a daily basis. And you drive a "Vul-voh." We can all add two plus two, which equals lesbian.

ROCHELLE

My private life has no bearing on my practice.

OPAL ANNE

No one put a gun to your head and forced you to decide to be lesbian. The fact is, the D.B.W.A. cannot accept abominated individuals. It's against our by-laws.

ROCHELLE

You can't accept-? What about the women who deceive their husbands, gossip, or cheat their customers? There goes your whole damn membership, right there.

OPAL ANNE

We are all sinners. 'Course, some delight in the sin more than others.

ROCHELLE

(beat, wants to say "fuck you" but doesn't) You said you have a list. Let's have it.

OPAL ANNE

You people from the north are just as harsh and frosty as your winters. Around here, we cherish our small talk. And we always offer visitors a libation to slake their thirst.  
(silence) I'll take a water. My needs are simple.

ROCHELLE

(buzzes the intercom.) Can you bring in a glass of tap water, please?

OPAL ANNE

However, I would not turn down a bottle of imported pure sparkling spring water, with extra-small bubbles, sourced from some exotic locale.

ROCHELLE

(buzzes the intercom) Savannah, please go through those old bottles at the back of the fridge and bring us a couple of Crystal Geysers. Thank you.

OPAL ANNE

I must say, the fact that Savannah Hill is still employed by Bright and Ashworth brings me up short. She has been disbarred-

ROCHELLE

She's not disbarred! Her law license is suspended. Temporarily.

OPAL ANNE

Yet here she is: working. In your office. (silence) I could report you both to the Tennessee Bar.

ROCHELLE

Savannah doesn't perform tasks that require her license. Savannah types up my notes and files my paperwork.

OPAL ANNE

Any "private duties," on the side?

ROCHELLE

Threats, demands, and innuendo: that's your idea of "small talk?" Please go over your list, Opal Anne.

OPAL ANNE

(beat) I want you to prosecute my suit.

ROCHELLE

Your suit. I thought you were handling it *pro se*. (pro say)

OPAL ANNE

I don't know what that is ... but the fact remains: I want you to pursue my civil case against that colored girl. I understand that Porter Bright has taken her side. And I would like to engage you to argue against that criminal con artist, to protect my interests.

ROCHELLE

If Porter were her attorney ... we're partners, and it would be a conflict of interest for me to work for you. (silence) A violation of my ethics.

OPAL ANNE

(puzzled) "Ethics." Ethics? In a law firm?

ROCHELLE

I can't represent you. I'm taking Abby's side. I plan to beat you, and win this lawsuit.

OPAL ANNE

How you gonna do that? (beat) I'll tell you what I think. I believe you aim to twist the facts of my case. I believe you'll place me front and center as some kind of Southern-fried circus clown, usin' the same type of publicity as you did with that dance club incident.

ROCHELLE

If that's what you think, why would you want to hire me?

OPAL ANNE

I want any media coverage that occurs to be favorable to me.

ROCHELLE

You're concerned about how you'll look.

OPAL ANNE

I didn't say that. (beat) Liberals have always used the agitation of race to try and bring down the South. You'll proolly court the liberal media; then go on about slavery. "Slavery this" and "slavery that," proolly. (fishing) That's my guess. (Silence) When, in fact, our field hands were viewed as family, and were very well-treated.

ROCHELLE

Pardon me. Under slavery?

OPAL ANNE

Under the American system of African servitude.

ROCHELLE

History called; it begs to differ.

OPAL ANNE

I'm speaking of my kin.

ROCHELLE

You have no understanding of history. The way you continue to honor the Confederacy is- is-

OPAL ANNE

Widespread. Popular.

ROCHELLE

That doesn't make it right! But I appreciate your willingness to expose your own bigotry. One of many reasons I won't represent you. What else is on your list?

OPAL ANNE

(pressing on) We don't travel in the same circles, Rochelle, and you are a Northerner. But as sure as the Confederate battle flag can be found flyin' on homes and trucks in all fifty states, we share a lot of common ground. You should consider what we have to offer.

ROCHELLE

I don't understand.

OPAL ANNE

I'm referrin' to our traditionalist movement. Almost a thousand groups, now, across the country. It's a cultural crusade that supports and favors people like you and me.

ROCHELLE

I thought I was "abominated."

OPAL ANNE

You could struggle into a dress, do somethin' to normalize your hair, and shave your legs. Providin' you keep your mouth shut, you'd be warmly received. You see, our movement is on the rise, bringing forth a mighty vision for the future: a country restored to our original founding principles.

ROCHELLE

This country is founded on the principle, "All of us are created equal."

OPAL ANNE

(laughs) That's a proposition, not a principle. And it was written by Thomas Jefferson. He didn't mean it literally!

ROCHELLE

You've been brainwashed by revisionists. You've been conned. The Confederacy is called the "Lost Cause" because you people lost.

OPAL ANNE

My goodness, you are out of touch. You take a look at who's sitting in the White House in Washington, DC? And the Southern White House, in Florida? You should think about what side this lawsuit puts you on, if you defend that girl.

Sounds. ROCHELLE moves to the window.

ROCHELLE

I'm well aware of what side I'm on: the side of removing that monument.

OPAL ANNE

You will never destroy our monuments: not without a battle. They are an emblem of the loss and trauma we suffered at the hands of invaders from the North. Slaughtering us on our own soil!

ROCHELLE

You're no victim; you can stop playing one.

OPAL ANNE

Make light of our anguish and pain if you wish. Our men returned with "soldier's heart." Now called "PTSD." Or never returned. Shot in battle, their blood bravely spilled.

