

# Sunny Room in Charming House

Marcia Savin



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SUNNY ROOM IN CHARMING HOUSE

by Marcia Savin

CAST

LYDIA BAILEY: Woman, 60s

CONNIE PENDLETON: Woman, 60s

*Setting: The entire action takes place in LYDIA's living room.*

*At rear is front door. Nearby is an antique standing cabinet, about three-feet high. It holds a corked red wine bottle, one glass and framed photo of LYDIA and her husband, dressed for a party, a few years earlier. He's 60ish. LYDIA's comfortable house shoes by door. Also, a coatrack with a jacket, silk scarves, hats and gym bag.*

*Downstage: A coffee table, vase of flowers in exact center. Chair at left is soft, comfortable, lived-in. Two formal, stiff chairs are spaced equally around the coffee table. A side table holds Trollope's "Framley Parsonage."*

*SUNDAY AFTERNOON, 4pm. Doorbell rings. Lights. LYDIA onstage, in slacks, casual top, scarf at neck, closes eyes for good luck. She's excited, hopeful, nervous as she opens front door. Enter CONNIE, tousled, in casual jacket, jeans, bike helmet, camera around neck. She's overloaded, carrying a laptop, suitcase, shopping bags spilling DVDs, photo albums, swimming goggles, gym bag: her worldly goods. Front door stays open.*

*Note: CONNIE's distinguishing characteristic is a big, infectious smile. It's the smile of one who finds people and the world amusing. It can be a grin, or knowing, or a 'gotcha' smile, but it's never phony.*

LYDIA: Connie, you made it!

CONNIE: *(big smile)* Lydia, I don't know you without your goggles.

LYDIA: *(laughs)* We were ships that passed in the Slow Lane. *(looks at helmet)* Connie, you didn't bike over with all this?

CONNIE: No, silly. Took a cab. *(Reaches outside front door. Brings in battered bike. Shuts door. Leans bike against cabinet. Bike starts to fall. LYDIA rushes to grab wine bottle. CONNIE moves bike to rest against wall.)* Don't worry, Lydia, I'll keep it in my room.

LYDIA: *(uneasy laugh)* Fine.

CONNIE: *(Collapses into comfortable chair. Removes helmet.)* Whew! Sooo glad I saw your notice at the Y. I was getting a wee bit antsy about finding a place to live.

LYDIA: *(Takes stiff chair)* Well, I'm glad it was you who answered it. At least, I knew you: The lady who kicked me in the pool with her frog stroke! *(demonstrates flinging arms and legs out.)*

CONNIE: I can't see anything without my contacts. I didn't hurt you, did I?

LYDIA: Oh, no. And Connie, you were so nice about it. Some people snarl, "Stay in your own lane!"

CONNIE: *(Gets up, looks around)* I loovve your place, Lydia! The old ceilings and fixtures.

LYDIA: We did the refinishing ourselves. *(beat)* But I was worried that I overstated the 'charming' part. On the notice.

CONNIE: Oh, nooo. When I saw the photos of my room, I thought: perfect!

LYDIA: It's a big step, sharing...

CONNIE: Yeah, but it was: share — or the street.

LYDIA: I meant, for me. I've never done this before. I'm a little nervous.

CONNIE: Of course! It's your home! And who am I? Someone who kicked you from the middle lane.

LYDIA: *(rushes in)* It's not that I was desperate or anything. I just...

CONNIE: Ran out of money. Isn't it a surprise? Who looks at bills?

LYDIA: We thought — my husband and I — (*eyes to photo*) he died last year ...that we had enough saved. But then he was sick. For a very long time.

CONNIE: That's rough. But, Lyddie, (*LYDIA jarred by "Lyddie," but covers*) you're lucky you still have your house. My ex, the Scumbag, cleaned out our bank accounts, then told me he was leaving.

LYDIA: No!

CONNIE: You should have seen our place, Lyddie. Three bedrooms, a great patio, a view. But, hasta la vista, baby. It's the bank's now.

LYDIA: I'm sorry, Connie. (*stands*) I painted your room. It might still smell of paint.

CONNIE: I love that smell. It says, "Today's a fresh start!" (*CONNIE picks up her stuff*)

LYDIA: (*worried*) Your husband took all your money?

