

2002

# Direction of the Play: Steel Magnolias

Jana Petersdorf  
*Central Washington University*

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**DIRECTION OF THE PLAY STEEL MAGNOLIAS**

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**A Thesis**

**Presented to**

**The Graduate Faculty**

**Central Washington University**

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**In Partial Fulfillment**

**Of the Requirements for the Degree**

**Master of Theatre Production**

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**by**

**Jana Shea Petersdorf**

**June 2002**

## ABSTRACT

### DIRECTION OF THE PLAY STEEL MAGNOLIAS

By

Jana Shea Petersdorf

June 2002

Steel Magnolias, by Robert Harling, is a poignant tragicomedy set in the fictional town of Chinquapin, Louisiana from 1983 to 1985. The play's setting is a beauty salon that serves as psychiatrist's office, confessional and home away from home for several women of the town. This play reflects the strong sisterhood needed by women as they struggle through life's tragedies and rejoice during life's triumphs. The play presents characters that learn to grow stronger as they face each new obstacle. They are able to persevere because of the strong community of women to which they belong.

**CENTRAL WASHINGTON UNIVERSITY**

**Graduate Studies**

**Final Examination of**

**Jana Shea Petersdorf**

**B.A., California State University Fresno, 1990**

**for the Degree of**

**Master of Education**

**Committee in Charge**

**Michael Smith**

**Brenda Hubbard    Wesley Van Tassel**

**McConnell**

**Room 201**

**Saturday, July 6, 2002**

**7:30 p.m.**

Jana Shea Petersdorf

Courses presented for the Master's degree

Course No.	Course Title	Number of Credits	Instructor	Quarter Completed
TH 539	Directing Young Actors	3	Smith	Summer, 1998
TH 520	Exploring Drama in the Classroom	3	Hawkins	Summer, 1998
TH 584	Puppetry in the Classroom	3	Hawkins	Summer, 1998
TH 533	Stage Combat and Choreography	2	Smith	Summer, 1998
TH535	Improvisation Techniques	2	Smith	Summer, 1998
TH 501	Intro to Graduate Studies	1	Kerr	Summer, 1999
TH 568	Lighting Techniques	3	Zetterberg	Summer, 1999
TH 598.05	Scenic and Prop Construction	3	Barnett	Summer, 1999
TH 540	Graduate Directing I	3	Hubbard	Summer, 2001
TH 542	Musical Theatre Directing	4	Smith	Summer, 2001
TH 510	Studies in Dramatic Literature	4	Van Tassel	Summer, 2001
TH 543	Teaching Young Actors	3	Smith	Summer, 2001
TH 544	Acting Styles	3	Hubbard	Summer, 2001
TH 541	Graduate Directing II	3	Bellah	Summer, 2002
TH 511	Analysis and Criticism	4	Meshke	Summer, 2002
TH 700	Thesis/Project Study/Exam	6	Smith	Summer, 2002

## BIOGRAPHICAL INFORMATION

**Jana Shea Petersdorf**

**November 02, 1965**

**Undergraduate Study:**

**College of the Sequoias, 1983-86  
California State University Fresno, 1986-90**

**Graduate Study:**

**Central Washington University, Summers, 1998-2002**

**Professional Experience:**

**Teacher: Golden West High School, Visalia, 1991  
Teacher: Tulare Western High School, 1991-02  
Professional Development Presenter, The California Arts Project 1999-02**

**Certification:**

**Single Subject Clear Credential, 1996**

**Additional Training:**

**The California Arts Project, 1996  
Cadre of Experts Training, UCOP, 2001-02**

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## Director's Concept

Steel Magnolias, by Robert Harling, is a poignant tragicomedy set in the fictional town of Chinquapin, Louisiana in 1983. The play's setting is a beauty salon that serves as a psychiatrist's office, confessional and home away from home for several women of the town. In a society where women have a number of unwritten and often mysterious rules to follow, these characters need a place to go where they can commune with other women. Abbott says in Womenfolks: Growing Up Down South, "To grow up female in the South is to inherit a set of directives that warp one for life, if they do not actually induce psychosis" (3). These directives do not cause psychosis in the play (neurosis, yes), but they do cause the need for the characters to go to a sanctuary of rest where they can share problems, laughter and be pampered.

There are many themes within Steel Magnolias. The primary theme reflects the strong sense of sisterhood of women from the South. Abbott says of the feminist notion of sisterhood in the 1960's, "But sisterhood was nothing new to me. It has been a zealously guarded secret among southern women for years" (167). The absence of men from the play is not an accident. With men present, sisterhood is hidden; this is why just like the lodge hall or golf course, southern women needed a place to commune with their own kind.

The play also deals with a woman's cycle of life. It examines women's lives from birth and marriage to pregnancy and death. This cycle of life reinforces the need to live life fully and not waste any of it on regrets, fear, insecurity or anger. Shelby says in Act I, Sc. II, "I would rather have thirty minutes of wonderful than a lifetime of nothing special" (35). Shelby teaches the other characters how precious life is and that sometimes life may require the ultimate sacrifice.



Steel Magnolias is also a play of contrasts. It deals with the contrasts of youth and age, joy and tears, and the paradox of extreme strength in a gender typically thought of as weak. The title of the play reinforces the characters' abilities to be strong in mind and resolve, but gentle in spirit. The characters are also contrasts. Shelby represents the passion of youth and M'Lynn the wisdom and prudence of parenthood. Their conflict mainly revolves around the issue of Shelby's health and the unnecessary risks Shelby takes. The lack of judgment by Shelby's husband regarding her health also becomes a conflict. Ouiser and Clairee contrast nicely as the sophisticated small town society lady and the grouchy, put upon old lady of the neighborhood. Their conflict is more humorous than life threatening. Annelle and Truvy's relationship becomes one of mother and daughter by the end of the play. Their main struggle develops when Annelle becomes "born again." Her extremism seems to be fading when she finally makes a wisecrack to Ouiser that leads us to believe she will grow into a healthy young mother. She also plans to name her child Shelby. The circle of life is complete.

The color palette of the show should reflect the contrast of the themes and characters. Creams, yellows and greens will emphasize the feminine, sunny coolness of a sanctuary, but black, reds, oranges and dark blues will contrast with masculinity, boldness (Major Color Associations, 1) and even the foreshadowing of death that attacks from the world outside their home-away-from home.

Contrasting textures include warm silk and cool steel, smooth satin and sticky vinyl, and plush velvet and scratchy wool. The rough textures with the smooth will help reinforce the opposing characters and themes within the play.

## Costumes

The costumes of the play will reflect the early 1980's but in no way should poke fun of the styles; instead, they should reinforce the characters. Shelby will be dressed in pinks since the script emphasizes her love of the color. "Pink is my signature color" (18). However, I want to explore as many shades and styles as possible to stress her outgoing and vibrant spirit. Annelle will wear greens, yellows, and floral. As she transforms from shy mouse to party girl and then to introspective Christian, her clothing styles will change from conservative to garish and then back again. Ouiser will start out in wild vibrantly printed purples, and gradually as she finds romance and a more sisterly attitude, she will change to warmer blues and greens. Clairee should be the "clothes horse" of the play. She'll wear tailored suits with slacks or skirts. As the former mayor's wife, her closet should be filled with stylish conservative outfits appropriate for luncheons, teas, and garden club meetings. M'Lynn should be just a step away from being stylish. A busy life and family responsibilities will keep her from being one of fashion's elite. Truvy will be the casual dresser with more jewelry and accessories than the other characters. She will have something of a western flair to her style.

## Music

The music for the show will represent the variations of the women. Bluegrass will be used during pre-show, intermission and through most scene changes. It is a traditional southern music style. The radio will play predominately female western singers of the 50's and 60's. Shelby's Hawaii-5-0 theme song will be played where the script requires, but other music like "Goin' to Chapel," "If," "Joy to the World" and "The Alleluia Chorus" will stress themes, mood, season and plot within the play.

Robert Harling wrote Steel Magnolias to honor his sister Susan. It is a beautiful epitaph written to teach a son about the sacrifices made by a loving mother. The fact that we can laugh through the tragedy of the play makes it an extremely appealing piece of theatre. Brandes says, “[. . .] incisive banter is the principal shield with which these ladies keep heartbreak at bay” (1). The “steel” of these women allows them to continue to support and encourage one another when they might instead despair. Their “sisterhood” keeps them strong, because they know they will always have a place to go to reestablish their strength as women.

### Performance Parameters

Tulare Western's Curtain Call Player's production of Steel Magnolias by Robert Harling will occur at 7:30pm on the following dates: April 12, 13, 19, 20, 2002. The performances will take place in the Little Theatre in room 811 on Tulare Western's campus. Although the Little Theatre was remodeled during the summer of 2001, challenges with the facility still remain, particularly involving the technical possibilities.

### Staffing and Budget

Tulare Western's production of Steel Magnolias will have a budget of approximately \$1,500. The set designer will be paid, as will the costumer. A drama parent will be serve as props mistress and has already begun the lengthy task of acquiring props for the show. During auditions, student will apply for other staffing areas including stage manager, assistant director, house manager, publicity, lights, sound and crew. Three Drama III students have expressed interest in assistant director and stage manager. Usually what works best is to have two assistant directors: one who becomes stage manager and one who heads the crew. Since they have been to all the rehearsals and know all the blocking and props, it is an easy transition for them to make into the other jobs. With these areas capably handled, I can concentrate on directing and the many technical challenges we face.

### Theatre Space

The Little Theatre is 17.5 feet deep by 36 feet wide. The lack of depth inspires creative set design and blocking. Since this is the only stage on which I have directed, with the exception of one even smaller, I am used to modifying my directing to work in this space. Although others may find it trying, I don't really think of it as a problem.

## Lighting

The lighting of the Little Theatre has always been an obstacle. The roof slants from the center of the room to the back of the stage. At its apex, the roof is about twelve feet high, and at the back of the stage, it is slightly more than eight feet high. Eight par cans were purchased three years ago and placed in the back of the room. Being unable to hang the lights from the ceiling made shadows impossible to avoid. During the remodeling, they decided to go against my recommendations for lights, because they were too expensive. Instead, track lighting was purchased. We have twelve lights on four channels and each lamp is only 120 Watts. We are currently exploring other possibilities including renting a system, adding to the current system, borrowing from two community theatres, or purchasing brighter lamps. I have been assured that our sixteen channel light board can be patched into the system so each light will have its own channel.

Although a beautiful sound and light booth was built, no speakers or soundboard were bought. In the past, we have used the A.S.B.'s sound system, but the speakers are extremely large and the sound quality is not very clear. A system could be rented, but more than likely we will attempt a fundraiser to purchase two speakers and a small soundboard.

## Casting

Casting Steel Magnolias should not be a problem. This year our department is predominately junior and senior girls. They average around three year's experience, and thankfully, they come in various shapes and sizes not just your run-of-the-mill teenager. Since four of the characters are over forty and two past sixty, I needed several girls to play age, and I believe we have them. The girls playing M'Lynn, Truvy, Clairee and Ouiser will be keeping observation journals of people their character's age. All actors will explore

body leads, master gestures, and the vocal qualities of characters of age. I also like to use animals for character movement so the cast will explore different animals for their characters as well.

The most challenging aspect of casting will be the dialect. After discussing this with Professor Smith, I decided to use American Southern and not try the more complicated Louisiana accent. Getting a consistent dialect from six girls with the typical San Joaquin Valley “twang” will most certainly be a challenge, but tapes are available for them to practice with as well as written dialect instruction from David Alan Stern’s Acting With An Accent. It has been helpful in past productions to practice the alphabet and a few key words or phrases from the play using the particular dialect. This will be used as part of the vocal warm up.

#### Rehearsals

Through necessity, a five-week rehearsal period has been scheduled. There will be a week off before production week for Easter vacation. This schedule has worked well in the past, because it gives the students a rest before production week. They usually come back refreshed and with a better attitude about rehearsing the long hours this week requires. The change from afternoon to evening rehearsals separates them from the school day, and the actors come in with a more professional attitude as though this was a job not just an extra-curricular activity.

Steel Magnolias offers the department many challenges from character to lights and sound to dialect. However, using a hired set designer, costumer and props mistress will allow me to concentrate on directing and character development as well as the time to explore solutions to the lighting and sound difficulties.

### Evaluation of Steel Magnolias as a Production Vehicle

The plot of Steel Magnolias is a simple one. We learn about the lives of six women as they share recipes, sorrows, joys and triumphs in the southern woman's retreat: the beauty shop. Abbott describes the neighborhood beauty shop, "It was an all-female society—no man would dare enter the place—and here, if nowhere else, women said what they thought about men" (168). The characters certainly do discuss their husbands, sons and other extended male relations, but the beauty shop served a more important service than this as a place that reinforces the sisterhood of women. Abbott says of southern sisterhood, "Next to motherhood, sisterhood is what they value most, taking an endless pleasure in the daily, commonplace society of one another that they never experience in male company" (167). The pressure felt by these women is scoffed at, joked about and laughed over, but the stress of their lives is real as the title reinforces. The director shouldn't forget the underlying importance of their problems; otherwise, the characters might seem stereotyped and one-dimensional.

Steel Magnolias is a character-driven play. It has little physical action in it and much of the story takes place off stage and is relayed to the audience through dialogue. Shelby's death occurs off stage, her wedding, and the changing relationships with the characters' husbands and beaux occur offstage. The actors have a great challenge to relate both character and a great deal of the plot through their careful delivery and interpretation of the dialogue. The play deals with everyday events such as marriage, birth and death. Ames says of the script, "The plays itself deals with the juxtapositions of the mundane and the profound [. . .]" (2). It is vital that the characters be well-rounded and not one-dimensional deliverers of clever quips and one-liners. As John Simons writes in his article,

“The play is often only one jump ahead of soap opera, but always manages to see a bit farther and deeper” (94). If the truth behind the play is foremost in the minds of the actors and the director, then the play will develop the honesty and love with which it was written.