ROCHELLE

According to every historical account, most Confederate deaths resulted from diarrhea. Anyway, the monuments are a symbol of bigotry, and they divide the community.

OPAL ANNE

Even if those ... Taliban on the Tennessee Historical Commission succeed in taking General Forrest from our park, he will remain enshrined as a hero in our souls!

ROCHELLE

(for her campaign) Do you support the Klan?

OPAL ANNE

It's not just the Klan out there. It's your neighbors. I understand you congratulate yourself that you're better than me. But you're living up on the hill, not in the flats. Worried about your property values. Sure, you'll hire one of them ... but only to grow your client base.

ROCHELLE

You've mistaken me for your friends, the KKK.

OPAL ANNE

(laughs) I see you, Rochelle. You prefer not to mix ... unless they're mowing your lawn, coming to you as an accused thief, or filin' your paperwork. As I said, we have a lot in common.

ROCHELLE

Don't delude yourself. I'm from Delaware, not "Dixie."

OPAL ANNE

You're not my moral superior. Delaware freed its hands a full two years after Tennessee freed ours. You want to be assimilated and diversi-teed out of existence, be my guest. I'm not ashamed of defending what made us the world's greatest nation. Those men out there are reclaiming our history.

ROCHELLE

A part of history best forgotten!

OPAL ANNE

Then the past will repeat. Won't it? (beat) Your business is doin' poorly. Think about the fees I could bring in, Rochelle.

They stare at each other. SAVANNAH enters with two Crystal Geysers.

SAVANNAH

I set up Abby in the other conference room. She's reading her fugitive slave book. And Rochelle, I did not attend law school to be chained to your intercom every waking hour. Hello, Opal Anne.

OPAL ANNE

(Ignoring SAVANNAH. To ROCHELLE) If you rethink your answer, I will remove impediments to your membership in the D.B.W.A.

ROCHELLE

I don't care.

SAVANNAH

Hello, Opal Anne.

OPAL ANNE

(to ROCHELLE) Doesn't that entice you to accept my offer?

ROCHELLE takes the water.

ROCHELLE

No, it doesn't.

OPAL ANNE

Full membership. And a hefty client fee.

SAVANNAH

(extending the water) Hello, Opal Anne.

OPAL ANNE won't take the water.

SAVANNAH sets the water on the table.

SAVANNAH (CONT'D)

(to OPAL ANNE) What do you want Rochelle for?

ROCHELLE

She wants me to make her look upstanding, and respectable.

SAVANNAH

(to ROCHELLE, innocently) I have absolutely nothing to say about that.

OPAL ANNE

(to ROCHELLE) I am waitin' for your answer!

ROCHELLE

I'm not signing on as your attorney. Get on with your list.

OPAL ANNE rummages in her bag, takes out a lipstick, lotion, and a handgun, sets them on the table. Finds and retrieves a manila envelope. Replaces items. ROCHELLE stares.

ROCHELLE (CONT'D)

How did you get that past security?

OPAL ANNE

My lipstick? Oh. It's not an explosive device ... it's a concealed carry handgun, protected by the Second Amendment. (Handing the envelope to ROCHELLE) Here. Before I let him go, I had my lawyer amend the charges against your client. I've added a second matter to my complaint. Perhaps it will inspire you to reconsider. (Silence) You see, the Hatchett family bible has gone missing from my home.

ROCHELLE

(oh, shit) Your ... bible?

OPAL ANNE

A large and well-preserved family bible, circa 1800. Last seen in the arms of your client.

ROCHELLE

No bible ended up at the Gettysburg museum.

SAVANNAH

And Abby is from California, where they do not read the bible.

OPAL ANNE

Nevertheless. In addition to under-appraising my heirlooms for her own personal gain, that girl has up and stolen my Holy Book.

ROCHELLE and SAVANNAH read the charges.

OPAL ANNE (CONT'D)

This suit is no longer about an under-appraisal; it's common theft.

ROCHELLE

This is- I'll discuss it with Abby. I'm sure she didn't take your book.

OPAL ANNE

Stealing the Holy Bible is not only a crime, it's a sin of the highest order. She took possession of the book the very first day she arrived at my estate.

SAVANNAH

You gave it to her. In order to demean her.

ROCHELLE

We're aware of the circumstances. (gives the papers to SAVANNAH) Thank you for the water. You can add this to Abby's file. That will be all for now.

SAVANNAH

I would like to stick around.

OPAL ANNE

Oh, it'd be lovely if your girl stayed. You said she types up your notes. Perhaps she takes shorthand?

SAVANNAH and OPAL ANNE face off.  
ROCHELLE takes a pad and pen from the table.  
Hands them to SAVANNAH, who snatches them, annoyed; stalks over to a chair, sits.

OPAL ANNE (CONT'D)

It seems to me that this entire situation is charged with tension, Rochelle. Fraught and laden. The fact that the heirlooms in question are from the Confederacy-

ROCHELLE

Exactly what I said-

OPAL ANNE

Among the general public outside the mid-South, that is, liberal Yankees, it may be seen as controversial. There may be a chasm of confused notions about why we value our particular way of life. (beat) This goes back to before the war. Hatred of my race is the motive for that girl to cheat me in the first place. (to SAVANNAH) Write that down.

SAVANNAH

Opal Anne, you have a better chance of being cheated by your own bank than by any individual, of any color! I read a report-

ROCHELLE

Savannah, can you please stay out / of this?

SAVANNAH

It's been proved by a scientific study! These big banks make up fake accounts, charge illegal fees, forge signatures, foreclose without / cause-

ROCHELLE

Objection-

OPAL ANNE

The First Bank of Tennessee did not get up in my attic and walk away with my family heirlooms!