CONNIE: Can you believe? I could have moved in with my daughter but I just couldn't impose. Don't worry, Lyddie, I have enough for rent. So, how we doing this?

LYDIA: Pardon?

CONNIE: What's mine, what's yours?

LYDIA: Your room is all yours. We share the kitchen. And bathroom. I made a list. (*takes from pocket*)

CONNIE: Goody. I love lists!

LYDIA: Now, I get up early.

CONNIE: (*laughs*) I don't.

LYDIA: (*relieved*) I'll need the bathroom first thing in the morning but I'll be out by seven.

CONNIE: Is there a schedule for peeing at night?

LYDIA: Oh, Connie, this is just a rough outline. Then I'll be in the kitchen from —

CONNIE: Don't bother fixing me anything. I never eat breakfast.

LYDIA: *(hadn't planned to)* I'll be out of the kitchen by 7:45. Then I leave for work at 8:15. Now, about dinner...

CONNIE: The kitchen's all yours, Lyddie. *(She's trying to gather all her stuff. It keeps spilling.)*

LYDIA: But what about dinner?

CONNIE: When Scumbag left, I gave up cooking. Just leave me shelf space.

LYDIA: *(makes note)* Connie, what's your schedule like?

CONNIE: Don't have one. I'm freelancing.

LYDIA: *(sigh)* Just one more year and I retire.

CONNIE: I hated that nine-to-five life. Always having to hustle your bustle.

LYDIA: *(laughs)* "Hustle your bustle."

CONNIE: I'm into photography now.

LYDIA: That sounds so interesting, Connie.

CONNIE: Photorealism. Actually, art photojournalism.

LYDIA: When I retire, I want to do something creative, too.

CONNIE: Oh, like what?

LYDIA: Oh...nothing. You're a big movie fan.

CONNIE: *(picking up spilling DVDs)* I'm an addict.

LYDIA: I love old musicals.

CONNIE: I've got them all. We'll have a blast!

LYDIA: (*heading stage left*) Connie, I painted your walls white. I hope that's okay.

CONNIE: White's perfect! Great background for looking at my shots.

LYDIA: And you get lots of light.

CONNIE: I'm so excited! (*following her*) Lyddie, anything to eat? With all the packing, I never had time for a bite.

LYDIA: Oh. Cheese and crackers? I think I...(*about-face turn stage right*)

CONNIE: (*follows, lugging bags*) Perfecto. Any mustard?

(*They exit right*)

## BLACKOUT

Scene 2: Next evening, 6pm (*CONNIE in the comfortable chair, with laptop, typing and making notes. Papers, notebooks, camera, on coffee table. Vase with flowers pushed to side. On side table, crowding LYDIA's book is coffee cup and slice of key lime pie on plate.*

*CONNIE sipping coffee, eating pie. Her jacket is flung on an empty chair. LYDIA enters front door, in business clothes. Taken aback seeing CONNIE and her stuff. Hangs coat on coatrack, changes to comfortable shoes.)*

LYDIA: Hi.

CONNIE: Lyddie, look at these shots I took today. This guy —

LYDIA: Let me get a glass of wine first. I always have a glass of wine and read before fixing dinner.

CONNIE: I'll have one, too. I like red.



*(LYDIA bites her tongue, pours red wine from opened bottle. Takes another glass from cabinet. Hands CONNIE glass, stands, waiting.)*

CONNIE: Thanks. This guy? *(shows laptop screen)* He calls himself Dry Doc.

LYDIA: *(smiles)* Connie, that's my chair.

CONNIE: *(smiles)* I guess technically they all are.

LYDIA: Connie, I don't mean to sound petty.

CONNIE: But I've got my work all spread out.

LYDIA: Yes, but I worked all day. And that's the comfortable chair.

CONNIE: *(laughs)* Oh, the uncomfortable ones are for guests.

LYDIA: You're not a guest.

CONNIE: I noticed.

LYDIA: *(trying to be cordial)* Connie, our arrangement was you had your room, not the whole house.