Steel Magnolias is a perfect play for the setting in which I teach. The play presents challenges to the actors because of its dialect, age, and pacing requirements, and it also calls for a broad range of emotions from the characters. It is a good vehicle to explore rounded characters that may seem like merely stereotypes. The play will be especially pleasing to our audiences who enjoy comedies of all kinds, but with a bend toward tragicomedy, it has a greater depth than other high school comedies. The play will make the department a profit, which is a necessary consideration, because our plays are paid for only through past production profits. Because Steel Magnolias was a well-known film, it will attract audiences who enjoyed the film. I am hoping the popularity of the film will also bring non-theatre goers to the play and further expand our audience base.



## Given Circumstances

The play Steel Magnolias takes place in the fictional town of Chinquapin, Louisiana. The play takes place over a two and a half-year period of time. Act I Scene I takes place on a cloudy morning in April of 1983. Act I Scene II occurs the Saturday morning before Christmas of 1983. Act II Scene I takes place eighteen months later on a morning in June of 1985, and Act II Scene II occurs on an unusually chilly morning on November 1<sup>st</sup> of 1985. The script only specifies the weather in Act I Scene I and Act II Scene II. According to the Center for Business and Economic Research, average monthly temperature for the Natchitoches area, where the actual events of the play took place, are 65 in April, 79 in June, 54 in November and 49 in December.

The economic environment of the play is different for each character. However, the play's environment is of the working middle class. Clairee and Ouiser have a great deal of money that was at least partly inherited from their deceased husbands. Clairee is able to purchase the radio station and take a trip to Paris. This shows her to have a surplus of disposable income. M'Lynn is the typical upper middle to lower upper class. Comments are made about Shelby's future, because her husband is an attorney so we are led to believe that she will also be lower upper class. Truvy and Annelle are on the lower end of the economic scale with Annelle being the lowest. Her poverty and lack of clothes, car and money are stated in Act I Sc. I. Through her job and help from Truvy, she pulls herself up from this poverty and is able to move, with her husband, to a larger apartment, and they are able to afford to start a family.

The play does not discuss the political environment much except that Clairee is the former mayor's wife. Clairee states in Act I Scene I “[. . .] I miss the whirlwind of being a

mayor's wife" (16). There is another statement by Clairee in Act II Scene II where she comments, "He (Lloyd) was a Louisiana politician. We don't know many people that went to heaven" (69). There is also a reference to political corruption when Nancy Beth's indiscretion with a political official is discussed in Act II Scene I. Truvy and Clairee discuss the scandal:

TRUVY. Nancy Beth was discovered in a nearby motel with a high political official.

CLAIREE. They were both high. They'd been smoking everything but their shoes.

TRUVY. To be the only Miss Merry Christmas in history caught with her tinsel around her knees was a very humiliating experience for the Marmillion family.

Although Harling pokes fun at the politicians, Bob Harling Jr. said during a phone interview (1) that Joe Sampatie was mayor at the time Steel Magnolias was written. Mr. Harling Jr. said that, depending on the mayor, he could be very important to promoting the town. One mayor even had signs made and wore shirts that said, "I Love Natchitoches."

The social environment of the play revolves a great deal around rituals and town events. Some of these rituals include weddings, Christmas decorating, pregnancy, parades, beauty contests, festivals, spring, and Halloween. Many of the rituals revolve around the seasons. Lynne Ames writes, "The changing of the seasons is marked by little things in the shop: bouquets of spring flowers yield to baskets of late summer tomatoes which in turn are replaced by Christmas decorations [. . .]" (2). Their Christmas Festival is one of the most famous in the state according to the Natchitoches website. These women's lives and social

environment revolve around holidays and rituals that have been around for hundreds of years.

These are the most well attended churches and the churches mentioned in Steel Magnolias. The statistics are from Louisiana's population in 1980:

Catholic – 589 churches with 1,304,084 members

Southern Baptist – 1,316 churches with 652,246 members

Church of Christ – 226 churches with 22,931 members

Presbyterian – 133 churches with 32,234 members

Episcopal – 96 churches with 38,554 members

Free Methodist – 14 churches with 1,722 members. (ARDA 1-2)

From the script, we know that Truvy attends the Methodist Church while Annelle attends the Riverview Baptist Church. Shelby and Owen sing in The First Presbyterian Church, and Ouiser's niece attends the Episcopal Church. From Truvy and Ouiser's reaction to Annelle's church, we can assume their churches are more conservative than The Riverview Baptist Church. Truvy says in Act I Scene II, "It breaks my heart that she won't come to the Methodist church with me. I think Riverview Baptist is a little too . . . 'Praise the Lord' for my taste" (37). After Annelle describes her vacation at Camp Crossroads, Ouiser says, "I'm going to check up on my granddaughter and make sure she's still going to the Episcopal Church. This born again stuff seems awfully tedious" (54). According to ARDA data there are more conservative Protestants than moderate and liberal combined. Religion is important to some of the characters, but liberal "Bible beater," "tent revivals," and praying "because the elastic in your pantyhose is shot" is frowned upon and a more conservative quiet spirituality is preferred.



## Previous Action

### Shelby- Act I Scene I

- Drum has been shooting at birds all morning
- M'Lynn and Drum have been arguing
- She sweats a lot
- Argued with M'Lynn over wedding hair
- She thought Jackson was a pest at first
- She and Jackson met at the Petroleum Club in Shreveport
- They will live in Monroe
- Jackson is a lawyer
- She loves being a pediatric nurse
- Argued with M'Lynn and Drum about her working after marriage
- She has been advised by her doctor not to have children
- She has severe diabetes
- M'Lynn insisted Shelby have bridesmaids she did not want
- Pink is her favorite color
- Jackson's from a good southern family
- Shelby and Jackson went parking and skinny dipping
- She has been put on the pill/her body has not adjusted
- She told Jackson she wouldn't marry him because she couldn't have children
- Jackson says they will adopt a child
- She hid her car so her brothers wouldn't desecrate it with decorations

### Shelby- Act I Scene II

- Shelby and Jackson are having marital problems
- She decided to get pregnant
- Jackson is excited about the baby
- They were rejected as adoptive parents because of her health
- She lost Miss Merry Christmas contest years ago
- She twirled a baton to the Hawaii-Five-O theme
- Shelby sings in her church choir
- Shelby met Owen Jenkins
- Shelby set up a meeting between Owen J. and Ouiser

### Shelby- Act II Scene I

- Shelby's kidneys are damaged
- She needs a kidney transplant
- She says she is pretty religious
- Her son's name is Jack Jr.

- Shelby hasn't had her colors done
- Jack Jr. was three months premature
- Jackson does not help with the baby/spends weekends hunting
- Shelby's on dialysis
- Shelby is receiving one of M'Lynn's kidneys
- Drum is not taking the future surgeries well

#### Shelby- Act II Scene II

- The transplant failed/Shelby went back on dialysis
- She had to have another surgery
- She went into a coma during the surgery
- She died after the family decided to turn off her life support
- M'Lynn was the only one who stayed with her until the end

#### M'Lynn- Act I Scene I

- Her sons just arrived for the wedding
- She took Drum's gun
- Drummond is her husband
- She may become the Administrator of Mental Health
- She always keeps confidences and secrets
- She wanted Shelby to wear her hair like Jaelyn Smiths for the wedding
- Does not want Shelby to work after she marries
- Knows how to treat Shelby during and after her hypoglycemic attacks
- Keeps candies in her purse for Shelby
- Wanted the wedding colors to be peach and cream
- Was with Shelby when the doctor told her not to have children
- She has three children: Shelby, Jonathan and Tommy

#### M'Lynn - Act I Scene II

- Her son Jonathan is in architectural school
- M'Lynn has negative feelings about Jackson
- M'Lynn has stated in the past that all she wants is for her children to be happy

#### M'Lynn- Act II Scene II

- She and Drum had their 30<sup>th</sup> wedding anniversary
- She and Drum are rediscovering their relationship
- Feels she's giving Shelby life twice
- Was the closest match to Shelby for transplant
- Bought Shelby a peignoir to wear in the hospital

M'Lynn- Act II Scene II

- Has been receiving many visitors and food
- Did leg exercises with Shelby while in the hospital
- Was the only one to stay in the room with Shelby after the machines were turned off
- Did her own hair
- Had difficult births with both boys, but Shelby was an easy birth
- Is concerned Jack junior won't know Shelby's sacrifice

Truvy- Act I Scene I

- Has been doing hair for 15 years
- She wants to visit Baltimore
- Her two sons are leaving town
- Her husband is a couch potato
- Her husband enclosed the carport in 1972 as a salon
- She misses romance
- Has never lost a client to other rival salons
- Believes there is no such thing as natural beauty
- Only does the ladies of the neighborhood on Saturdays
- Will be doing Shelby's hair for the wedding

Truvy- Act I Scene II

- Is outside trying to repair a blown fuse box
- Her husband redid their son's room for Annelle's crafts
- Craves romance
- Hasn't started her shopping

Truvy- Act II Scene I

- Rarely does manicures at the shop
- Considers Annelle her semi-daughter
- Is afraid her sons are going "to hell in a handcart"
- Is concerned with Annelle's constant praying

Truvy- Act II Scene II

- Received a scarf from Clairee from Paris
- Wanted to be in the shop if M'Lynn needed her
- She and her husband are taking M'Lynn's family barbecue
- Her husband might have an electrical contracting job

### Annelle- Act I Scene I

- Move to Chinquapin a month ago
- Husband left her last week
- Number one in her class for frosting and tinting
- Living at Mrs. Robeline's Boarding House
- Originally from Zwolle
- Husband left with their car, money and most of her clothes
- Doesn't know if her marriage is legal
- Her checks are bouncing
- Police visited her to question her about her husband, Bunkie Dupuy
- Her husband may be a criminal

### Annelle- Act I Scene II

- Has taken up arts and crafts
- Went through a wild time drinking, smoking and carrying on
- She is dating Sammy De Soto
- Made the Christmas ornaments with beauty and hair things
- Bought all the baby Jesuses at the fire sale
- Annelle moved into Poot's old room at Truvy's
- Joined Riverview Baptist Church last month
- Has done guest lectures at the trade school
- Annelle met Sammy De Soto at Shelby's wedding

### Annelle- Act II Scene I

- Went to a Bible weekend and came back a Christian
- She is praying all the time
- She is taking a religious vacation to Camp Crossroads in the Ozarks
- Sammy's crazy about Annelle but a bit resentful of her religious fervor
- Annelle wrote Ouiser a letter to invite her to church
- She prays for Ouiser every day

### Annelle- Act II Scene II

- Annelle and Sammy married
- Annelle and Sammy are expecting a baby
- Annelle wants to name the child after Shelby
- Annelle and Sammy are moving into a bigger place next month
- Annelle believes Shelby will be their guardian angel
- Annelle's husband says she needs to lighten up



Clairee- Act I Scene I

- She is the former mayor's wife
- The stadium is named after her husband – Lloyd Belcher Stadium
- Married to Lloyd nearly fifty years
- Lloyd died three months before their 50<sup>th</sup> anniversary
- Ouiser was her maid of honor
- Loves football
- Hates the current mayor's wife
- Doesn't want to be seen as a third wheel or old biddy
- Brought Truvy recipes

Clairee- Act I Scene II

- Announced the Devil's game as "color" announcer
- Has a hoarse voice
- Had hair cut shorter
- Bought KPPD
- Devils won their first state championship in eight years
- Her niece Nancy Beth is Miss Merry Christmas this year
- There was no Christmas festival when she was in high school
- Clairee knew Owen Jenkins

Clairee- Act II Scene I

- Nephew knocked on her bedroom window at 9:30 the night before
- Her nephew announced he was gay
- She told him she would accept him
- Her niece, Nancy Beth, was caught high with a political official
- She plays bridge
- Planning a New York theatre trip
- Marshall brought her a gold enamel bug pin
- Her nephew says all gay men have track lighting and are named Steve, Mark, or Rick
- She and Sis Orelle are driving to Monroe and want to have dinner with Shelby and Jackson
- She is scared to fly
- Sees the Sherwood Forest truck delivering flowers to Ouiser twice a week
- Sees Owen's car parked outside Ouiser's house at least once a week
- She wants to support the arts in her area
- Her radio station is sponsoring a summer fiesta with games and prizes

Clairee- Act II Scene II

- Clairee traveled to Paris before Shelby became ill

- Went directly to M'Lynn's house when she returned from Paris
- She brought everyone gifts
- Instructed the station to play music Shelby would have liked
- Clairee has call waiting

#### Ouiser- Act I Scene I

- Has had an ongoing battle with Drum about who owns the Magnolia tree
- She has a dog named Rhett
- Her dog is losing its hair because of Drum's shooting
- She was expected for her hair appointment at 11:00 am
- Hasn't been sleeping well
- She lives alone
- Has been married twice
- Takes dog to Whitey Black, the vet
- She says she knows everyone in town
- Cleaned house in case neighbors came by
- Drum stole all the magnolias off what she considers to be her tree
- Says Drum fired a cannon at her

#### Ouiser- Act I Scene II

- People are parking on her lawn to go to the parade
- Rhett is the poster dog for the Christmas Parade
- Rhett's hair has grown back
- Says she ran off Owen Jenkins
- Says her first two husbands were deadbeats
- Has three ungrateful children
- Says she's been in a bad mood for forty years
- Always brings her shrimp meat pies to events