SAVANNAH

Fifty percent better chance of being robbed by a bank than by a person. You want me to show you on my phone?

OPAL ANNE

No, I don't want to look at any study on your phone-

SAVANNAH

Take me but three seconds to Google the thing-

OPAL ANNE

My bank is not named in this lawsuit! (to ROCHELLE) If your token hire thinks / she's going to educate me, she has got another think comin'. In fact, she can jump off that train before it tootles out the station!

SAVANNAH

"Token!" I am fully qualified to be an attorney in this state! I graduated second in my class, and I passed the bar on my first attempt!

ROCHELLE

Can we act like adults? Will y'all please compose yourselves!

OPAL ANNE and SAVANNAH step back.

SAVANNAH

Don't go stealing "y'all," Rochelle.

ROCHELLE

(to OPAL ANNE) We'll deal with this claim at trial. Is there anything else on your list? If not, I'm afraid you're going to have to leave.

OPAL ANNE

I have one thing more. I've given it a lot of thought, and it has occurred to me that since Caleb got roped into a scheme by this colored girl-

SAVANNAH

That she's a young woman of color has nothing to do with / the case.

ROCHELLE

(to SAVANNAH) All right. (to OPAL ANNE) Please continue.

OPAL ANNE

It adds an intricacy to the situation. So. Besides amending my complaint, I have moved to save Caleb from being caught up in a whirlwind of black-white bitterness.

ROCHELLE

You mean trying his case separately. I know / that-

OPAL ANNE

Hold your horses; that's not what I'm talkin' about. I sat my nephew down, and we had a long heart-to-heart. Bosoms were bared, and tears were shed. Since he was raised by my sister Lila Rae, out in the Land of Fruits and Nuts ... Well, it's no surprise to anybody he's three pickles shy of a jar. But I did take the time to hear from his own mouth what happened.

ROCHELLE

What did he tell you?

SAVANNAH

And why would you believe it's true?

OPAL ANNE

My nephew is eager to avoid the drama of centuries of racial resentment. Which seems to be worsened by these ... deeply meaningful family keepsakes. Caleb described to me how that girl gained his confidence, by pretending to have affection for him. Then, deceived him like a commonplace Jezebel. That colored girl walked right up to a trunkful of treasure and declared it worth nothin.'

ROCHELLE

(Making notes) I see. Your definition of "nothing" is "sixty thousand dollars."

OPAL ANNE

I never saw a penny. That girl took everything, and conspired to make Caleb appear liable for her fraud!

SAVANNAH

The museum said the heirlooms arrived by courier. And the money was wired to an account that's closed; and was never in Abby's name. There's nothing that ties those heirlooms to Abby.

OPAL ANNE

There's her appraisal! Caleb left no doubt in my mind: My nephew is innocent.

ROCHELLE

Nobody is innocent.

OPAL ANNE

Kin always takes precedence. (beat. To SAVANNAH) Write this down: I have dropped my case against Caleb.

ROCHELLE

You're claiming my client is the sole perpetrator?

OPAL ANNE

I am.

SAVANNAH

You haven't even heard Abby's side!

OPAL ANNE

I have no need. I am content. (beat) The Hatchett family had several men fighting in the War. We lost five. (emotional) Those heirlooms, and that bible: those are my family's things, which is why their loss is so devastating. (to ROCHELLE) I am left to ponder your motivations for pursuing the suit. I assume you are driven by ambition, recrimination, and white guilt.

ROCHELLE

My motives are pure.

OPAL ANNE

You just said "Nobody is innocent." Which means your client's guilty.

ROCHELLE

It's a catchphrase! A motto. A saying, like, like ... Like, "Who Runs the World? Girls!"

Both look at ROCHELLE.

ROCHELLE (CONT'D)

Or ... like ... "with Liberty and Justice for all."

OPAL ANNE

Since she's guilty, you've now got to somehow justify the theft. (thinks, guesses) Prolly plan to portray this woman as some kind of populist thief of the common people. Makin' up for wrongs committed against her.

ROCHELLE

(beat) Guess again. I'm aware you're nosing around for my defense strategy. You won't get it. I will remind you: my client will not settle.

OPAL ANNE

I realize a settlement would destroy the opportunity for you to inflate your massive ego on that TV show, "Memphis Live."

ROCHELLE

Fuck you, Opal Anne.

A moment.

SAVANNAH

I agree with something Opal Anne said, and that is making me nervous.

OPAL ANNE

Bless your heart. (to ROCHELLE) Pride is the original sin.

ROCHELLE

Here I thought it was back-stabbing.

SAVANNAH

Being a preacher's kid, I'm highly qualified to settle this question. The original sin ... is agreeing to have a conversation with a snake.

OPAL ANNE

What? It is not! It's pride. Perhaps we are perusing two different Good Books. You got some colored version?

SAVANNAH

Mine's full-length. Sounds like you've been skimming the comic book edition.

OPAL ANNE

Read back those notes!

SAVANNAH hands OPAL ANNE her note pad. OPAL ANNE looks at the blank page.

SAVANNAH

Read them yourself. (OPAL ANNE can't find them.) Flip over the page.

OPAL ANNE

(flips, reads) This says, "I am not your secretary!"

SAVANNAH smiles.

ROCHELLE

Opal Anne, you've disrupted my client conference, and my day, long enough. My time is valuable. Is there anything else on your list that we need to go over?

OPAL ANNE

(furious) No. There is not.

ROCHELLE

Then, I will ask you to leave.

OPAL ANNE

I thought it was plenty rude when you gave me the silent treatment ... but tryin' to get rid of me before I am ready to depart takes the all-fired cake!

