

SHIP OF FOOLS

A Ten-Minute Dramatic Duet

by
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CAST: FRANCINE and JAN

SCENE: Two women in a rowboat, JAN and FRANCINE. JAN pulls at the oars. FRANCINE awakens and stretches.

FRANCINE: Is it morning again?

JAN: For a while now.

FRANCINE: You should take a break.

JAN: I'm fine.

(beat)

FRANCINE: **(in Schoolteacher voice)** Jan Marshall, exactly how long do you intend to keep rowing this boat?

JAN: It's too early.

FRANCINE: **(in her own voice)** Not for me. It helps. You know it helps. **(back to Schoolteacher voice)** At the risk of repeating myself... Jan Marshall, why are you still rowing this boat?

JAN: **(Child's voice)** Sorry Ms. Steinkeller. Is recess over?

FRANCINE: It's been over for quite some time now. I want you to come inside and practice your spelling. After your marks on that last quiz, I think you need all the practice you can get.

JAN: I'll stop in a just a minute. Just as soon as I see land.

FRANCINE: You're going to row yourself to death, young Ms. Marshall. You either stop this instant, or I'll have you talk with the therapist.

JAN: **(in her regular voice)** Not the therapist.

FRANCINE: Yes. I think that you have some hidden issues that need discussing.

JAN: I don't have issues. I just want to—

FRANCINE: **(in Therapist's voice)** I really think we're going to have a good session today, Jan. Where should we begin?

JAN: I'm feeling fine. It's just been—

FRANCINE: A tough day at work?

JAN: **(now as Congresswoman)** You know how it is on the campaign trail. It's non-stop. Sometimes I feel like it's never going to end. Donors, kissing babies, opening malls, smooth talking lobbyists. Whatever happened to the issues?

FRANCINE: Ah, but you still see the end of the tunnel. Re-election.

JAN: That's what keeps me going. Knowing that there is an endpoint. That someday I will get back in my office and draft important legislation. This is just temporary.

FRANCINE: But you're not here because everything's going fine. You're having a problem.

JAN: A big problem.

FRANCINE: Some personalities are driven, to push for the far shore. But my question for you is: at what point do you realize that you must conserve your energy? At what point do you accept that rowing for the far shore will actually cause more harm than good.

JAN: What if I can't accept it?

FRANCINE: The question I have for you is, how would such acceptance make you feel?

JAN: Helpless. Powerless. Doomed. Those aren't the types of feelings that got me elected. I'm a survivor, doc. That's what my constituents see in me—someone who never gives up.

FRANCINE: I'm thinking that this attitude of extreme stubbornness, in the face of overwhelming odds stems from some unresolved childhood issues. Tell me about your father.

JAN: **(in Cop voice)** Doctor Steinkeller, step away from the desk with your hands where I can see them.

FRANCINE: Officer Marshall?

JAN: One and the same. Don't try to get buddy-buddy with me. We have a few questions to ask about the sinking of the Claire de Lune.

FRANCINE: **(as an aging Granny)** Officer, I'm seventy-nine years old. I was with my grandchildren the whole time. Poor little Timmy. I always told him not to collect so many rocks in his pockets. Who would have thought?

JAN: Granny Steinkeller, I'm sorry, but we've got to take you in. I know you've meant a lot to generations of the family, but that bolt cutter in your pocket just can't be explained.

FRANCINE: Officer, I have such a hard time understanding what you're saying with all this commotion going on. Couldn't you stop rowing for a moment, so we could have a nice quiet chat. I have a cookie in my pocket that we could share.

JAN: **(in her own voice)** Really? **(FRANCINE produces a cookie.)** You've had a cookie for five days and you didn't tell me?

(FRANCINE crosses her legs and appears serene.)

FRANCINE: **(as the Zen Master)** The truth seeks its way to the surface, like a sprout to the sun.

JAN: Zen Master. How does one obtain the blessed cookie?

FRANCINE: A rowing hand cannot hold a cookie. A panting mouth spills crumbs and consumes nothing. **(JAN stops rowing)**

JAN: I'm stopped. Look, taking a break. See. What kind is it?

FRANCINE: In ancient Nepal, the monks refer to it as Oatmeal Raisin. A contradiction in a cookie.

JAN: Please? **(splits cookie in half and gives half to JAN)**

FRANCINE: Food nourishes best when savored.

JAN: **(as Dear Janny)** "Dear Janny, I've been trapped on a lifeboat for five days with a complete stranger. We have no food, no water, and precious little entertainment. I feel the need to keep rowing, with the thought that we might actually reach land at some point. What do you suggest? Signed, confused in the South Pacific." Dear Confused, if you stop rowing, you'll have given in to despair and might as well just feed yourself to the sharks. I say, row to your heart's content. **(JAN starts to row again.)**

FRANCINE: Dear Janny, I need your advice. A dear friend of mine has been cast adrift after a deadly naval disaster. Now that the storm has lifted, the Coast Guard is certain to be searching for survivors. Should my friend row herself to death, or should she conserve her energy to stay alive until she's finally rescued? Signed, Frustrated Francine."

JAN: Dear Frustrated: It's a big ocean. If your delusions of rescue keep you from drowning yourself, good for you. As for your friend, I say a little exercise is good for the spirit.

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