#### Ouiser- Act II Scene I

- She has new artwork
- Her nephew Steve installed track lighting for her
- Grows tomatoes because that's what southern women are supposed to do
- Received many letters from the people from the Riverview Baptist Church
- Made an appointment to have her colors done
- Doesn't see plays or movies or read books
- Owen wants more than friendship from her
- Has a granddaughter who attends the Episcopal Church
- Smiled at Drum when they were both at the Piggly Wiggly

Ouiser- Act II Scene II

- She never watches public television
- Lloyd got a lot of humor at Ouiser's expense when he was alive
- She has been praying for M'Lynn's family since Shelby's death

## Analysis of Dialogue

When analyzing the dialogue in Steel Magnolias, the quick comic one-liners should not be overlooked as arbitrary or just for laughs. Robert Harling describes in the DVD interview his use of comedy in the script, “I never consciously think, I need a funny line here. I just sort of set up the situation and if my character feels the need to deal with that particular situation or that retort with humor, then my character sort of comes up with something humorous to say. I never think, oh I want a laugh here.” Harling uses humor to ease tensions, to cheer others or to lessen a criticism in the play. One example is when Truvy complains about Drum’s behavior, “Shelby . . . uh you know I’d walk on my lips to avoid criticizing anyone but your father is about to make us all pull our hair out” (12). She prefaces her criticism with humor to lessen the severity of it. Truvy is often the one who uses humor to change the subject or create a lighter mood. When Shelby confesses that Jackson does not help with raising Jack Jr., Truvy uses humor to cheer her when she says, “But Jackson is certainly a good provider. [. . .] And he’ll come around. And when he does, I want you to run tell me how you accomplished it. And I’ll get to work on that sofa slug I’m married to” (53). Truvy often serves as the peacemaker by changing the subject, particularly in Act I Scene I. When Shelby and M’Lynn are bickering about the size of the wedding party, Truvy changes the subject with, “What are your colors Shelby?” (18). The stage directions even say, “the peacemaker.” She continues to lighten the mood as they bicker about the colors of the wedding with, “I am wearing a sexy blue chiffon, Shelby. Jackson’s gonna take one look at me and leave you behind in the dust” (18). Through much of this act, she finds ways to derail the tensions and arguing that might get ugly. She makes

sure M'Lynn and Shelby never have a chance to spoil Shelby's special day with petty bickering.

Although we don't see it as often from the other characters as we do with Truvy, the other women also use humor to defuse volatile situations. The most obvious is in Act II Scene II when M'Lynn has her meltdown about Shelby's death. The characters are in pain and seem completely at a loss until Clairee steps in with humor. When M'Lynn states she wants to hit someone until they feel as badly as she does, she gets her wish. Clairee says, "Here. Hit this! Go ahead, M'Lynn. Slap her! [. . .] We can sell T-shirts saying, 'I slapped Ouiser Boudreaux!' Hit her!" (68). Clairee realizes M'Lynn's despair and the inability of the others to help her. She decides to use laughter to lessen the seriousness of the moment and help them all begin to heal.

Harling's use of humor is not merely for a laugh. It helps to carry the dialogue and plot forward and to defuse negative situations. Throughout Steel Magnolias, Harling uses humor to make tragic events bearable.

When looking at the writing style of Steel Magnolias, the style used reinforces the way people actually speak. The dialogue is a "slice of life" because it sounds like normal everyday speech. The dialogue is full of fragments, comma splices and run on sentences. Essentially, it is written as people speak to communicate, not how they write to communicate. Harling has created the quick topping of lines that comes with people who know one another well and speak often. It follows the fragmentation of normal speech. An exchange between Annelle and Truvy in Act II Scene I is an example of this fragmented speech:

TRUVY. Amen. Annelle? I'm out of uh . . .

ANNELLE. Is it still next to . . . ?

TRUVY. No. It's over the . . .

ANNELLE. O.K.

This example shows us how these characters essentially finish one another's thoughts or sentences. In the year and a half they have been working together, they have bonded and are so comfortable together they can guess the other's needs. The dialogue reinforces the relationships and also the naturalness of everyday speech.

Bob Harling Jr. clarified a few words from the play during a phone interview on March 25<sup>th</sup>. Mr. Harling said the phrase "I'll swanee," spoken by Clairee in Act I Scene I, is a replacement for swearing. He said swearing would not have been appropriate under those circumstances. His information about "Dago pie" is that as originally used, it was not any kind of racial slur. He described the dessert as a layering of pudding and fruit.

## Character Analysis

## M'Lynn

The primary conflict in Steel Magnolias revolves around M'Lynn's desire to control her daughter Shelby, and Shelby's desire to maintain her autonomy. Mary Lynn Eatenton is private and controlled about her personal life. M'Lynn's character is fairly typical of a southern matriarch. Abbott writes in Womenfolks: Growing Up Down South about her mother's lessons, "But one of the things she most wanted me to learn was [. . .] Hide. Never let anybody know what your true feelings are" (170). M'Lynn hides her true feelings under the guise of confidant and secret keeper.

Several characters comment on her ability to keep confidences. Shelby states in Act I Scene I of Steel Magnolias, "When mama says she doesn't talk, she means it. She's a brick wall" (24). Clairee chastises M'Lynn for her silence about the kidney surgeries, "Mary Lynn Eatenton! I am without words! Why haven't I been told? [. . .] I can't believe you didn't say anything" (57). M'Lynn, herself, even comments on the need for keeping other's secrets. "I will not discuss office business in a social setting. People need a place they can come unload their problems. I would never violate their confidence" (24). M'Lynn even sounds bitter regarding her closed mouth reputation in Act I Scene II. "I never tell anyone anything" (35) Something within M'Lynn keeps her from confiding in her friends and her husband. During Act I, we see a very emotionally controlled woman whose real feelings are hidden behind silence or subtle criticisms. She has learned to keep her feelings hidden and secret.

M'Lynn does not hesitate to share Shelby's personal life with the other women. Since she cannot control Shelby's life, she can at least voice her disapproval and worry to

the other women. This criticism is a constant reminder to Shelby that M'Lynn feels she is incapable of making her own decisions and having control over her own life. She states in Act I Scene I, "Drum and I feel that Shelby should not work anymore after she gets married" (17). Shelby's sarcastic remark, "I'm so anxious to discuss this topic for the nine hundredth time this week" (17), is just the beginning of a power struggle between these two characters that speaks loudest in Act I.

M'Lynn's attitudes at the beginning of the play deal with the desire to maintain control of Shelby's life, because as a controlling parent, she feels Shelby is incapable of doing it herself. Shelby says in Act I Scene II after confessing her pregnancy, "You are jealous because you no longer have any say-so in what I do. And that drives you up the wall. You're ready to spit nails because you can't call the shots" (34). In Mothers Who Drive Their Daughters Crazy the Cohens' remark, "The mothers and daughters forget to adjust to an adult-adult relationship" (215). M'Lynn cannot control Shelby's life, because Shelby has asserted her position as an adult child. By making a life-changing decision, though perhaps not a wise decision, she has questioned her mother's wisdom and advice. M'Lynn is hurt by this decision not just for Shelby's health, but because it seems a defiant gesture against her mother's advice. In the Cohens' book, Tolpin says, "Anytime the daughter makes a choice that doesn't fit the mother's image, it is like a betrayal" (214). Until M'Lynn can allow Shelby to be an adult and make her own decisions, the discord between the two will not end. M'Lynn criticizes nearly every decision Shelby has made for the wedding even down to her color choices. "That sanctuary looks like it's been hosed down with Pepto-Bismol [ . . . ] I tried to talk her into using peaches and cream" (18). It should not be a surprise to M'Lynn that Shelby chooses pink for her wedding since Shelby



describes it as her “signature color.” M’Lynn gives further evidence of her need to have power over her family when she says, “I am supposed to be the expert on behavior and I can’t seem to manage the people in my own family” (24). With three adult children, we must wonder why she feels the need to “manage” them and Drum at all.

M’Lynn’s attitude gradually mellows as the play progresses and her need for dominating Shelby’s decisions declines. You can see a reciprocal relationship growing between M’Lynn and Shelby in Act II Scene I. Shelby’s animosity is gone as are M’Lynn’s underhanded criticisms. The Cohens describe what daughters want their mothers to know, “I have my own life. I can make my own decisions. I have to take risks and fail but I will be okay” (214). M’Lynn is more willing to step back and allow Shelby to make these decisions for her future as M’Lynn’s character changes and adapts to allow for a healthy adult/adult relationship with her daughter.

M’Lynn’s change of attitude is also apparent in the rekindling of her marriage. Usually cynical about her own husband and marriage, she shares many marital alterations with the women of the shop; “The most bizarre thing has happened. Drum and I seem to be rediscovering those things that brought us together in the first place. I don’t know if we buried them or became blind to them” (55). The reality of the surgery and perhaps her own mortality brings her to appreciate what she has been overlooking both in Drum and in Shelby. She continues philosophically, “Every now and then Drum and I seem to find these moments of magic. I don’t know. I don’t know if I’m lucky to have what I have . . . or lucky to know what I have” (56). She no longer needs to be so enrapt in her children’s lives- especially Shelby’s. She can begin to rebuild the marital relationship that she has sacrificed with her former need to control the lives and decisions of her children.

M'Lynn's final polar attitude is when she completely loses control of her emotions after Shelby's death. Until now, a woman so stoic and restrained, her rage and despair is painfully shared with her friends, ". . . It is not supposed to happen this way. I'm supposed to go first. I've always been ready to go first. I can't stand this. I just want to hit somebody until they feel as bad as I do. I . . . just want to hit something . . . and hit it hard" (68). She has finally come to terms with the fact that she could not control Shelby and she could not control death. We are led to believe that this passionate outburst will be a healing event for her. After many tense moments, which are broken by Clairee's offer of Ouiser as a punching bag, M'Lynn and Truvy share this exchange:

M'LYNN. I shouldn't have gone on like I did. I made everybody cry. I'm  
sorry.

TRUVY. Don't be silly. Laughter through tears is my favorite emotion.

M'LYNN. Maybe it was about time I had an emotional outburst. Maybe I'll  
start having them at home more often. Drum will be so pleased. (70)

We finally see M'Lynn let go of her emotions and share them with someone else—her friends who are her extended family. Her outburst about Shelby's needless death is finally freed and she can begin to heal with the help of her network of friends. The Cohens describe the dangers of repressed anger; "Feelings are magnified when kept in the private world [. . .] and repressed rage can be extremely damaging" (34). M'Lynn has been keeping her feelings private and secret since the beginning of the play. The fact that she says her husband will be pleased if she has these outbursts at home intimates that she does not even share her anger and heartbreak with him. The Cohens write, "Expressing anger can feel pleasurable and freeing" (43). This first eruption and her acceptance of Shelby's

death complete her polar attitude. She sees the hope that is still left in Shelby's child, the cycle of life continued with Annelle's child being named Shelby and in the close ties she has within her circle of friends. She no longer has to control her every emotion and she no longer must protect Shelby. She is without her daughter but not lost.

### Shelby

Shelby's character begins the play seeking distance and separation from her mother's advice and control. Already twenty-five years old, she hopes this marriage will give her the freedom and autonomy she craves. Although Shelby seems to be the girl who has everything, we soon find that her life has been limited by diabetes. It limits her future, her relationships, and her ability to have a normal life. After Shelby has a hypoglycemic attack at the beauty shop, M'Lynn confides to the others, "Dr. Michoud told her at her last appointment that children are not possible [. . .] She feels that Jackson might be throwing away his chance for children" (22). Shelby stubbornly refuses to allow the women to coddle or pity her. She continues to strive for a normal life. M'Lynn comments, "Don't fuss over her [. . .] Normality is very important to Shelby" (22).

The fact that Shelby is the daughter of a controlling mother influences her character greatly. According to The Mom Factor by Cloud and Townsend, Shelby has two choices. They write, "If a mother is unable to let her child have a life of her own, separate and distinct from her, moving away and against her, one of two things will happen—the child will be broken, or the mother and child will battle and someone wins" (92). In Act I particularly, we see Shelby rebelling against M'Lynn's protection and control. She goes so far as to exclude M'Lynn from her future life decisions when she says, "I'd rather not talk about it, Mama. What happens in my life now is between Jackson and me. Jackson will

take care of me and I will take care of him” (23). Shelby truly believes she and Jackson can have a happy reciprocal marriage and that Jackson will “take care of her” as her mother did. Unfortunately, the script elaborates gently on a troubled marriage so troubled that Shelby is willing to risk her life to have a baby. She states, “Listen to me. I want a child of my own. I think it would help things a lot” (34). She is referring to marital problems between she and Jackson. Clearly the problems with adoption have put a strain on their marriage. She believes giving Jackson a baby may save her marriage. Shelby had stated in Act I Scene II regarding getting pregnant, “I know all about adoption. And I also know the limitation of this body of mine. I would never do anything stupid” (24). Then why does she? There are several reasons besides just to save her marriage. As the daughter of a controlling mom, it may be as simple as rebellion. By becoming pregnant, she goes against everyone who said she couldn’t or shouldn’t. Cloud and Townsend write, “The rebellious style resists all types of rules and authorities. She sees bosses, parents, teachers and other experts as controlling and abusive to her freedom to be herself” (169). In order to prove her independence; Shelby risks her life by becoming pregnant. In order to save her marriage, she risks her life by having a child. She rebels against everyone to live the normal life she craves.