ROCHELLE

If you have anything else to tell me, or more documents, or added claims, whatever it is ... please use the usual methods: messenger and email.

OPAL ANNE

I prefer to deal face to face.

ROCHELLE

There is nothing more to say. I'm busy, and I'm telling you: Get out of my office.

OPAL ANNE

I sit here stunned by your incivility to a fellow litigator.

ROCHELLE

If you refuse to leave, I'll get security. I will have you forcibly removed. (silence) Don't think I won't.

OPAL ANNE

(beat) I haven't finished my Crystal Geys er water.

ROCHELLE

Fine. I'm going to the lobby; and I'll see you shortly.

SAVANNAH

You're leaving me alone with her?

ROCHELLE

Sometimes there are no good options.

Giving SAVANNAH a warning look,  
ROCHELLE exits. SAVANNAH crosses to her  
briefcase, rummages, takes out a tiny bible, a  
handgun, and her cell phone. Checks her cell  
phone. Returns all the items to her bag. ABBY  
enters with her backpack and the red library  
scrapbook, sets them down.

SAVANNAH

Abby, it's best you wait outside.

OPAL ANNE

My, my. Look who's here.

ABBY

I've been sitting out there long enough, while you discuss my case, without me. Again!

SAVANNAH

(quickly summarizing) Opal Anne is representing herself. She's dropped the case against her nephew, and is now suing you, alone.

ABBY

What?! That's bullshit. Caleb cheated both of us!

SAVANNAH

Your attorney has gone to fetch security. Which means: now would be a good time to hush up.

ABBY

What am I going to do? I don't have a million dollars!

OPAL ANNE

That will be unfortunate when a judgement is rendered.

ABBY

Savannah, we don't have to go to court at all, if you'll let me tell her what / happened.

SAVANNAH

This isn't the venue to run your mouth. Let's all observe several minutes of silence.

ABBY

Doesn't the truth mean anything around here?

OPAL ANNE

I would be delighted to finally hear some truth.

SAVANNAH

We all want the truth. But this woman is the plaintiff in your suit. To say anything in front of her, without Rochelle, is a risk you do not want to take.

ABBY

Aren't I entitled, by law, to face my accuser?

SAVANNAH

In court.

ABBY

You told me I should settle! (beat) If you knew the strategy Rochelle has in mind! If you understood how she plans to- (stops) This is the lesser risk. If you had heard Rochelle, Savannah. You wouldn't try to shut me up.

A moment. SAVANNAH considers.

SAVANNAH

I get it.

OPAL ANNE

I would be very interested in Rochelle's strategy. Isn't that something opposing counsels share with one another, prior to trial?

SAVANNAH

You are just as confused as a cow on AstroTurf. (to ABBY) Opal Anne's nephew has laid his crime at your feet. If you have something to say ... You'd better hurry up and say it.

OPAL ANNE

My nephew speaks only verifiable facts.

SAVANNAH

Did he tell you he was dating Abby, here? No he did not.

ABBY

Caleb said me he'd take me here, so I could do my family research. He gave me a promise ring-

SAVANNAH

Speed past this part.

ABBY

(to OPAL ANNE) The day after the reenactment, Caleb and I climbed up into your attic, alone. I appraised the heirlooms in your trunk-

OPAL ANNE

For sixty thousand! And then made sure the museum transferred a million dollars to your offshore account!

ABBY

Do I look like I have an offshore account?

OPAL ANNE

(as if this is proof) You are from Southern California.

SAVANNAH

(quickly) Describe what happened with the antiques, please.

ABBY

(to OPAL ANNE) I evaluated them like a professional. They were in very poor condition. The general's uniform was missing buttons, and the trousers were patched and frayed. The tang was gone from the sword. The battle flag was in tatters.

OPAL ANNE

I wouldn't keep a tattered Stars and Bars!

ABBY

I couldn't believe a museum wanted any of them for display. (to SAVANNAH) Do you think I'm telling the truth?

SAVANNAH

I- I would say ... Yes, I believe you are.

OPAL ANNE

No judge is going to believe her, over me!

SAVANNAH

(to OPAL ANNE) Con men are persuasive: that's true by definition. Smart people get fooled all the time. It's nothing to be ashamed of. Your boy was bent on scapegoating Abby, here. And he conned you pretty good in the process.

OPAL ANNE

I don't sue kin. (referring to ABBY) On the other hand, I do sue carpetbaggers: Outsiders who come to a region to prey on local people.

ABBY

I didn't prey on you. Caleb showed me these crappy ... Everything was packed in a brand-new footlocker, like, from Walmart.

OPAL ANNE

Also, a lie. The general's things were stowed in my antique steamer trunk. I remember distinctly. Out of a dozen trunks in my attic, I stored those heirlooms in the finest trunk.

SAVANNAH

Is that your testimony? Because / it- [*contradicts Abby's.*]

ABBY

It's obvious! Caleb showed me different artifacts, inferior ones, knowing I would appraise them fairly. Then he sold your family heirlooms to the museum for a lot more money!

OPAL ANNE

No jury will believe that I own a footlocker. From Walmart? The very notion is ludicrous. That the proceeds of this sale went to lining this girl's personal pocketbook ... it's heartbreaking!

SAVANNAH

You can't expect a miracle, Abby. Save your testimony for the jury. You did your best.

ABBY

I did. (beat) Now, I have a question for you, Opal Anne.

OPAL ANNE

(sarcastic, bright) Oh, am I now on trial?

SAVANNAH

(to ABBY) Whatever it is, leave it alone!