CONNIE: *(realizes she's overstepped)* Hey, whoa! I'll move. *(gathers stuff)*

LYDIA: I'm sorry but I'm tired. It was hell at work. *(Collapses in her chair. Puts CONNIE's glass on table. Moves vase to center.)* Just one more year.

CONNIE: Lyddie, I know I should be working in my room but the light's so much better in here.

LYDIA: But your room is so sunny.

CONNIE: By the time I'm up, the sun's moved. Lyddie, see these great shots I took today. *(Sits across from LYDIA. Turns laptop to LYDIA)* This is Dry Doc. He used to be called Doc, then he gave up drinking. *(Waits for LYDIA to smile. She doesn't.)* So, now he's Dry Doc.

LYDIA: He looks like a homeless man.

CONNIE: Yes! I'm doing a photo-study of them. And some women, too.

LYDIA: You talk to them?

CONNIE: Hey, they're people. I know half the stories they tell me are bull but I love hearing them. And Scumbug knew someone who has a gallery.

LYDIA: Connie, I really need to read for awhile. (*Gingerly picks up her Trollope amid CONNIE's mess.*)

CONNIE: What are you reading?

LYDIA: "*Framley Parsonage*."

CONNIE: Is it new?

LYDIA: Very old. I'm re-reading all of Trollope.

CONNIE: But there's so much other stuff to read.

LYDIA: But not as good. (*reads*)

CONNIE: So, you always sit in the same chair? Reading a book you've read before?

LYDIA: (*Annoyed, puts book down*) I guess you think it's boring. I find it comforting to know how it turns out. (*reads*)

(*CONNIE stands, gathers stuff, heads Stage Left*)

LYDIA: You don't have to leave.

CONNIE: (*Hurt but covering*) You want to read.

LYDIA: Oh, don't go. (*beat*) It must be fun biking around, taking pictures. (*spies half-eaten pie*) That pie.

CONNIE: Key lime. Fabulous.

LYDIA: (*stunned*) But I was saving it.

CONNIE: How could I know? I opened the fridge and there it was.

LYDIA: It was for my lunch tomorrow!

CONNIE: *(offers)* There's some left.

LYDIA: *(dismayed)* It was the last piece. It was for my lunch.

CONNIE: Do you always plan what you'll eat the next day?

LYDIA: I suppose I sound very boring.

CONNIE: Hey, no, Lyddie. If it's what turns you on... You don't want it? *(LYDIA shakes her head. CONNIE finishes pie, drinks wine quickly.)* I'm going to get dinner.

LYDIA: You eat dessert before dinner?

CONNIE: You've never done that?

LYDIA: *(lying)* Sure.

*(CONNIE, laden down, heads Stage Left)*

LYDIA: Will you be in the kitchen long?

CONNIE: The kitchen? *(laughs)* I told you I never cook. I'm going out. Want me to bring something back?

LYDIA: *(tense)* No, thanks. I have my food waiting.

*(CONNIE exits left. Her notebook still on coffee table. LYDIA stares angrily at it. CONNIE enters from left, without stuff, takes jacket.)*

CONNIE: Later, Lyddie. *(Exits front door.)*

LYDIA: *(gritting her teeth)* And don't...call...me...Lyddie. *(Takes up her book but can't concentrate. Looks at pie, presses fingers into crumbs, licks fingers. Torn between anger and self-hatred, she drinks her wine, stares in space.)*

BLACKOUT

Scene 3: Next evening, 7pm

*(CONNIE is in comfortable chair, with laptop, typing, making notes. Jeans and sweatshirt. Papers spread on coffee table, jacket on empty chair. Trollope on floor. Enter LYDIA, front door, frazzled, in business outfit. Sees CONNIE, stiffens. Changes shoes. Sees a picture of homeless man propped against her framed photo. LYDIA angrily removes CONNIE'S photo.)*

LYDIA: Connie—

CONNIE: Hiya. *(typing fast)* I know, I know. I'm moving. Just one little sec.

LYDIA: You covered my husband's picture!

CONNIE: Whoa! I didn't mean to. And doesn't he have a name? You always say 'my husband,' like he's an institution.

LYDIA: It's better than 'Scumbag!'

CONNIE: Sorry. *(rolling eyes)* Oh, I suppose you had one of those 'perfect marriages.'