In Act II Scene I, we see a different Shelby who shares the problems she has been having with Jackson. When she discloses her fatigue from caring for Jack Jr., Truvy tells her to get Jackson’s help. Shelby tells them, “He helps, I guess. Mama doesn’t think he does. But he does. Sometimes. When he thinks about it. Which isn’t often. Most of the time he doesn’t do a damn thing. And every weekend he’s off hunting” (52). This is quite a change from Act I when she believed she and Jackson would care for one another for the

rest of their lives. This lack of care from Jackson has forced Shelby to return to her mother in her time of need. In *Film Literature Quarterly*, Lisa Tyler describes why Shelby and many women will seek help from other women or their mothers. She writes that women, “[. . .] turn to other women and their own daughters for the emotional closeness they cannot as easily experience in heterosexual relationships with men” (103). With the exception of Clairee, none of these women have very satisfying relationships with men. Shelby’s character seems destined to become one of the regulars who must go to the “female world of love and ritual” (Tyler 102) to commiserate with those of her own gender.

Shelby really finds her freedom with the women in the beauty shop. Her polar attitude changes from wanting to seek freedom from her mother’s tyranny through marriage to embracing her mother’s love and sacrifice and the feminine social network within the beauty shop. Tyler quotes Marilyn Arthur as writing that women, “[. . .] form a female solidarity [. . .] whose basis is the special comfort, affection, and general gratification which women are able to offer one another simply of their appreciation of and identification with one another” (100). Shelby learns to seek comfort and love from the circle of women around her that she will never find from Jackson and her less than perfect marriage.

### Ideas of the Play

The play, Steel Magnolias, deals with characters all at different stages of a woman's life. The core idea of Steel Magnolias is to live life to the fullest no matter what stage of life we may be in. Within the play there are a plethora of quotes from many of the characters about living life to the fullest. One quote that stands out the most is in Act I Scene II when Shelby says to M'Lynn, "I would rather have thirty minutes of wonderful than a lifetime of nothing special" (35). Shelby was only twenty-eight years old when she died, but she had a true zest for life. When she is on stage, she always gives the impression that she doesn't waste a minute on sorrow or envy or other negative feelings. M'Lynn reinforces this idea in Act II Scene II when she says, after Shelby's death, "Shelby, as you know, would not want us to get all mired down and wallow in this. She would look on it as just one of life's occurrences. We should deal with it the best way we know how . . . and get on with it" (66). Even after Shelby dies, M'Lynn still uses her as an example not to stay down after a heartbreak but to carry on with our lives. On the DVD, Robert Harling says, "I wrote it to be a celebration of life." The joys and accomplishments each character creates are to be celebrated by the audience.

The play doesn't just deal with the issue that "life must go on" but also that we must figure out why we're here and what our purpose is. An exchange between three characters in Act I Scene I demonstrates this:

CLAIREÉ . . . We had such a good time. Until last November . . . at least he hung on through the state playoffs.

SHELBY. Miss Clairee. There are still good times to be had.

CLAIREE. Oh sure. But I miss the whirlwind of being a mayor's wife . . .

SHELBY. Somebody like you should be able to find something to occupy her time.

CLAIREE. Well. I really do love football. But it's hard to parlay that into a reason to live.

TRUVY. Let's just face it, Clairee. You're a woman coming to terms with her grips . . . It's up to us to figure out why we were put on this earth.

(15-16)

Clairee has to adjust to being alone after nearly fifty years of marriage. But instead of giving in, she buys a radio station, begins traveling and attending the theatre. She continues to enjoy life but a different life than she had before.

Ouiser seems to be too much of a curmudgeon to enjoy life or to live it to the fullest. However, through a new relationship, she begins to find the *joie de vivre* that seemed to be missing. She says in Act II Scene I, "You broaden your horizons your way. I'll broaden my horizons mine. I have plans on Friday. I'm going to Shreveport to get my colors done. . . . It's a present from Owen" (51). Ouiser finds pleasure in life her own way, and although she usually protests too much, we are led to believe Owen's flowers and visitations are not unwelcome. She is no longer just the town grouch but becomes a woman with a good man in her future.

### Metaphor

The primary metaphor of the play is the beauty shop as a home away from home. It is a place for these characters to come to "let their hair down" literally and figuratively. Richard Shickel juxtaposes women's needs for bonding as opposed to men in his *Time* review, "Feminist theory and common sense tells us that women have a similar need to

renew gender loyalties [. . .] a small-town beauty parlor can function as a little lodge hall for women, a place where they can let their hair down while it is being put up” (92). After Shelby’s death, Truvy decides to stay open in case M’Lynn needs her. M’Lynn cannot even explain what draws her inexorably to the shop. As she struggles for control of her emotions, she tells them, “[. . .] I didn’t know if I would have time . . . would feel like coming here. But this morning I wanted to come here more than anything. Isn’t that silly?” (67). She leaves her house, husband and sons to return home to the family with whom she can share anything, even her most vulnerable emotional despair. It is only here that she can feel comfortable and receive the nurturing and love she needs. It is also a place where she does not have to be in control; this gives her a peace she cannot attain at her own house.

### Symbolism

In Steel Magnolias, the title serves as a symbol of both the south and its women. Gold’s article in *The Wall Street Journal* describes how Harling wants us to see the characters: “He wants us to see these traditional, small town women [. . .] as heroic – blushing flowers with innards of forged steel” (2). Julius Novick is quoted in Contemporary Literary Criticism as writing, “The “steel” in Steel Magnolias evidently refers not to metallic rigidity, hardness, and coldness, but to sheer strength of character” (167). Despite their problems and challenges these women stay positive and productive. They don’t become depressed or self-pitying but carry on with the duties of life. Although the women often make light of the difficulties in their lives, their problems and sorrows are not trite and silly. Sometimes women are viewed as soft and delicate, but Bob Strauss writes in his article in *The Atlanta Constitution*, “We don’t think of women’s stories and women’s lives as soft. Actually, most women’s lives are pretty damn hard” (19). These



women are deserted physically and emotionally by husbands, widowed, robbed, abandoned and finally bereft of a child, and yet they are able to continue with a life that must go on despite its difficulties and sorrows. Margaret Harling describes the difference between the men and women's reactions during Shelby's service in *Family Circle* as quoted by Lisa Tyler, "The men were awkward—some fought tears, some didn't know what to say, some wept openly. But the women knew how to function in a crisis . . . They were strong" (102). This strength is to be admired not scoffed at because they choose to handle crises with humor and optimism.

The magnolia is the state flower of Louisiana and is a more obvious symbol of these women. The steel may apply to all women, but magnolia certainly specifies the southern woman as unique to all others.

Another symbol within the play is the radio. Shelby gave it to Truvy, but it was really a surplus wedding gift. During Act I Scene II and Act II Scene I the radio plays but half-heartedly; it must be prompted by the women to play. The stage directions read, "Shelby's radio plays, but fades in and out. Truvy and Annelle have to whack it from time to time to make it play" (44). The "illness" of the radio symbolizes Shelby's own physical degeneration in these two acts. Although given to Truvy as a gift, the radio is always referred to as "Shelby's radio." After her death, it symbolizes the part of her that will always be remembered and cherished. It represents part of that "little piece of immortality" she so desperately needed to leave behind.

### Themes

One of the themes as stated in the director's concept is the strong sense of sisterhood created in the play. In *Literature and Film Quarterly* this sisterhood is described

as a, “ [ . . . ] form of female solidarity [ . . . ] whose basis is the special and particular comfort, affection, and general gratification which women are able to offer one another by virtue simply of their appreciation of and identification with one another” (100). Discussing wedding plans, criminal husbands, homosexual nephews, and childbearing problems are subjects they readily share with each other. Indeed, these women feel comfortable revealing to one another their most intimate secrets. No matter how large and daunting the problems seem to be, the others find a way to help deal with them. When M’Lynn confides that Shelby’s pregnancy is not necessarily a joyful occasion, the women rally around her:

TRUVY. Oh, honey. I wish I had some words of wisdom . . . but I don’t. So

I will focus on the joy of the situation. Congratulations.

OUISER. Absolutely.

M’LYNN. Diabetics have healthy babies all the time.

ANNELLE. It will all be fine.

CLAIREE. Of course it will.

M’LYNN. Thank you, ladies. You’re right. We’ll make it through this fine.

You know what they say. That which does not kill us makes us stronger.

(43)

The reality of the situation is that the damage has been done. Shelby is pregnant so instead of wallowing in the “what ifs” of the situation, the women create a network of support for M’Lynn so much so that she is able to buy into the optimism they create. The women repeat this in Act II Scene II after Shelby’s death:

TRUVY. M’Lynn. You promise you’ll call if you need anything, you hear?

ANNELLE. And if her line’s busy, you call me.

CLAIREE. Call me. I have call waiting. Just got it.

M'LYNN. I will . . .

TRUVY. M'Lynn. I know it hurts. But it'll get better. And if you feel like taking a whack at something . . . come on over and hit on me. I won't break. (70)

Although the offers are given lightly and some even with humor, their true meaning is not lost. If she needs them anytime, they will be there for her together or individually. Though Shelby's absence is keenly felt, the solidarity and companionship between the women is still intact and will not change.

### Conflict

M'Lynn's desire to control Shelby's life and thereby control her diabetes is the primary conflict in Steel Magnolias. Salamon reiterates this in *The Wall Street Journal* when she writes, "[. . .] and the plot's central frustration revolves around M'Lynn's inability to take charge of her tall, beautiful daughter's diabetes" (2). Even when Shelby and M'Lynn have reconciled and are no longer struggling for control of Shelby's life, in Act II Scene I, M'Lynn is still fighting Shelby's illness. She even attempts to fight it at the risk of her own life. Shelby says, "Mama's going to give me one of her kidneys" (58). Unfortunately, M'Lynn does not win this battle, but she did win the love and acceptance of her daughter and the knowledge that she gave everything to save Shelby's life.

Another conflict within the play is that between the characters and their invisible husbands. Tyler writes, "Certainly these women are decidedly skeptical of the institution of marriage" (99). With the exception of Clairee, all the women have or have had conflict in their relationships with men. Annelle's describes the conflict with her husband, Bunkie

DuPuy, in Act I Scene I, “He took all the money, my jewelry, the car. Most of my clothes were in the trunk. [. . .] He’s in big trouble with the law. Drugs or something . . . They say my marriage may not be legal [. . .]” (29). Annette is desperate and these women help her solve her problems. She eventually finds a job, religion and a new loving husband to accept and love her.

The other women face conflicts that are much less drastic. Trudy has a “sofa slug” for a husband, but with the promise of a new job, he gives hope that things may be looking up for them. M'Lynn transforms from a woman frustrated and furious with her “crazy” husband to a woman who begins to relive the reasons why the two married in the first place. After two unhappy marriages to “the two most worthless men in the universe”, Ouiser begins a new friendship with a gentleman that may lead to romance. And finally, Clairee actually learns to live without her much-loved husband after his death. She develops interests of her own and finds happiness in these pursuits. Each woman resolves or begins to resolve the conflicts she has had in her relationships with men.

## Reviews of Previous Productions

The recent productions of Steel Magnolias vary from traditional versions, to environmental theatre set in a salon with an audience of twenty-four to a drag production. Most of the productions have been reviewed positively. Several reviewers commented on the entire life cycle of a woman depicted in the play. Others recognized that the women aren't as superficial as they may appear at first glance. Even those who did not give the play much weight find it an enjoyable night of theatre. Salamon writes, "There isn't that much to Robert Harling's first play. [. . .] It's a homey soap opera brightened up with some hilarious one-liners and endearing characters. These simple pleasures [. . .] have made the show a great hit with a great many people, including me" (1).

On the more critical side, the fact that there is no action in the play, merely dialogue, was pointed out as a weakness of the script. Other critics cited this as a strength. Kershner writes, "[. . .] it is also uncommonly honest, well written and non-manipulative" (1). To write in a bunch of useless overt conflict/action would not be an honest portrayal of a very personal experience recreated by the playwright. He is going for a slice of southern life, not Hollywood melodrama. Bob Strauss writes, "[. . .] the idea that there's not a hard edge to a woman's story because no one pulls out a gun and shoots somebody is really offensive to us" (2). The conflict within the story is within the lives and struggles of the characters.

## Robert Harling

Born in Dothan Alabama in 1951, Robert Harling III and the rest of his family moved to Natchitoches, Louisiana when Harling was in his early teens. Harling relocated to New York after graduating from Tulane, University. In New York, he found work as a commercial voice-over actor.

Robert Harling describes his family on the DVD of the movie *Steel Magnolias*. He uses the words, “close knit,” “unique southern family,” and “eccentric.” Harling says he was especially close to his younger sister Susan whom he describes as “my best friend” and “the most wonderful person in the world.” Unfortunately, Susan died in October of 1985 of complications from surgery and diabetes.

Harling felt isolated from his family in New York and angry that his nephew, Susan’s son Robert, would “never know how wonderful she was.” Some of his friends told him to write about his feelings so Harling decided to write a short story of Susan’s life and struggles. The more he wrote the less he felt the prose form captured the “humor, grace, and dignity” of Susan and the “community of women” who surrounded his mother and sister. He felt dialogue would be a better conveyor of his feelings and the events. He set out to write a one-act play and wrote a full-length production instead. In ten days, he had written Steel Magnolias!