ABBY

(to SAVANNAH) It's okay. (to OPAL ANNE) While your nephew was busy smearing my reputation, did he tell you that he lent me your family Bible? The one you made me carry during the reenactment? (beat) He did. And I have the book ... right here.

As she is speaking, ABBY has taken an 1800's family bible from her backpack. It is wrapped in archival plastic. She dons cotton gloves and removes the plastic. A moment.

SAVANNAH

(under her breath) Jesus, wave me home. Abby, put a cork in it, right now.

OPAL ANNE

You stole that from me, is the plain truth!

ABBY

I borrowed her bible. Caleb told me it was no big deal, and that I could help myself.

OPAL ANNE

You burgled that!

SAVANNAH

(to OPAL ANNE) Even a fake lawyer can get that borrowing a book is not a crime.

ABBY

As you can see, there's been no damage. It's in perfect condition.

SAVANNAH

Heaven knows, it went unread by its owner.

ABBY

(to OPAL ANNE) I valued your artifacts fairly. Later that day, the Authenticity Committee mistakenly returned both mine and Caleb's cell phones ... to me. I- happened to glance through his text messages-

SAVANNAH

Boundaries, Abby-

OPAL ANNE

I want to hear this!

ABBY

He was texting with someone ... a financial middleman with an overseas bank account. When the committee realized, and reclaimed his phone... I did some soul-searching. I'd been had. (silence) Then, Caleb disappeared; he ghosted me. There was no way to give back the bible, short of visiting Opal Anne.

ROCHELLE enters.

ROCHELLE

Abby's not- (takes in the situation.) What the hell is going on / here?!

OPAL ANNE

(ignoring ROCHELLE) That's a cover story, invented by a thief!

ROCHELLE

I step out for five minutes, and you compromise- *[the suit!]*

SAVANNAH

Sometimes there are no good options. What is your strategy for defendin' this client?

ROCHELLE

I don't owe you that.

ABBY

I'd like to state for the record, in front of witnesses, that I am returning Opal Anne's bible. I apologize for borrowing it, without your permission.

ROCHELLE

That's the missing bible?

OPAL ANNE

Stolen-

ROCHELLE

(to OPAL ANNE) There's no harm done. Certainly no grounds for a lawsuit.

OPAL ANNE

The theft of this precious family book is written up in my civil complaint!

ROCHELLE

You handed her that book .... after forcing her to dress as a slave! The *mens rea* (menz ray-ah) for theft requires specific intent: to deprive an individual of property. Cardoza vee ... Carr, 2002. Plainly, that intent is lacking in this instance.

SAVANNAH

Whatever happened to fetching security?

ROCHELLE glares at SAVANNAH.

OPAL ANNE

Next time, don't hire the same security detail that tends to my reenactments.

ABBY

Will you listen to me for a minute? (silence) This bible ... means something. The middle pages, in between the Old Testament and the New. (She has placed a bookmark.) It's got a family registry: pages set aside for historical dates: Marriages, Births and Deaths ... This is important.

ROCHELLE

Objection: relevance!

SAVANNAH

What? Overruled.

ABBY

You can judge relevance when I'm through. (ABBY reads.) January the twelfth, 1861.  
The birth of Opal Anne Hatchett.

OPAL ANNE

My second great-grandmother. This means what?

ABBY

June, 1862. You'll see. The birth of William Robert Kirby Hatchett.

OPAL ANNE takes the bible. ABBY continues  
to recite from memory.

ROCHELLE

There. She's re-taken possession.

OPAL ANNE

(absorbed) My second great-grandmother's brother.

ABBY

August the seventh, 1862. At ten in the morning, right? Cut down in the bloom of life,  
Missus-

OPAL ANNE

(reading) Annabelle Sage Hatchett. (to the room) My third great-grandmother, General  
Andrew's wife. It's told she succumbed to a particularly malicious slice of pork loin.  
What is your point?

ABBY

September the third, 1863. Look. "The birth of Baby Girl Ayone."

OPAL ANNE reads the entry. ABBY picks up  
the red volume of Fugitive Slave Ads.

OPAL ANNE

"Baby Girl Ayone"? That name... is unknown to me.

ABBY reads from the red scrapbook.

ABBY

And this, from Savannah's genealogical library. (Explains) It's an ad. (Reads) "Offer of a twenty dollar reward for a fugitive house slave, answers to "Abigail." Absconded from Shelby County with her mulatto baby girl, name of Ayone. The wench is sixteen years of age, bears the letter 'H' burned onto one hip. As she is clever, and can read and write, I have no doubt she will try to pass as free." (shows the scrapbook to ROCHELLE) That ad was placed in the Memphis Enquirer, dated January 26, 1864. By one General A. K. Hatchett.

A moment.

OPAL ANNE

I do not understand what you are insinuating.

SAVANNAH

I do.

ABBY

The facts are these: Between your own Hatchett family bible, my research, and this advertisement, it is obvious-

SAVANNAH

Clear as glass.

ABBY

It's clear as glass that you and I come from the same family line. That you and I share the same third great-grandfather: General Andrew Hatchett.

ROCHELLE

Related to Opal Anne? That's ... a lot of sympathy points.

OPAL ANNE

(to ABBY) You are accusing the General-?

ABBY

Yes, Opal Anne! Of fathering Baby Girl Ayone, my grandmother's grandmother. Her mother was his enslaved house servant, Abigail.

OPAL ANNE

I have traced my roots through the archives of The United Daughters of the Confederacy, a legitimate heritage organization. None of what you claim is documented.

ROCHELLE

The documentation is right there.

SAVANNAH

(to OPAL ANNE) Sure, it was easy for you to trace your line. It's tough for Abby to do the same. Her ancestor might have ended up bein' nothing more than a number, and an age, in a plantation ledger. (to ABBY) You got lucky.