LYDIA: You have no respect!

*(Angrily, LYDIA pours a glass of wine for herself from corked bottle.)*

CONNIE: Sorry, Lyddie. Really. I was so caught up in my work, I wasn't thinking. Come and see this. *(Shows laptop screen)* Isn't she priceless? She calls herself Henny Penny. She makes crazy hats out of plastic bags. She says they protect her from the sky falling.

*(Guiltily, LYDIA gets a second wine glass for CONNIE and pours. Crosses downstage to CONNIE, carrying glasses, looks at screen.)*

LYDIA: A homeless woman is somehow sadder than a homeless man.

CONNIE: Yes and no. She's very creative with plastic.

*(LYDIA hovers by CONNIE, sipping, waiting.)*

CONNIE: Just put it there. *(table)*

LYDIA: *(wickedly)* It might spill all over your work.

CONNIE: Ha ha. Okay, okay. *(closes laptop, gathers stuff)*

LYDIA: My Framley Parsonage! On the floor!

CONNIE: Is that a big deal?

LYDIA: *(gritting teeth)* No, not a big deal. But I'd like to come home, sit in my own chair, in my own house, and read my book without crawling on the floor for it!

*(CONNIE bends down, hands book to LYDIA, who indicates her hands are full. CONNIE gently puts book on table, gathers stuff, rises. CONNIE knows she's overstepped again. She's barely out of chair when LYDIA wiggles behind her and sits in it. LYDIA puts CONNIE's glass on far side of table, takes satisfying sip of wine.)*

CONNIE: Okay if I sit?

*(LYDIA shrugs, opens book, reads)*

CONNIE: Um, I like this wine. I'll buy the next bottle. *(puts feet on table)*

LYDIA: Connie, uh...could you not put your feet on the table? It took us a long time to refinish it.

CONNIE: *(puts feet down, sips)* I'm thinking of changing my name to Connie della Pendleton. You know, like those artists back in Trollope's day.

LYDIA: *(eyes on book)* Trollope was Victorian. And English. Those artists were Renaissance. And Italian.

CONNIE: Whatever. They had names like 'della Francesca, della Rubbia.' It has a ring.

LYDIA: *(looks up)* You don't think 'della Pendleton' sounds affected?

CONNIE: That's how to get ahead, Lyddie. By being affected as hell. Who can remember 'Connie Pendleton?' Take Sting. You think that's his real name? When I have my first show, I'm going to do a lot of crazy stuff to promote it.

LYDIA: Isn't it hard to get in a gallery, Connie?

CONNIE: I have a connection. I've called the gallery but he was out. (*CONNIE admires her photos.*) What work do you do, Lyddie?

LYDIA: It's *Lydia*. I toil at a nonprofit for too little pay. We help the community. Three of us crammed into an office so small, our chairs bump. (*beat*) One more year to retirement.

CONNIE: I liked my last job. I gave the boss suggestions about how to run the office. How to listen to us, instead of talking at us. How to stop interfering with us when we worked on a project, just let us get on with it.

LYDIA: Wow. I wish I could do that.

CONNIE: He fired me. Hasta la vista, baby. (*beat*) Sorry about your husband's picture. Was it a good marriage?

(*LYDIA nods.*)

CONNIE: (*suddenly lonely*) Go ahead and read. I know you want to.

LYDIA: Oh, that's okay. More wine? (*refills glasses*)

CONNIE: Want to watch a musical later? I have Rogers and Astaire, Rodgers and Hammerstein...

LYDIA: Sure. I used to tap dance as a kid. The Y gives tap classes. When I retire, that's what I want to do. I want to tap! Does it sound silly?

CONNIE: No way. Go for it!

BLACKOUT

Scene 4: Following evening; 6:30pm

*(LYDIA enters front door, in business clothes. Changes shoes. CONNIE has taped 10 photos of homeless people to the wall above the cabinet. Cabinet has two empty glasses, new bottle of wine, photo of LYDIA and husband. LYDIA is livid, seeing CONNIE's pictures. She stabs the corkscrew into the cork. Pulls out cork, pours herself large glass. Takes a sip and makes an awful face.)*

LYDIA: *(sputtering from bad wine, checks label)* What is this?