Margaret Harling, Robert Harling’s mother and the person M’Lynn is based on, said per a phone interview, “Robert saw the way the women were handling Susan’s death was very different from the men.” This difference is what Harling captures in many of his works: the unique perspective of women. Shirley MacLaine says on the DVD interview, “It’s (Steel Magnolias) all about understanding feminine reactions, women’s reactions,

women's tears, women's comedy." Harling's ability to understand feminine idiosyncrasies is further supported by John Simon's article, "Wall in the Family" in *New York Magazine* as republished in Contemporary Literary Criticism. He writes, "Often when men write plays with all-female casts, the result is patronizing and false [. . .] but it is not with the charming Steel Magnolias [. . .] and he (Harling) convinces me utterly that he knows their heads inside and out, hair by hair and thought for thought" (166). This understanding of women's behavior and feelings is reflected in his two other works: *The First Wives' Club* and *Evening Star*. Both of these screenplays deal with women's reactions to strife and loss through divorce and a child's death.

A reoccurring theme in his works is to live life to the fullest whether it's continuing after the loss of a loved one as in *Evening Star* and Steel Magnolias or sweet revenge after a disastrous marriage in *First Wives' Club*. Another theme is the banding together of women as a community. The formation of a close-knit community of support during hardship may be a uniquely female trait that Harling saw reflected in the lives of his mother and his sister in Natchitoches. Humor through hardship is also a theme of his works. He discussed on the DVD that his sister Susan would "take it upon herself to take us out of the depths of despair" with humor. Harling uses humor to relate the joys and sorrows of southern women's lives, creating both laughter and tears.

### Student Outcomes

1. Students will demonstrate a grasp of the southern dialect through execution of dialogue on stage.
2. Students will keep an observation journal to assist with character development.
3. Students will demonstrate an understanding of character tempos, body leads and master gesture through rehearsal and practice.
4. Students will build community through rehearsals, practice and a common goal.
5. Students will utilize their observation journals for the physical development of their character.
6. Students will use character quotes to analyze and develop their character and their relationship to other characters of the play.
7. Students will develop make up designs for their character.
8. Students will participate in set construction, painting, props, and publicity for a more complete production experience.



## Production Journal

## Week One

Blocking went fairly smoothly. I still don't like the end of Act I Scene I so I will look at it freshly next Tues. Gabby and Haylie have Act I Scene I memorized already. Projection is key for Ashley. They all have hard "r's." All have dialect tapes to practice with and journals for character observation. Sanisha is observing her grandmother and so is Kathryn H. Kathryn M is observing her aunt. The props lady backed out Monday, because her daughter wasn't cast. Erin said she would take over the props. She's had a meeting and divided up everything, including beauty shop numbers, with the props crew. Haylie is making an appointment to visit the dialysis unit at the hospital. I told her I would go if she got some days and times for us to choose from. Used dialect tape to drill as a warm up Tuesday and Thursday.

## Week Two

I had the girls sit in a line facing each other's backs. They massaged their show "partner" or "other half." I have been calling them that to help them build community and relationship with everyone but particularly their partner. Ouiser/Clairee, Annelle/Truvy, M'Lynn/Shelby are partners. Then they each had to say what they admired about the other character. They turned around and then said what they admired about the person playing the character. This was especially good for Haylie (Shelby) and Kathryn M. (M'Lynn) because Haylie is so self-absorbed and esoteric, and Kathryn is such a recluse that I felt they needed to bond more than the others. It also helped shed that fear high school students have of touching anyone of the same gender.

Everyone has done well with memorization except Kathryn M. who is behind. She always has an excuse such as she can't memorize by herself, she has a lot of homework, etc.

Cleaned up the end of Act I Scene I a bit. It will be easier to "see" when the wagons are in place.

### Week Three

We went over their character quotes Monday and they were very insightful. Clairee said they helped her understand the changes in her character from Act I to Act II Scene II.

Haylie is completely memorized, as is Gabby. The verbs are working well with the girls.

Instead of dictating every line's intention, I wait until I see they have no objective behind the line then I remind them of the unit's title and I give them a verb or two and that gets

them back on track. I got a call from Kathryn M. Tuesday after rehearsal. Her mother died

Tuesday morning from surgery complications. She lives with her aunt so their relationship

is unknown to me. She said, "I kept thinking how ironic it is. I'm playing a mother who

loses her daughter, and I'm a daughter who has lost her mother." Leave it to Kathryn to

find the irony in tragedy. She was out the rest of the week. Certainly not a good place for us

to be with Easter vacation coming up. We sent her flowers.

### Week Four

The newspaper came and took pictures and interviewed the girls. Gabby was gone. I found

out later that she got stuck in LA. We still have no real set, because it is being built in the

shop and then assembled here. Got paint, paneling, styling chairs, and other necessities

over Easter break. Erin did wonderfully well with props over break. We are having trouble

finding 80's beauty posters or pictures. Haylie visited the dialysis unit and talked to some

of the patients and nurses. Kathryn is very behind the other girls. She was late for rehearsal on Monday and expected us to do her hair and make up for the pictures. They are supposed to be off book today for Act I. She was so bad I let her hold her script just so we could get a rhythm going. The other girls were upset with her. By Thursday, she was much better and the warmth was back between the girls. I wasn't really getting what I wanted from her during her ending monologues so I had her deliver them to Haylie. Then I had her deliver it holding Haylie's hand. This seemed to help her. The costumes are looking great. I think the gray suit for M'Lynn has to go. In the last scene, I want each character to have something pink on them to symbolize that Shelby is still with them. Nancy liked this idea and she is looking for different possibilities. The lights are horrible. The school's electrician said the best he can do is get three lights on one channel. Steve LaMar (lighting genius) has not returned any of my phone calls. Ed and Dave have been hard at work on the set, and it is coming together finally. The crew and painters were here all week and did a great job both at painting and working around us. The girls are really building a family on stage. They know each other's lines and are listening intently. Gabby still has a tendency to speak before she has time to register the other person's lines.

#### Week Five

Dress Rehearsal # 1 was long. They had troubles with the added props especially Gabby and Ashley. They are both beginners so I chalk that up to inexperience. All of them came out without at least one prop that was there but which they didn't bother to check for or ask about. Haylie particularly has the actor's attitude. The costume girls watched Nancy tonight. The quick changes are tough especially Act I Scene I. The set change for that same act and scene is taking too long. Erin met with them and went over their assigned props,

etc. Vanessa cannot help with props. It is some sort of parental problem. The play was slow and the units were choppy and not well defined. Girls are very tired.

Dress rehearsal #2 was nightmarish. Kathryn can't remember her blocking for the final "meltdown" monologue. She cannot cross, then speak, change physically, then cross and speak. She ends up pacing which looks terrible. The two costume girls did not show up. When Jerri (2<sup>nd</sup> assistant director) called them, they said they weren't going to be a maid to some Cinderella. Oh boy, I love high school theatre. The set change for Act I Scene I was even slower tonight. We ran it afterwards and because of Vanessa's absence, I am going to help with that scene change. The flow was better tonight especially Act I Scene II and Act II Scene II. The costumes look great. I really like the purple for Ouiser. Nancy needs to find a different outfit in the last scene for Annelle and Ouiser. Ouiser's is too drab and Annelle's is just unattractive. The wigs look pretty good. She's going to look for a different one for Ouiser in the second act and also one for Truvy. Her own hair looks too modern.

Full Dress Rehearsal #1- Tonight went very well. The girls' cue pick up was great! The intents and objectives were clearer than I have seen thus far. They did a much better job with the props tonight, but they keep forgetting to leave the back door open for Act I Scene I. Act I Scene I scene change was much quicker tonight, and the music ran smoother as well. The sound effect timing was nearly perfect. I added a par can stage right to light that side. Lots of shadow. I'll experiment further with that. Truvy's new wig works well as does Ouiser's second wig. It really emphasizes the season and time changes. Annelle's projection has been much better and her character changes are smooth, effortless and natural. I want Penny to paint "TRUVY'S" on the stage right window. I asked Haylie not to throw her hair during curtain call. Haylie is doing better at communicating visually with

the other actors. Her eyes have been wandering. It is a lack of focus I believe. Asked Sanisha to concentrate on putting stiffness in her knees and elbows to emphasize her age. The hypoglycemic scene went so well tonight. I held my breath through most of it. Steve LaMar came today and refocused the lights onto stage areas. The gels were way too yellow so I removed most of them except for a couple ambers. The glass gels are too thick and throw too much color since they are so close to the stage.

Full Dress Rehearsal #2- Well, they are really ready for an audience. They were a little low energy tonight despite videotaping. Kathym's monologue was quite good tonight. She didn't pace, used pauses, and her verbs were much clearer. They were really tuned into each other and focused. There were a few line problems, but they covered for one another. Great listening was going on. Ouiser got a green dress with pink scarf in the last scene and it really demonstrates the change in her character. Anelle's projection has improved greatly. Haylie and Kathryn are communicating and finally came across as mother and daughter. The volume on the sound effects and music was better. He's learning. Krystal (make up) did a better job blending Clairee's make up tonight. I went over it with her last night. They are ready for an audience tomorrow. They need the feedback. The crew is even excited about opening. Ticket sales have been pretty good.

## Self-Evaluation

As the director of Steel Magnolias, I found the production to be very successful. I base this on several criteria. To begin with, many if not all of the cast and crewmembers met most of the student outcomes. Although the accents were not perfect, they were unobtrusive and to the untrained ear indicative of a southern dialect. Annelle and Clairee succeeded most in the execution of the lilted dialect.

All but one of the students found the observation journals to be very helpful in developing their character. They found their characterizations through the physicalizing the person they observed. Sanisha, who played Ouiser, said she observed how, “Older people deal with sadness differently. I guess because they’ve seen so much.” She thought this helped her not overdo her reaction to Shelby’s death in comparison to Truvy and Annelle who are both considerably younger. Haylie (Shelby) did not find the observation journal all that helpful since she was not playing very far out of her age range. She did use it to jot down ideas for her character.

I definitely felt the actors excelled at building community within the cast as well as with the crew. The experienced actors helped the newcomers with writing blocking, checking props, and with positive feedback. They really turned into a family. The students who had done shows before said this was the closest they had ever felt to a cast.

In addition to general character quotes, the students each chose a quote that was their character’s life philosophy and this was a through line they used when they were lost with intention or objectives. It helped them see the “big picture” of their character.

Four of the actresses created make up designs for their character. The other two students had never done make up on or off stage. Kathryn H. (Clairee) had her make up

done for her since it was age make up, and Kathryn M (M'Lynn) had another girl show her how to do it then she executed it herself after that.

Because we hired a set constructor, the students didn't help with set construction or painting. There simply was not enough time for them to participate. They did get advertisements for the program and they distributed flyers.

The students were very professional through the entire run of the show. There were only five absences total and three of those were when Kathryn's mother passed away. They always called for absences and when they were going to be late. They were responsible and careful with their costumes, wigs, and the school make up supplies.

I was pleased with the production overall. The lights were a bit disappointing and I never solved the stage right problem lighting problem. Until they invest in a true theatre lighting system, they will remain a frustration and limitation.

The sound was also frustrating at times. Although I really felt the songs were well chosen and told the story I wanted, at times, the execution of cues was too slow, too fast, or the wrong song was played. This was most apparent during the second Friday's performance when two songs were incorrect. Songs, which I felt, were key for mood and story. Some of this can be attributed to a poor sound system and an inexperienced sound operator who professed to have a great deal of skill. I still feel this student's professionalism improved as the production continued.

I felt the flow of the show could have been a bit quicker through some of the units of action. Perhaps the tempos might have been more varied for emphasis. I was thrilled that not one person said the actors talked too fast or spoke too softly. Ashley's (Annelle) volume especially improved through warm up and some simple visualization exercises.

The students' characterization was very close to where I wanted them to be. I would still have liked more from Kathryn (M'Lynn). She has a tendency to underplay a character to the point of monotony, but she made huge improvements from casting to production.

The set and costumes were very successful. The set was one I am proud to have designed from its angularity, to colors, to set dressing. Built beautifully, I truly felt it looked like a home turned into a beauty salon. The individual cups, the plants, the sunny warmth of yellow, the coolness of the aqua, and the butterflies fancifully flying overhead, completed the home away from home feeling. We changed the set when it was nearly completed when my research showed a great deal of paneling was used by many of the southern salons. The paneling added warmth and richness as well as an authenticity on which many, that survived the 80's, commented. The only drawback was the nail unit down left. I was using it to ground the corner along with the radio, but I now realize I needed to incorporate it more into the blocking. I was concerned with blocking the audience's view of the stage left beauty station. I did try moving it and then pulling it out only for that scene, but moving it took too long and it made a lot of noise, although it was greased. Also, the chairs couldn't naturally be on stage so we had nowhere to get them from but backstage. In the end, it stayed put.

The costumes were a feast for eye and era. Many women who grew up during the 80's said, "I had that exact hair style" or "my maternity dress looked just like that." The idea to have Ouiser's character in purple worked well. People who wear purple are seen as unique and somewhat eccentric. As the play progressed, she became one of the group and in the final scene, she is in a very stylish green dress. Her change in costumes symbolized her personal transformation as well.



The metaphors and ideas of the play were successful to me. No one found the characters silly, trite, or ridiculous. They were women we know who enjoy one another, who need one another and ultimately love one another. Harling's message of support through the feminine network, of living life to the fullest and how much impact one person can have on those around them resounded through the performances. The production remained true to my vision, and I believe, to Harling's intentions for his play.

Audition Pages + Characters

Truwy/Aunelle - 7-9 Add Clairee 10-11

S|M|C|T|A 13-16 / 37-~~40~~

↑ Add Ouiser - 27-30  
18-20

↙ 40-43

M'Lynn / St. ... 33-35

**STEEL**

M'Lynn - 66-67 / 68 Mervin's

**MAGNOLIAS**

All 68-70

BY **ROBERT HARLING**

S|C|T|A  
44-47

Guy - 62-63 E 44



DRAMATISTS  
PLAY SERVICE  
INC.