OPAL ANNE

I am sure-

SAVANNAH

I am sure you should have cracked your own family bible.

OPAL ANNE

(To SAVANNAH) This is not your concern! (To ABBY) This entry does not state, "Ayone Hatchett."

ABBY

The General's wife died a year before the baby's birth, as noted on those pages.

ROCHELLE

Ayone can't be Annabelle's child.

OPAL ANNE

The General would never ... trifle with a slave!

ROCHELLE

You're mixing up your terms, Opal Anne.

OPAL ANNE

He would never list one of his servants in the family Good Book! The / idea-

ABBY

Why would the general write "Baby Girl Ayone" in the pages of his own family bible, unless she is his?

OPAL ANNE checks the family registry again.

OPAL ANNE

I ... That's another thing. Rochelle? Come look at this, it's written in another hand. See the difference? The general never recorded this!

ABBY

(referring to the ad) "As she is clever, and can read and write."

SAVANNAH

(low whistle) Abigail notated it herself.

ABBY

I believe she did.

OPAL ANNE

I will not entertain this ... attack on my bloodline, and slander of the General's good name!  
I will engage a forgery expert to analyze the ink on this page-

ROCHELLE

(looking) This note is old and faded, the same as these other inscriptions.

ABBY

I agree with Opal Anne; let's remove any doubt. Hire two forgery experts, please. I'd like more witnesses to my ancestor's ingenuity and courage.

OPAL ANNE

(beat) It's- This is ... It's simply incredible!

ABBY

(to OPAL ANNE) Your General Hatchett raped my third great-grandmother-

OPAL ANNE

A lie-

ABBY

Who bore his child, inscribed her birth, and escaped, despite great personal danger, to Camp Nelson, Kentucky. Where she was freed. (beat) I was confident, after I saw your bible, the day I arrived. But I needed to know for sure. Savannah helped me find the General's ad. Two pieces of evidence confirm I'm right.

ROCHELLE

Opal Anne, as an attorney licensed to practice law in the State of Tennessee, I would say that what Abby has put together ... We would call it "a preponderance of the evidence."

Silence as OPAL ANNE considers.

OPAL ANNE

Did you cheat me.

ABBY

Caleb cheated us both.

ROCHELLE

That million-dollar trove of heirlooms, in the Gettysburg museum ...

ABBY

Yes. As sure as I'm standing here, those are my third great-grandfather's heirlooms.

SAVANNAH

You have family heirlooms, after all.

OPAL ANNE turns to ROCHELLE.

OPAL ANNE

I would prefer, my dear friend Rochelle, that this "story" be kept here, in this room. Among the four of us. This ... speculation about my family must not get out into the public sphere.

ABBY

Our family.

ROCHELLE

That's not possible, Opal Anne. This bible is part of pre-trial discovery.

OPAL ANNE

I venture that the United Daughters of the Confederacy - *[can clear this up.]*

SAVANNAH

The UDC can kiss Abby's ass!

OPAL ANNE

(turns on SAVANNAH) That's about all I can stand outta you! You are suspended from practicing law in this state, and if I were you-

SAVANNAH

If you were me? You have no idea of my life, and you could not be me because I have more integrity in my little pinkie finger-

ROCHELLE

Not now, / Savannah.

SAVANNAH

She has been dismissing me, and I will not tolerate the lack of respect!

ROCHELLE

I'm warning you: watch what you say.

SAVANNAH gives ROCHELLE a disgusted look.

ROCHELLE (CONT'D)

Opal Anne, there is still the matter of the civil suit. Which will go forward, and which will make public-

ABBY

That we are family.

OPAL ANNE

No.

ABBY

I don't like it. You don't like it, either, I'm sure. But here we are, you and me: Kin. (pause) I thought I heard you say, you "don't sue kin."

ROCHELLE

Just a minute. When did she say that? This is not a settlement conversation: we're going to court.

SAVANNAH

(to ROCHELLE) I have been begging you to settle this case-

OPAL ANNE

When I consider my reputation, and my business-

ROCHELLE

(to OPAL ANNE) Don't be in such a hurry. Don't let your own bigotry rob you blind.

SAVANNAH

(To ROCHELLE, angry) Opal Anne said it, after you left the room: She doesn't sue kin!

ROCHELLE

(to OPAL ANNE) But... You won't even admit that she is your kin!

OPAL ANNE thinks.

OPAL ANNE

The case is withdrawn.

ROCHELLE

You're giving up all that money-

OPAL ANNE

I am. I will ask my attorney to- that is, I will take up this matter with-  
Oh, you know what I mean. We're finished. And you will never speak of this girl's ...  
theory, to anyone.

SAVANNAH

That sound you just heard, Rochelle? Is the snap! of your media spotlight being switched  
off. You'll have to get on TV some other way.

OPAL ANNE

(to ABBY) Regardless of what occurred today: I know you to be a cheat.

ABBY

Opal Anne, you own thousands of acres, and a house. You're wealthy, with all that  
you've inherited because you're a Hatchett. You enjoy status and standing in this  
community. But your family built its fortune on the backs of people like my third great-  
grandmother. Abigail's story has no kindly white plantation owner, no "good" slave  
master. She was stolen. Owned as property, branded to show she was his. Forced to  
work for nothing. Raped, and compelled to bear her rapist's child. She never got justice  
for the crimes against her: kidnapping, imprisonment, the loss of her homeland and her  
loved ones, the theft of her freedom!