CONNIE: Hi. You're late. Run into traffic? The wine was on sale. I don't want to mooch. Pour me a glass, will you?

*(LYDIA, still livid, pours one for CONNIE. Walks downstage with both glasses.)*

LYDIA: Your pictures, Connie. Why are they all over my wall?

CONNIE: Whoa. I just taped them up for a minute. To get a panoramic view. See which should go next to which for the exhibit. *(takes glass from LYDIA)* Thanks.

LYDIA: *(trying to swallow)* Please take down the pictures.

CONNIE: *(Crosses to cabinet, takes down pictures)* Lyddie, what do you do for fun?

LYDIA: *(Grabs comfortable chair. Moves CONNIE'S things. The terrible wine is pushing her over the edge.)* I...take...off my shoes, ...pour myself a glass of good wine...sit in my comfortable chair and read my Trollope. If I can.

CONNIE: Jesus, you need to break loose.

LYDIA: And you need to stay out of my chair.

CONNIE: Don't you ever want to try something different?

LYDIA: I read. I swim. I go to movies. I cook. What do you do, Connie? Aside from spreading your stuff everywhere? And hanging around with winos and druggies.

CONNIE: I'm out there seeing the world. There's a lot to see, Lyddie. If you ever put old Trollope down, you'd find out.

LYDIA: Why is it that the people who are always full of advice are the ones whose lives are a total mess?

CONNIE: My life isn't a mess. Total or partial.

LYDIA: You're out of work, broke, with no place to live. I call that a mess.

CONNIE: I have a place to live. Here. And I'm not out of work. I'm freelancing.

LYDIA: Doing what?

CONNIE: Working on my portfolio. Getting it ready.

LYDIA: To show where? in the park? to your homeless friends?

CONNIE: You really are a hard-ass.

LYDIA: At least I'm not a phony! Photorealism, my foot.

*(CONNIE, for once, is speechless. Stunned and hurt, she gathers stuff and heads Stage Left.)*

LYDIA: I'm sorry. Okay, maybe not a phony. Maybe a dreamer.

CONNIE: At least I don't stay at a job I hate.

LYDIA: I don't hate it. I just—

CONNIE: *(smiles)* Can't wait to leave it.

LYDIA: *(nods)* I'd like to do something else. Be like you. Sit around, admiring my handiwork, eating a pie someone else baked.

CONNIE: You baked that? Wow.

LYDIA: Many a lime bit the dust for that pie.

CONNIE: For a hard-ass, Lyddie, you're okay.

LYDIA: No one ever called me that before.



CONNIE: Hard-ass? Come on. Really? (*LYDIA shakes head no.*) Your kids must have.

LYDIA: We were never blessed.

CONNIE: (*laughs*) Maybe you were. Once you have a kid, Lyddie, you learn about every damn fault you ever had. Even some you didn't. But my daughter is wonderful. Great kid. Smart and independent. That's why I would never impose on her.

LYDIA: You're lucky, Connie.

CONNIE: Yeah. You really baked that pie?

(*LYDIA nods, gets up, puts wine glass on cabinet. Gets fresh glass and bottle. Has trouble getting cork out.*)

LYDIA: Connie, I appreciate the flattery but I just don't want to come home from work and see photos of sad people all over my walls.

CONNIE: They're not all sad. Some are rather cheerful. Henny Penny —

LYDIA: (*frustrated with stubborn cork*) Connie, this isn't working.

(*CONNIE crosses to LYDIA, gets cork out, pours for LYDIA. LYDIA takes sip, girds herself for speech.*)

LYDIA: I don't mean the corkscrew. I meant this arrangement. I thought I could share my house. But I can't.

CONNIE: I've felt unwelcome since Day One.

LYDIA: (*hurt*) But I did welcome you. You loved your room. I said we'd share the kitchen and the bathroom. That was the agreement.

CONNIE: You thought I'd never leave my room? How crazy is that?

LYDIA: I didn't think you'd take over the whole house.

CONNIE: One chair! When you're at work.

LYDIA: Or that you never went out!