STEEL MAGNOLIAS was originally presented at the WPA Theatre (Kyle Renick, Artistic Director; Wendy Bustard, Managing Director) in New York City on March 22, 1987. It was directed by Pamela Berlin; the setting was by Edward T. Gianfrancesco; the lighting was by Craig Evans; the costumes were by Don Newcomb; the sound was by Otts Munderloh; the hair was by Bobby H. Grayson; the casting was by Darlene Kaplan; and the production stage manager was Paul Mills Holmes. The cast, in order of appearance, was as follows:

TRUVY.....Margo Martindale  
 ANNELLE..... Constance Shulman  
 CLAIREE..... Kate Wilkinson  
 SHELBY..... Blanche Baker  
 M'LYNN.....Rosemary Prinz  
 OUISER..... Mary Fogarty

The WPA Theatre production of STEEL MAGNOLIAS was transferred by special arrangement with Lucille Lortel to the Lucille Lortel Theatre on June 19, 1987. It was directed by Pamela Berlin; the setting was by Edward T. Gianfrancesco; the lighting was by Craig Evans; the costumes were by Don Newcomb; the hair design and supervision was by Bobby H. Grayson; the sound was by Aural Fixation; and the production stage manager was Cosmo P. Hanson. The cast, in order of appearance, was as follows:

TRUVY.....Margo Martindale  
 ANNELLE..... Constance Shulman  
 CLAIREE..... Kate Wilkinson  
 SHELBY..... Betsy Aidem  
 M'LYNN.....Rosemary Prinz  
 OUISER..... Mary Fogarty

Place: Chinquapin, Louisiana

Act I: Scene 1: April

Scene 2: December

Act II: Scene 1: June, eighteen months later

Scene 2: November

## CAST OF CHARACTERS

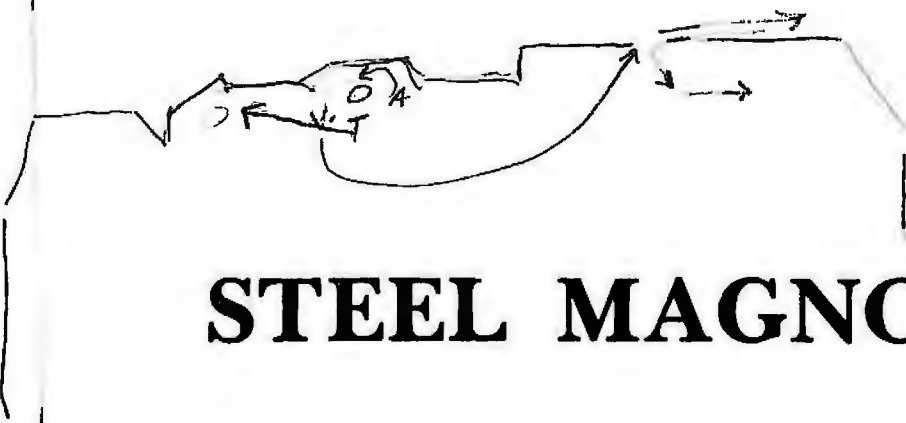
- TRUVY JONES<sup>40ish</sup> — 40ish. Owner of the beauty shop.  
ANNELLE DUPUY-DESOTO — 19. Beauty shop assistant.  
CLAIREE BELCHER — 66ish. Widow of former mayor. Grande dame.  
SHELBY EATENTON-LATCHERIE — 25. Prettiest girl in town.  
M'LYNN EATENTON — 50ish. Shelby's mother. Socially prominent career woman.  
BOUISER (pronounced "Weezer") BOUDREAUX — 66ish. Wealthy curmudgeon. Acerbic but loveable.

**AUTHOR'S NOTE:** The women in this play are witty, intelligent, and above all, real characters. They in no way, shape or form are meant to be portrayed as cartoons or caricatures.

## SPECIAL NOTE

All groups receiving permission to produce STEEL MAGNOLIAS are required (1) to give credit to the author as sole and exclusive author of the play in all programs distributed in connection with performances of the play and in all instances in which the title of the play appears for purposes of advertising, publicizing or otherwise exploiting the play and/or a production thereof; the name of the author must appear on a separate line, in which no other name appears, immediately beneath the title and in size of type equal to 50% of the largest letter used for the title of the play, and (2) to give the following acknowledgement on the title page of all programs distributed in connection with performances of the play:

"Originally produced by the W.P.A. Theatre, New York City, 1987. (Kyle Renick, Artistic Director)"



# STEEL MAGNOLIAS

## ACT ONE

### SCENE I

*The curtain rises on Truvy's beauty shop. There are the sounds of gunshots and a dog barking. Annelle is spraying Truvy's hair with more hairspray than necessary.*

ANNELLE. Oops! I see a hole.

TRUVY. I was hoping you'd catch that.

ANNELLE. It's a little poofier than I would normally do, but I'm nervous.

TRUVY. I'm not real concerned about that. When I go to bed I wrap my entire head with toilet tissue so it usually gets a little smushed down anyway in that process.

ANNELLE. In my class at the trade school, I was number one when it came to frosting and streaking. I did my own.

TRUVY. Really? I wouldn't have known. And I can spot a bottle job at twenty paces (Studying her hairdo.) Well . . . your technique is good, and your form and content will improve with experience. So, you're hired.

ANNELLE. (Overcome.) Oh!!

TRUVY. And not a moment too soon! This morning we're going to be as busy as a one-armed paper hanger.

ANNELLE. Thank you, Miss Truvy! Thank you . . .

TRUVY. No time. Now. You know where the coffee stuff is. Everything else is on a tray next to the stove. (Truvy removes her smock.)

ANNELLE. Here. Let me help you. (Dusts her off.) You've got little tiny hairs and fuzzies all over you.

TRUVY. Honey, there's so much static electricity in here I

X R.  
of  
pl.  
a

TRUVY has mirror in front

smile pull down mirror

Direct. behind both hand

nod

pick up everything except boys and money. (*Points Annelie toward the kitchen.*) Be a treasure. (*Annelie exits into the kitchen. Truvy immediately starts redoing her hairdo.*) Annelie? This is the most successful shop in town. Wanna know why?

ANNELLE. (*Offstage.*) Why?

TRUVY. Because I have a strict philosophy that I have stuck to for fifteen years . . . "There is no such thing as natural beauty." That's why I've never lost a client to the Kut and Kurl or the Beauty Box. And remember! My ladies get only the best. Do not scrimp on anything. Feel free to use as much hair spray as you want. (*Annelie returns with the tray. The sound of a gunshot makes her jump, but she recovers.*) Just shove that stuff to one side, it goes right there. (*Pointing out the room.*)

Manicure station here . . .

ANNELLE. There's no such thing as natural beauty . . .

TRUVY. Remember that, or we're all out of a job. Just look at me, Annelie. It takes some effort to look like this.

ANNELLE. I can see that. How many ladies do we have this morning?

TRUVY. I restrict myself to the ladies of the neighborhood on Saturday mornings. Normally that would be just three, but today we've got Shelby Eatenton. She's not a regular, she's the daughter of a regular. I have to do something special with her hair. She's getting married this afternoon. Now. How long have you been here in town?

ANNELLE. A few weeks . . .

TRUVY. New in town! It must be exciting being in a new place. I wouldn't know. I've lived here all my life.

ANNELLE. It's a little scary.

TRUVY. I can imagine. Well . . . tell me things about yourself.

ANNELLE. There's nothing to tell. I live here. I've got a job now. That's it. Could I borrow a few of these back issues of *Southern Hair*?

TRUVY. Uh . . . sure. It's essential to keep abreast of the latest styles. I'm glad to see your interest. I get *McCall's*, *Family Circle*, *Glamour*, *Mademoiselle*, *Ladies' Home Journal*, every magazine known to man. You must live close by. Within walking distance, I mean. I didn't see a car.

Turn to her mirror

spray →  
Gunshot  
X to point →

to mirror

jump of S

T X

X to change open sign on window

5:15 up stage sofa

Look out window

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ANNELLE. My car's . . . I don't have a car. I've been staying across the river at Robeline's Boarding House.

TRUVY. That's quite a walk. Ruth Robeline . . . now there's a story. She's a twisted, troubled soul. Her life has been an experiment in terror. Husband killed in World War II. Her son was killed in Vietnam. I have to tell you, when it comes to suffering, she's right up there with Elizabeth Taylor.

ANNELLE. I had no idea. (There is a loud gunshot and barking.) Is that a gunshot?

gunshot

TRUVY. Yes, dear. I believe it is. Plug in the hotplate, please.

pl. Xing to S.L. window

ANNELLE. But why is someone firing a gun in a nice neighborhood like this?

TRUVY. It's a long story. It has to do with Shelby's wedding and her father. (More gunfire and barking.) You'll be happier if you just ignore it like the rest of the neighborhood.

CLAIREE. (Entering.) Knock, knock!

TRUVY. Morning, Clairee!

CLAIREE. Morning, Truvy.

TRUVY. I tried to call you and tell you I was running late. No answer.

CLAIREE. I was at the high school. I was out at the crack of dawn.

deposit  
stuff on  
soft

TRUVY. Annelle, I want you to meet the former first lady of Chinquapin, Mrs. Belcher. Clairee, this is Annelle. She's taking Judy's place.

ANNELLE. Pleased to meet you.

to meet her loud

CLAIREE. I'm a little embarrassed. If I had known I was meeting new people, I would have taken a little more pride in my appearance. I have been at the dedication of our new football field. I am not always this windblown.

insert  
glance +  
out in  
pane

TRUVY. Annelle. They named the stadium after her late husband . . . Lloyd Belcher Memorial Coliseum. The team has voted her all sorts of special titles.

CLAIREE. I have the pom-poms to prove it. What is your name, dear?

ANNELLE. Oh. My married name's Dupuy.

CLAIREE. I don't think I know any Dupuys.

ANNELLE. I just moved here. I'm originally from Zwolle.

CLAIREE. That explains it. Truvy? I thought I brought you those recipes. *(She fumbles with her shirt that has no pockets.)*

TRUVY. ~~Clairée. The reason I called is, do you mind if I do Shelby first?~~

CLAIREE. That's fine. I'll amuse myself. Shelby's the most important one today. *(A gunshot.)* That man! I'll swanee . . . I think the situation is worse than ever.

TRUVY. Annelle? We're going to need more towels. They're stacked up next to the washing machine. *(Annelle exits.)*

CLAIREE. Sweet girl. Where'd you find her?

TRUVY. She heard I had a position open and she just walked in. I think there's a story here.

CLAIREE. What makes you say that?

TRUVY. For starters. *(She's married . . . but she lives at Ruth Robeline's. (Clairee reacts.)* Alone.

CLAIREE. I'd get to the bottom of this, if I were you. You have some nice silverware you'd like to keep.

TRUVY. Oh, I'm not worried about that. She's very nice. I just love the idea of hiring someone with a past.

CLAIREE. She can't be more than eighteen. She hasn't had time to have a past.

TRUVY. Honey. It's the eighties. If you can achieve puberty, you can achieve a past.

CLAIREE. *(Annelle enters, carrying towels. Clairee sips her coffee and grimaces.)* Yuck! *(Truvy, concerned, takes a sip.)*

TRUVY. Annelle? How did you make this coffee?

ANNELLE. Like you said. I poured hot water through the thing.

TRUVY. Where'd you get the water?

ANNELLE. It was boiling on the stove.

TRUVY. Did you notice the hot dogs in the bottom of the pot?

ANNELLE. No.

TRUVY. Make some more, please.

ANNELLE. I'm so sorry.

CLAIREE. Don't worry. I love a good hot dog. Just not with cream and sugar. *(Annelle exits.)*

*gunshot*

*X to = to Truvy*

*X to get coffee*

*X to C*

*look*

*to sneeze*

*to wear*

*to remove*

*SIT*

*girl cup*

*place towels  
Truvy's*

TRUVY  
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TRUVY. She's probably not an international spy. <sup>sharp</sup> But! If she works out, I may let her rent the garage apartment.

CLAIREE. I thought the twins were going to live there while they go to the college. <sup>laugh</sup>

TRUVY. Recent developments. Louie's going away to LSU now. And Poot has decided to work for my cousin in Baltimore. He doesn't want to be called Poot anymore. My babies are growing up. <sup>put bowls away</sup>

CLAIREE. I can't believe your kids are old enough to leave the nest.

TRUVY. You know I was a child bride. Well. I look at the bright side. I have some places to visit now. I've always wanted to go to Baltimore. I'm told it's the hairdo capital of the world.

CLAIREE. *(Finding the recipes in her pocket.)* Here they are! I'm so fat I couldn't feel them. <sup>X to her</sup>

TRUVY. The recipes? Let me see . . . *(Truvy takes the recipe cards and pores over them. Clairee reads over her shoulder.)* <sup>Sit in chair T. go behind her</sup>

Um . . . this sounds delicious.

CLAIREE. It is. And the Bisquick makes it so simple. *(Pulls another card.)* And this is from my daughter-in-law. She says you can't attend a function in Tickfaw where this is not served.

TRUVY. Yum. *(Reading.)* Now are these chocolate chips semi-sweet or milk?

CLAIREE. Milk.

TRUVY. Is the Karo syrup light or dark?

CLAIREE. Matter of taste.

TRUVY. Where's that other one you were telling me about . . . Cuppa, cuppa, cuppa?

CLAIREE. That's so easy you don't have to write it down. Cup of flour, cup of sugar, cup of fruit cocktail with the juice. Mix it up and bake at 350 'til gold and bubbly.