(MORE)

ABBY (CONT'D)

Abigail never saw a penny of the fruits of her forced labor, and neither did any of her descendants. (pause) Would you still like to discuss who got cheated?

OPAL ANNE

(beat. Flustered.) I am unwilling to discuss anything with you.

SAVANNAH

If you read the bible in the first place, you'd remember that part about loving your neighbor. Matthew 22.

OPAL ANNE

Do not instruct me on how to be a Christian!

SAVANNAH

Save it for hell, Opal Anne.

A breath.

ABBY

You can't un-know me. We are kin. You can't continue to imagine that your family-

OPAL ANNE

What do you want.

ABBY

I want my bible.

OPAL ANNE

I am ever astonished at you people's sense of entitlement. You may take it, in trade, for your silence.

ABBY reclaims the bible.

OPAL ANNE (CONT'D)

(to ABBY) It's tainted. I never want to see it, or you, again. (to the room) Now, I'm going home; I have ... a reenactment to manage.

OPAL ANNE crosses to the door.

ABBY

If you want your money back, go ask Caleb.

OPAL ANNE

(hard) You keep my nephew's name outta your mouth.

OPAL ANNE exits. A long moment.

SAVANNAH

Whoooo. We beat her good!

ABBY

Grand slam, bottom of the ninth!

SAVANNAH

Come from behind, seventh game of the World Series!

They celebrate. SAVANNAH, furious at ROCHELLE's refusal to settle, turns to her.

SAVANNAH (CONT'D)

We beat her, Rochelle.

ROCHELLE

Right. That's right. (To ABBY and SAVANNAH) You beat her.

ABBY

We all did. (to ROCHELLE) I appreciate all of your (can't think of a word to describe what ROCHELLE contributed) ... help.

SAVANNAH

(to ROCHELLE) You are a real piece of work.

ROCHELLE

(irritated, to SAVANNAH) What's your problem, now?

SAVANNAH

Rochelle- (stops) I got something I gotta tell you.

ABBY looks from ROCHELLE to SAVANNAH.

ABBY

Oh, shit. You want me to step out for a minute? (SAVANNAH nods.) I saw a box of envelopes in the conference room; may I-?

SAVANNAH

Sure thing.

ABBY picks up the red scrapbook, the Bible, and her backpack, and exits. SAVANNAH faces off with ROCHELLE.

ROCHELLE

I asked: What is your problem? You should be grateful. Abby's lawsuit is better than settled. It's disappeared!

SAVANNAH

I will be gathering up my things. I will be leaving this office.

ROCHELLE

What does that mean?

SAVANNAH

I quit, Rochelle! You deliberately discouraged Opal Anne from droppin' her lawsuit!

ROCHELLE

You're being ridiculous.

SAVANNAH

You have a blind spot. It prevents you from seeing the harm you do in the name of justice. And I am exhausted ... from fetchin' water for every bigot that sashays in the door, and cleaning up puke courtesy of Mr. Porter Bright. It's plain you do not regard me as an equal.

ROCHELLE

You can't do anything that requires a law license, and I- I- I-

SAVANNAH

Even when I had my license you condescended to me! As if you couldn't accept a woman of color as a lawyer at all.

ROCHELLE

Savannah, you know me. You know how I am.

SAVANNAH

Several adjectives come to mind-

ROCHELLE

I'm color blind.

SAVANNAH

You see color enough to exploit it.

ROCHELLE

(huffy) I sponsor a poor black child in Africa, with monthly donations.

SAVANNAH

Great, let's put up a monument to you, Rochelle.

ROCHELLE

I- I- I stood up to Opal Anne about her slaveholder ancestors!

SAVANNAH

Sure. You'll stand up against a mess ended a hundred and fifty years ago! Try looking at what's going on, on these premises, this minute. The way you treat me, and what you almost did to Abby-

ROCHELLE

Forgive me if I can't keep up with every little thing that offends you!

SAVANNAH is taken aback.

SAVANNAH

Wow. (beat) You know, Delia hasn't been able to find a job, since you "helped" her?

ROCHELLE

I didn't know that. (beat) That means ... you'll need money. Stay. You can re-apply for your license in ten months-

SAVANNAH

You got Delia fired, and my license revoked, and you're not gonna take a speck of responsibility?

ROCHELLE

I have no control over Delia's employer, and your suspension is on you. I told you to keep your mouth shut. When a judge threatens you with contempt of court, you need to stop yelling!

SAVANNAH

The judge said I yelled. I did not yell. (beat) Did you ever speak up, Rochelle, and some man calls you "hysterical?"

ROCHELLE

(beat) I get told I'm "too aggressive."

SAVANNAH

That judge called me an "angry black woman." When all I did was speak up for myself, in a calm voice.

ROCHELLE

You're lucky he didn't try to disbar you, for good.

SAVANNAH

You know what would have been lucky? Having a friend by my side. You're everybody's ally when the camera's running. Step into judge's chambers, and you're quiet as a god-blessed corpse.

ROCHELLE

I'm truly sorry. I didn't think the judge would take it to the bar! I didn't think-

SAVANNAH

I told you he would. You don't listen. (beat) Delia's career will not recover.

ROCHELLE

I got the charges dismissed-

SAVANNAH

But you splashed her face all over the TV! A teacher at a Christian School. She's had three job interviews this month. The first question is always: "Scuse me, you that dyke from the dance club?" Then it's, "There's the door: Thank you and goodbye."

ROCHELLE is shaken. Chants outside.

ROCHELLE

I apologize. I'm every bit as unhappy as you are. It's not fair.

SAVANNAH

What's "fair," Rochelle? You're gonna tell me what's "fair?"

ROCHELLE

I face prejudice, too.