CONNIE: I go out. I bike around the city and watch people. I love people-watching. Maybe you should get out more, Lyddie. Instead of sitting here re-reading *The Foaming Parson*.

LYDIA: "Framley Parsonage!" And I don't keep reading the same book. Trollope wrote 47 novels. It takes years to get through them all.

CONNIE: *(smile)* Talk about living.

LYDIA: Thank you very much for your commentary on my life. *(beat)* I'm sorry, Connie. It's not working.

*(Silence. The sparkle has left CONNIE. She sips wine.)*

CONNIE: Lyddie, my boss dumped me. Scumbag dumped me. And my kid dumped me. I don't think I can take any more.

LYDIA: Your daughter? You said she was so wonderful.

CONNIE: She threw me out.

LYDIA: But I thought you didn't want to impose.

CONNIE: I imposed. And drove her nuts. *(gathers up stuff)* Guess I'll just have to join Dry Doc and Henny Penny on a park bench. I'll get Henny to teach me how to make a plastic hat that will protect me from the sky falling.

LYDIA: Connie, your daughter is not going to let you be homeless.

CONNIE: Oh, yes she will. She's like you, Lyddie. A hard-ass.

*(LYDIA hurt.)*

CONNIE: My daughter wants to be alone. With her nice apartment and nice life.

LYDIA: I thought...when my husband was so sick, it would be a relief to be alone. For a while, it was. Then it was just so damn...quiet. But damn it, Connie, I want my chair, my wine, my Trollope.

CONNIE: Isn't he getting a bit moldy? What is he, about 200 years old?

LYDIA: He's predictable and comforting. And funny.

CONNIE: Maybe I could live at the Y. Hide a sleeping bag. Sneak around at night. Use the showers. Leave stuff in a few lockers. And no rent!

LYDIA: Stop.

CONNIE: I've run out of places to go, Lyddie. A room is all I can afford. Don't dump me.

LYDIA: You're being so dramatic.

CONNIE: And you're not? What did I do that was so bad?

LYDIA: Aside from telling me my faults? Telling me I'm boring?

CONNIE: So, that's it. Not about sitting in your chair. And I never said you were boring. You did.

LYDIA: No, that's not what it's about. It just isn't working.

CONNIE: Going to let a stranger move in now?

LYDIA: I don't know. *(torn and frustrated)*

CONNIE: Got it. *(beat)* Hasta la vista, baby. *(exits left)*

*(LYDIA tries to savor her solitude, her wine and her book, but can't. Offstage sounds of CONNIE banging stuff together, bike falling over.)*

LYDIA: *(frustrated)* Damn! *(LYDIA throws book across room just as CONNIE enters, in helmet, walking bike, carrying suitcase, overflowing bags as in Scene One. Book just misses CONNIE who ducks.)*

CONNIE: You don't have to get physical!

LYDIA: Oh, I didn't mean to—

CONNIE: I'll just keep the helmet on.

LYDIA: Connie, I wasn't aiming at you. I feel awful but...I...(beat) You're already packed?

CONNIE: I never unpacked. I've only been here four days.

LYDIA: Four days? It feels like a lifetime.

CONNIE: (smiles) I have that effect on people. (puts jacket on and hand out. LYDIA shakes CONNIE's hand.) Actually, I was asking for the balance of my rent.

LYDIA: (Crosses to her purse. Opens it. Takes out checkbook. Pauses.) Connie, I...I...don't want you to go.

CONNIE: You're sure? (LYDIA nods)

CONNIE: (relieved, takes off jacket) Lyddie, you're gone all day. So what if I sit in your chair. I promise. After this, I'll be out of your chair before you...(sees LYDIA's expression) I'll use the other chair.

LYDIA: Thank you. And, Connie, please don't buy any wine. That stuff is awful.

CONNIE: (beat) What changed your mind?

LYDIA: No one ever called me a hard-ass before. I kind of like it.

CONNIE: You're a good soul, Lyddie.

LYDIA: (weary) It's Lydia.

CONNIE: (removes helmet) Was Lyddie what your husband called you? That why it bothers you?

LYDIA: He called me Lydia.

CONNIE: Always?

LYDIA: What's that got to do with anything?