TRUVY. Sounds awfully rich.

CLAIREE. It is. So I serve it over ice cream to cut the sweetness. Give me some paper, I'll copy them down for you. <sup>X to sit + direct pen + glasses</sup>

TRUVY. *(Calling.)* Annelle? Get Miss Clairee some paper. I believe there's some stuck on the Frigidaire under the crawfish. *(To Clairee.)* Oh . . . and here's that article on Princess <sup>X to your spot</sup>

Di. (There are gunshots and frenzied barking.) Sometimes I wonder if Drum Eatenton's brain gets enough oxygen. That is so annoying.

CLAIREE. Try living next door to him. (Enter Shelby. Her hair is in rollers. She carries a picture torn out of a magazine. She is a blushing bride in the first stages of completion.)

SHELBY. Hi, everybody!

TRUVY. There she is! There's my girl! Come break my neck. (Shelby's fingernails are wet, so she is careful when she hugs.)

SHELBY. Truvy. It's so good to see you! Morning, Miss Clairee! It's not that I'm unfriendly, I'm just worried about my nails.

TRUVY. What a pretty color.

SHELBY. I hope this doesn't dry too dark. If it's too dark, it will never do. You know the colors are never the same on the bottle.

TRUVY. You will always find that to be true.

SHELBY. (Her nails.) This is drying way too dark. "Practically Pink" my foot! Truvy? Do you have any of those nail polish remover things?

TRUVY. (Handing her some.) Here. Where's your mama?

SHELBY. Right behind me, I thought. (Annelle enters with fresh coffee.) Hi! I'm Shelby Eatenton . . . soon to be Latcherie.

ANNELLE. Hi. I'm Annelle. I'm new. X to Clairee

TRUVY. Today's Annelle's first day.

SHELBY. Well, Annelle. You're working with the best. Anyone who's anybody gets their hair done at Truvy's.

TRUVY. Absolutely. (A loud series of gunshots.)

Shelby . . . uh you know I would walk on my lips to avoid criticizing anyone but your father is about to make us all pull our hair out. And that is bad for my business.

SHELBY. Well, he should be finished with his yard work soon.

TRUVY. I hope so.

SHELBY. You're not the only one concerned. Mama's about to have a fit. She and Daddy are fighting like cats and dogs.

CLAIREE. They're just anxious with so much going on.

SHELBY. No they're not. They just try to create as much

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tension as possible in any given situation. It's a creed they live by.

TRUVY. You know. I was just reading an article in *Glamour* about tension during family occasions. It seems there can be a lot of stress and trauma. The thing I found most interesting is that stressful times can unleash deep dark hostilities that make your hair fall out.

SHELBY. They're fighting about patio furniture. Jackson and I will never fight about silly things. Are you married, Annelle?

ANNELLE. (*Changing subject.*) Oh. I hope that coffee's better.

CLAIREE. It smells right.

ANNELLE. (*Looking at the picture Shelby brought.*) How pretty . . .

SHELBY. Princess Grace . . .

TRUVY. Did you bring me the picture of that hairdo like I asked?

SHELBY. Here you go. Study it carefully. (*Pulls out a plastic bag.*) Here's the baby's breath.

TRUVY. This is so exciting. I feel like I am present at the creation. There is something so wondrous about the way a bride looks. I feel it is beauty in its purest form. (*Studying the picture and the bag of baby's breath.*) Where are you going to put this stuff? There's no baby's breath in this picture.

SHELBY. You just stick it in. It's meant to frame my face. Baby's breath is part of my whole decoration concept. For a total romantic look. (*Notices Clairee's shoes.*) Miss Clairee! What cute shoes!

CLAIREE. You think so? I'm not so sure. I think they're a little too racy for me. I'll probably give them away.

TRUVY. Ooo. Those are too cha-cha for words. If you decide to get rid of them, I'll buy 'em from you.

CLAIREE. What size do you wear?

TRUVY. Well. In a good shoe, I wear a size six, but sevens feel so good, I buy a size eight.

CLAIREE. They're eight and a halves.

TRUVY. Perfect. (*M'Lynn enters carrying a large tote bag.*)

SHELBY. Hi, Mama. Look at Miss Clairee's shoes.

TRUVY. Ah, ah, ah! They're mine!

M'LYNN. Is this a riddle?

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SHELBY. Annelle. This is my mama. How're things at the house?

M'LYNN. Fine. Ouiser Boudreaux just this second dropped by to talk to your father. One or both of them is probably lying in a pool of blood by now. *(To Annelle.)* Hello. Did you say Annelle? What a pretty name. Unusual. I'm M'Lynn.

TRUVY. How's the mother of the bride?

M'LYNN. Don't ask.

TRUVY. What's the matter?

M'LYNN. Nothing a handful of prescription drugs couldn't take care of.

ANNELLE. I'll take this for you. *(Annelle takes M'Lynn's bag.)*

M'LYNN. Just put it over there, please. *(Annelle puts it near Clairee.)* *opposite on sofa*

TRUVY. Annelle. Why don't you go on and shampoo Mrs. Eatenton? These girls have mountains to move today.

M'LYNN. Ain't that the truth.

TRUVY. Her coiffure card is right on top. *X to room spot.*

ANNELLE. *(Looking at the card.)* Oh. Piece of cake. *- X*

SHELBY. Mama. This color is all wrong. It looks like a stuck pig bled all over my hands.

M'LYNN. I'm sure I have something at the house that'll do. *to dismember*

SHELBY. But do you have pink?

M'LYNN. Of course I have pink.

SHELBY. It has to be delicate.

M'LYNN. If I don't have something, we'll send one of the boys to get you some delicate pink nail polish.

SHELBY. Great idea, Mama. I'd love to see what Tommy'd pick out.

CLAIREE. Anything I can do to help out last minute?

M'LYNN. You've done plenty, Clairee. I think we've got everything situated. We've just finished borrowing every fern in North Louisiana. The boys got in last night and they're taking care of the odds and ends.

CLAIREE. I hope the rain holds off. I'm sorry it's not a prettier day.

SHELBY. This is perfect weather for me. I don't function well when it's hot. I love cloudy days. On cloudy days I feel God's not trying very hard, so I don't have to either.

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M'LYNN. She does sweat profusely.

SHELBY. Thank you, Mama.

TRUVY. Heat never bothers me. I love it. But spicy foods <sup>to comfort</sup> make me sweat. Especially on the top of my head. My hair <sup>to purify</sup> gets wet. *(The phone rings.)* <sup>to count</sup>

CLAIREE. I'll get it.

M'LYNN. I'll bet that's for me. It's probably my mind trying to locate my body.

CLAIREE. *(Answering.)* Hello? Yessir, she is. Hold on a minute. M'Lynn. It's your husband. <sup>light</sup>

M'LYNN. *(Takes phone.)* Yes Drum? I don't know. I haven't got it. I don't have it. Drum, if you're trying to drive me crazy, you're too late. For the last time . . . I don't have it.

Ask the boys. Goodbye. *(She hangs up.)*

SHELBY. What did Daddy want?

M'LYNN. Nothing. <sup>to count</sup>

TRUVY. *(Looking at the picture and at Shelby's hair . . .)* So . . . we want to sweep it up, but leave some softness around your ears . . .

M'LYNN. Sweep it up?

SHELBY. Yes, Mama. Up. Like Princess Grace.

M'LYNN. Did you bring Truvy the picture of Jaclyn Smith? <sup>slow picture</sup>

SHELBY. No. I brought the picture of Princess Grace. I destroyed the picture of Jaclyn Smith.

M'LYNN. But I thought I had made you understand the advantages of the Jaclyn Smith hairdo . . .

SHELBY. No, Mama.

M'LYNN. Well. At least I talked her out of that stupid idea of sticking that baby's breath all in her hair.

SHELBY. Keep your head in the sink, please. *(Annelle accidentally squirts M'Lynn.)*

ANNELLE. *(Bringing M'Lynn up.)* I'm sorry. I'm so sorry. <sup>Start to dry hair</sup>

M'LYNN. That's all right. I find cold water refreshing. It startled me a little, that's all.

CLAIREE. Truvy? Could I copy your recipe for Strawberry Pie? <sup>to count</sup>

TRUVY. Sure. *(Clairee gets the recipe box. Truvy works on Shelby's hair.)* Your mother doesn't tell us much, Shelby.

What's Jackson like?

SHELBY. He's pretty swell. I thought he was a pest at first,

but then he kind of grew on me. And now I love him.

TRUVY. Where'd you meet him?

SHELBY. At a party at the Petroleum Club in Shreveport. I had no idea who he was, but I was getting a big kick out of watching him on the dance floor. It was painfully obvious he had never taken the time to dance in front of a mirror. There was something so attractive about how stupid he looked.

TRUVY. Is he real romantic?

SHELBY. No. But he does give me flowers. And little presents if I bug him enough. He has promised to give me a red rose on every anniversary corresponding to the number of that anniversary. I think that's so sweet.

TRUVY. Well, now. That's a pretty romantic idea, isn't it?

SHELBY. Yes. I wish it had been his.

CLAIREE. Lloyd and I missed it to fifty years by three months. That stinker. Bless his heart. He tried. He just couldn't make it.

SHELBY. You remember your wedding? *5, 7 in A's chair*

CLAIREE. Of course I do. I remember everything. The flowers, the food. Ouiser was my maid of honor. Shelby, I hope you and Jackson will be as happy as Lloyd and I were. We had such a good time. Until last November . . . at least he hung on through the state playoffs.

SHELBY. Miss Clairee. There are still good times to be had.

CLAIREE. Oh sure. *Miss Clairee* But I miss the whirlwind of being a mayor's wife. It's not easy being just one. I don't like going to things by myself. If I go with another couple, I'm a third wheel. If I go with a friend, we're just a couple of old biddies.

SHELBY. Somebody like you should be able to find something to occupy your time.

CLAIREE. Well. I really do love football. But it's hard to parlay that into a reason to live. *x to c'k*

TRUVY. Let's just face it, Clairee. You're a woman coming to terms with her grips. You and I are in the same boat. My kids are leaving town and I've got a husband that hasn't moved from in front of the TV set in fifteen years. It's up to us to figure out why we were put on this earth. That's today's sermon. So, Shelby. Are you and Jackson going to live in West Monroe or Monroe proper?

SHELBY. Monroe, of course. His law practice is there.

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CLAIREE. You are so lucky, Shelby. Louisiana lawyers do well whether they want to or not.

SHELBY. I don't really care. Don't get me wrong. The money's real nice . . . but I just like the idea of growing old with somebody. My dream is to get old and sit on the back porch covered with grandchildren and say, "No!" and "Stop that!"

TRUVY. Are you going to quit nursing?

SHELBY. Never! I love it. I love being around all those babies . . . Last week we had this poor little fellow, two and a half months premature. He looked like a big rat. I kept talking to him and holding him. But I knew he wasn't going to make it.

TRUVY. That's so sad.

SHELBY. It happens all the time.

M'LYNN. Drum and I feel that Shelby should not work anymore after she gets married.

SHELBY. I'm so anxious to discuss this topic for the nine hundredth time this week . . .

M'LYNN. You should not be on your feet all day. You should be kinder to your circulatory system.

SHELBY. (Changing subject.) Annelle? I know you're new and all, but don't let that stop you. Anytime you have anything to say, you just let 'er rip.

ANNELLE. I don't have anything to say.

TRUVY. Well, M'Lynn. It looks like you're ready to roll. I think we can trust Annelle to roll you up, don't you? Do you think you can roll up Mrs. Eatenton, Annelle?

ANNELLE. I don't know. Today is very special. And my work tends to be too poofy when I'm nervous. Does your dress have to go over your head?

SHELBY. You can't screw up her hair. You just tease it and make it look like a blond football helmet.

M'LYNN. I must have missed the passage in Emily Post that said all abuse must be heaped on the mother of the bride. Go ahead, Annelle. I'm sure you'll do a beautiful job. It doesn't matter what I look like anyway.

TRUVY. Hush girls. Shelby. Tell me things about the wedding. How many bridesmaids?

SHELBY. Nine.

put scope in place  
pull up M'Lynn

stand

to some place

to the station

X close up to protect

TRUVY. Good Lord!

SHELBY. Exactly. *to make a wedding*

TRUVY. I hope that photographer brings a wide-angle lens.

SHELBY. I think it's embarrassing and awful. But Mama made me have my cousins, and Margi St. Maurice.

M'LYNN. Shelby. There was no way around it and you know it.

SHELBY. It will be pretentious. Daddy always says, "An ounce of pretension is worth a pound of manure."

M'LYNN. The poet laureate of Dogwood Lane . . .

SHELBY. Mama. I wish you would get off Daddy's back. He gets enough hassle from Miss Ouiser.

TRUVY. *(The peacemaker.)* What are your colors, Shelby?

SHELBY. Blush and bashful.

M'LYNN. Her colors are pink and pink.

SHELBY. Blush and bashful.

M'LYNN. I ask you. How precious is this wedding going to get?

SHELBY. My colors are blush and bashful. I have chosen two shades of pink. One is much deeper than the other.

M'LYNN. The bridesmaids' dresses are beautiful . . .

SHELBY. And the ceremony will be too. All the walls are banked with sprays of flowers in the two shades of blush and bashful. There's a pink carpet specially laid for the service. And pink silk bunting draped over anything that would stand still.

M'LYNN. That sanctuary looks like it's been hosed down with Pepto-Bismol.

SHELBY. I like pink.

M'LYNN. I tried to talk her into using peaches and cream. That would be so lovely this time of year. All the azaleas in our yard are peach colored. Peach is so flattering to every skin tone.