SAVANNAH

This isn't a contest. It's a plea to stand in my shoes.

ROCHELLE

What happened to you was unacceptable. Honestly, these days, I don't know what's happening. I don't even recognize my own country!

SAVANNAH

I grew up in Memphis, where Dr. King was murdered. I recognize this country just fine. (beat) What do you want, Rochelle?

ROCHELLE considers.

ROCHELLE

I want respect. I want them to accept me.

SAVANNAH

I'd like that, too. I am here to tell you that they will never respect you. You are a slap in the face to their ideal of white Southern womanhood.

ROCHELLE

I never meant to hurt you, or Delia. I'm financially ... (stops; regroup) I have been paying rent for this office out of my own pocket. Porter can't take cases; neither can you. It's been very hard ... doing everything alone. It's not an excuse for what I did. But, if you would stay on ...

SAVANNAH

Abby explained the way she's been ripped off. But more can be stolen from a person than belongings, and money. Every day, I'm robbed of my dignity ... and my worth. My contribution is not acknowledged. You drummed up publicity for this firm at the expense of two women of color.

ROCHELLE

/ But I-

SAVANNAH

By not standing up for me, Rochelle? By using me. I don't know if you can understand: You cheated me. (Silence.) I need to step away from the system. Being an attorney... I wonder every day: where is my ability to bring about justice in this world?

ROCHELLE

You are an excellent lawyer, Savannah.

SAVANNAH

(beat) Thank you.

ROCHELLE

(Careful) If you go ... how will you get by?

SAVANNAH

For now, I expect I'll work at the Family History Library full-time.

ROCHELLE

That library's on the brink of bankruptcy.

SAVANNAH

No, it's not a personal enrichment scheme. But you saw what that library did for Abby. It gives people their place in history. (beat) After I get the archives online, I'll see what I do with my law degree.

ROCHELLE

You could come back to work / with us.

SAVANNAH

Maybe I'll start my own firm. I can see it, Rochelle! Our motto will be: "Some People Are Innocent." (beat) What'll you do, Rochelle?

A moment. What will ROCHELLE do?

SAVANNAH (CONT'D)

Listen, for a change, for the next, right thing to do. Then do that.

ABBY enters. She has the red scrapbook and wears her backpack.

ABBY

Hey. I didn't want to interrupt, but you're taking forever. I've really got to get going.  
(turns to SAVANNAH) Savannah, there's no way to properly thank you, / but-

SAVANNAH

Take care of yourself.

They hug. Rally sounds.

SAVANNAH (CONT'D)

Where's your car?

ABBY

Right ... across the park. I've gotta go.

SAVANNAH looks at ROCHELLE, and nods  
at ABBY.

ROCHELLE

Abby ... let me get your car. I'll, uh, bring it around the west side of the building.

ABBY gives ROCHELLE her key.

ABBY

Thanks! It's parked kitty-corner to the bank: it's the red Kia.

ROCHELLE

(to ABBY) I'll meet you in ten.

ROCHELLE dons her coat, crosses to the door.  
She gets a little lip-quivery.

ROCHELLE (CONT'D)

(to SAVANNAH) Savannah, I hope you know how sorry I am. I feel terrible. I wish  
there was a way I could make it right-

SAVANNAH unplugs the intercom and dumps  
it in the trash can. ROCHELLE and ABBY  
stare. SAVANNAH then takes ROCHELLE'S  
scarf from the chair, crosses and puts it around  
ROCHELLE's neck.

SAVANNAH

Don't want to catch pneumonia out there, sidesteppin' the Klan. Good luck, Rochelle.

ROCHELLE

You too, Savannah.

ROCHELLE tosses the scarf over her shoulder,  
exits. Rally applause.

ABBY

Thank you for the scrapbook. Maybe, when I'm back on my feet, and can scrape a few pennies together ... I want to make a donation to your library. I'd like to give back.

ABBY heads for the door.

SAVANNAH

Abby, before you go-

ABBY

(turns) Yes?

SAVANNAH

Opal Anne handed you that bible the first day you arrived, is that right?

ABBY

Day One. Why?

SAVANNAH

(thinking) And you got the phone number of Caleb's money man ...?

ABBY

The day after that. I told you. That's when I figured out Caleb was pulling the con.

SAVANNAH

(working it out) Right. And that's when you texted instructions to that phone number, as if you were Caleb. And got the cash wired to Los Angeles... care of you.

ABBY

What?

SAVANNAH

You could easily wipe the phone before you gave it back. Caleb would be stuck.

ABBY

Savannah, you said you believed me!

SAVANNAH

I do believe you. Right up to the part you left out: the part where you end up with a million dollars.

ABBY

You're on Opal Anne's side?

SAVANNAH

(decides) Your dad needed you. And Abigail's descendants - your whole family - for decades, and generations, you got bamboozled. (reflects) You gave Opal Anne every opportunity to sue your god-blessed ass, and she refused, entirely on account of her own racism.

ABBY

I should have expected as much from an Angels fan! (beat) You know what? Believe what you want. What I believe, with my whole, beating heart, is that Justice bats last.

ABBY sets down the red scrapbook. ABBY exits. SOUND CUE: Music. A traditional Tennessee song like DANIEL IN THE LION'S DEN ... slowly segues into TENNESSEE by Arrested Development.

SAVANNAH opens red scrapbook. As she turns the pages, she finds an envelope hand-lettered with "SAVANNAH". Puzzled, she looks at the door, then at the envelope. SAVANNAH rips open the envelope. Cash tumbles out: a whole lot of hundred-dollar bills.

She gathers up the money and begins counting it. She begins to laugh. Quick blackout. End of play.