SHELBY. No way. Pink is my signature color.

TRUVY. What color is your dress, M'Lynn?

M'LYNN. Peach and cream.

TRUVY. Clairee?

CLAIREE. Beige lace to the knee.

TRUVY. I am wearing a sexy blue chiffon, Shelby. Jackson's gonna take one look at me and leave you behind in the dust.

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SHELBY. Mama's dress is gorgeous. It cost more than my wedding dress.

M'LYNN. It did not. <sup>to protect</sup> It was on sale. <sup>to defend</sup>

SHELBY. That's what she told Daddy. What she actually meant is that it was "for sale" not "on sale." *(The phone rings.)*

TRUVY. I'll get it. *(Answers.)* Hello. Hi, Janice. Yes, I heard. I know it's an emergency . . . but today I'm dealing with Shelby. But tomorrow's Sunday—but . . . *(Just to get off the phone.)* . . . sure, fine . . . come by after church. *(Hangs up in disgust.)*

CLAIREE. Truvy, you shouldn't give up your Sundays.

TRUVY. Well, you know how neurotic Janice Van Meter is about her appearance.

CLAIREE. *(To Annelle.)* Janice is the current mayor's wife. *(Sweetly.)* We hate her.

TRUVY. Now Shelby . . . fill me in on the reception.

SHELBY. There's going to be ferns and twinkly lights. There'll be magnolias in the pool.

M'LYNN. I just hope your father doesn't get any magnolias from Ouiser's side of the tree. We'll never hear the end of it.

SHELBY. The wedding cake will be by the pool. The groom's cake will be hidden in the carport.

M'LYNN. Shelby and I agree on one thing. *A spin her to L*

SHELBY. The groom's cake. It's awful! It's in the shape of a giant armadillo.

TRUVY. An armadillo?

SHELBY. Jackson wanted a cake in the shape of an armadillo. He has an aunt that makes them. *to wonder*

CLAIREE. It's unusual.

M'LYNN. It's repulsive. It has gray icing. I can't even think of how you would make gray icing.

SHELBY. Worse! The cake part is red velvet cake. Blood red! People are going to be hacking into this animal that looks like it's bleeding to death.

M'LYNN. The rehearsal supper was an experience.

SHELBY. It wasn't that bad. It was out at Jackson's uncle's place on the river.

M'LYNN. They served steak and baked potatoes. They went to a lot of trouble.

SHELBY. His family loves to barbecue. *to defend*

M'LYNN. For dessert they served an original creation called "Dago" pie. I think that says it all. Jackson is from a good old Southern family with good old Southern values. You either shoot it, stuff it, or marry it.

SHELBY. They are simply outdoorsy, that's all. *to fine beach*

TRUVY. Did you all do anything especially romantic?

SHELBY. We drove down to Frenchman's Point and went parking.

M'LYNN. Shelby, really. *to admonish*

TRUVY. Oh, boy. The romantic part. This is what really melts my butter.

SHELBY. Then we went skinnydipping and did things that frightened the fish.

M'LYNN. Shelby.

*Coughing*

CLAIREE. It's been a long time since we've had a youngster in this place, hasn't it?

SHELBY. We talked, and talked, and talked . . .

TRUVY. I love those kinds of talks . . . in the arms of the man you love. *bent to L side*

SHELBY. Actually we fought most of the time.

TRUVY. What?

SHELBY. Because I told him I couldn't marry him. *(Shock all around.)*

*T Stand*

M'LYNN. What?

CLAIREE. Why would you go and do a thing like that? *lean forward on sofa*

SHELBY. It's O.K. now. We worked it all out.

TRUVY. Oh. It was just one of those last minute jitter things.

SHELBY. No. But the wedding's still on.

TRUVY. Thank goodness. *(Pointing to Shelby's hairstyle.)*

'Cause this is going to be in the hairdo hall of fame.

CLAIREE. You scared us, Shelby. That wasn't a nice thing to do to your mama. You should never say something like that to a woman who's marinating fifty pounds of crab claws.

TRUVY. Oooo. Making up can be extremely romantic. I'm jealous. I miss romance so much.

CLAIREE. Truvy. It can't be that bad.

TRUVY. The last romantic thing my husband did was in 1972. He enclosed this carport so I could support him! Very

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nice Annelle. I think you know what you're doing.  
ANNELLE. Thank you. Mrs. Eatenton, you have great hair.  
And your scalp's clean as a whistle.

M'LYNN. I try.  
TRUVY. Must run in the family. Shelby. You have such  
pretty hair . . . so thick . . . *(Shelby's head is beginning to  
drop forward. She resists Truvy's touch.)* Hold your head up,  
darling.

SHELBY. Stop it.  
TRUVY. Shelby? Shelby? M'Lynn!  
M'LYNN. *(Upon realization, springs into action. There is no  
alarm, just efficient action.)* Oh honey.

CLAIREE. *(Also aware.)* I'll get some juice. *(Clairee exits into  
kitchen for juice.)* X to kitchen

M'LYNN. Truvy. There's some candy in my purse.  
TRUVY. I got a peppermint right here. *(Truvy slips the candy  
into Shelby's mouth. Shelby spits out the candy.)*

M'LYNN. *(Attending to Shelby.)* Shelby? We're getting you  
some juice. *(knew she had to get)*

TRUVY. Should I get her a cookie? X to kitchen

CLAIREE. *(Returns with orange juice.)* Here's the juice.

M'LYNN. *(To Truvy.)* Shelby? You need some juice. *(Tries to  
get Shelby to drink.)*

SHELBY. Leave me alone.  
M'LYNN. Drink, honey. Drink some juice.

TRUVY. Drink the juice, honey. *(pushing her hair out of her eyes)*  
SHELBY. *(Pushing away the juice, spilling it.)* No! → Annelle

CLAIREE. *(Refilling the glass.)* Who can blame her. Juice  
after a peppermint?

SHELBY. Mama. Stop it. I have candy in my purse.

M'LYNN. You didn't bring your purse, honey. Here. Have  
another sip.

SHELBY. No . . . *(But Shelby drinks a sip.)*

M'LYNN. It's not any wonder. With all this wedding non-  
sense and running around.

ANNELLE. Excuse me. Should I call the doctor or  
something?

TRUVY. No, no.

CLAIREE. Shelby's a diabetic.

M'LYNN. She's got a little too much insulin, that's all. She'll be fine if we can get something in her. Drink some more, Shelby.

SHELBY. I'm going to leave if you don't leave me alone.

M'LYNN. I'd love to see you try. Shelby . . . cooperate. Drink.

TRUVY. Honey, drink . . . please. *(Shelby drinks some.)*

M'LYNN. There we go. That's a start.

CLAIREE. That one hit her quick.

M'LYNN. Yes. She's on the pill now and her hormones are running wild. She'll get on an even keel pretty soon. *to want*

CLAIREE. She could hurt herself, M'Lynn? What if this happened when she was driving a car?

M'LYNN. Perhaps that explains why I have so much gray hair. But you've known Shelby as long as I have. You know I have to let her be strong. *(Shelby drinks.)* She doesn't seem to be down too deep.

CLAIREE. Talk to us, Shelby.

SHELBY. No.

CLAIREE. That's good enough. *to confide*

M'LYNN. She's been so upset lately. She and Jackson have been going round and round. Dr. Michoud told her at her last appointment that children are not possible. It wasn't the easiest thing in the world to sit there and watch your child's heart break.

SHELBY. Don't talk about me like I'm not here.

M'LYNN. There. She's making some sense. This one wasn't bad at all. But I think we should have a little more juice. *give glass*

ANNELLE. Can I do something? Should I *wipe up some* *C*

M'LYNN. No. She'll be fine in just a minute. She probably won't remember anything. Don't fuss over her . . . Normality is very important to Shelby.

TRUVY. I'm sorry to hear about the children part, M'Lynn.

M'LYNN. I know. She feels that Jackson might be throwing away his chance for children. They've discussed it and he seems to have taken it alright . . . Shelby's the one that's pushing the issue. He's crazy about her and . . . *to bring*

SHELBY. He said, "Shut up. Don't be stupid. There's plenty of kids out there that need good homes. We'll adopt

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ten of 'em. We'll buy 'em if we have to."

CLAIREE. Jackson sounds like good people to me.

SHELBY. I knew right then and there that if he was dumb enough to spend the rest of his life with me, then I'm dumb enough to marry him. (*Shelby is recovering. She realizes what has happened and is embarrassed.*) Oh gosh . . . oh gosh . . . I'm sorry . . . I'm so sorry, Mama. (*M'Lynn hugs Shelby. The phone rings.*)

TRUVY. (*Answering.*) Hello? Yeah, hon . . . just a second. M'Lynn? It's Tommy . . . for Shelby.

M'LYNN. Shelby, honey? It's Tommy.

TRUVY. Shelby, it's Tommy. He wants to know where your car is.

SHELBY. Absolutely not. That's the honeymoon getaway car. He just wants to defile it. Jonathan said he's been buying rubbers by the case.

TRUVY. She'll have to call you back.

SHELBY. (*To M'Lynn.*) Thank you, Mama. (*M'Lynn returns to Annelle who continues working on her hair.*)

TRUVY. Sit up straight. I've got to gild the lily. Now. Are you going to take it down after the reception? I'll be glad to give you a touch-up before you leave on the honeymoon.

SHELBY. I'm going to leave it up as long as possible.

TRUVY. Now. Let me guess where the honeymoon is. I picture tropical. Moonlight for days. Secluded. Somewhere that you can be intimate out of doors . . .

SHELBY. Las Vegas.

TRUVY. The weather's supposed to be nice. I hear it's like living in a blow dryer.

M'LYNN. Shelby? About what Jackson said

SHELBY. I'd rather not talk about it, Mama. What happens in my life now is between Jackson and me. Jackson will take care of me and I will take care of him.

CLAIREE. You can't blame people for being concerned about you, darling.

M'LYNN. What Jackson said about children . . . about adoption . . . was wonderful. And very wise. Not being able to have children is no disgrace. (*Silence.*) Shelby? Did you hear what I said?

give glass to M'Lynn

pause look up to M'Lynn  
to a point not again

C x back touch

gives just x to

too weird

to protect to have out

SHELBY. Mama. I know all about adoption. And I also know the limitations of this body of mine. I would never do anything stupid.

M'LYNN. Finally. You're listening to reason.

TRUVY. Now, Shelby. You're going to have to start untangling this baby's breath.

M'LYNN. Oh, Shelby . . . no.

SHELBY. It's my wedding! I'll stick baby's breath up my nose if I want to.

TRUVY. She's got enough . . .

M'LYNN. Fine. Fine. I am supposed to be the expert on behavior and I can't seem to manage the people in my own family.

SHELBY. Oh! Did you tell them, Mama?

CLAIREE. Tell us what?

M'LYNN. Oh, it's nothing really. I might be promoted to administrator of the Mental Guidance Center.

CLAIREE. Wonderful! That Guidance Center does such good work for the disturbed.

TRUVY. I wish I'd taken my boys there when they were little and straightened them out. I should've realized Louie had problems when his imaginary playmates wouldn't play with him.

SHELBY. Your boys grew up fine. They're just a little scary that's all.

TRUVY. I just think it must be fun for M'Lynn to have access to all that secret personal information. Come on, M'Lynn. Tell us some of your most bizarre mental cases and let us guess who they are. There's a lot of sick tickets in this town.

M'LYNN. I will not discuss office business in a social setting. People need a place they can come unload their problems. I would never violate their confidence.

SHELBY. When mama says she doesn't talk, she means it. She's a brick wall.

CLAIREE. As somebody always said . . . if you don't have anything nice to say about anybody . . . come sit by me.

M'LYNN. (Ignoring.) Do you realize we are being rude to poor Annette?

ANNELLE. Elle . . .

hand it to her

Thematic Quote

pat sofa to line

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M'LYNN. Annelle. She doesn't know us from Adam's house cat and we just keep talking about things foreign to her experiences. Annelle, tell us about yourself.

ANNELLE. There's nothing to tell.

M'LYNN. Where do you live?

ANNELLE. On the corner of Jefferson and Second.

M'LYNN. Which corner?

ANNELLE. The one where you can't see the house for the weeds.

M'LYNN. You must live in Mrs. Robeline's house.

ANNELLE. She's my landlady.

M'LYNN. Are you getting along with her? *to me*

ANNELLE. What's the matter with her? *to me*

M'LYNN. Nothing . . . nothing. Are you happy there?

ANNELLE. She scares me. She's always watching me. Sometimes I catch her looking through my keyhole.

M'LYNN. Oh. Dear me. Uh. Don't worry. She's probably not taking her medication. I'll check on her Monday. *(Beat.)* Shelby? Would you like to finish off that juice?

SHELBY. I'm fine, Mama. You finish it.

M'LYNN. Why don't you drink it? It's going to be a while before the bridesmaid's luncheon.

SHELBY. You know what you need in here, Truvy? You need a radio. Music is wonderful to have in the background. It takes the pressure off having to talk so much.

TRUVY. I used to have one, but I slammed it against the wall when I couldn't figure out where the batteries went. I know now I was the victim of premenstrual syndrome.

SHELBY. I've gotten four radios for wedding presents. I'll give you one.

TRUVY. How sweet!

CLAIREE. What did I just hear? Oh, yes. The Antilly family is selling KPPD. I wonder how much radio stations sell for?

M'LYNN. A lot. But a small town radio station can be a license to print money if it's run right.

SHELBY. Miss Clairee. You should buy KPPD. You got plenty of money.

CLAIREE. What would I do with a radio station? Business never interested me at all. Lloyd took care of all that stuff.

M'LYNN. Shelby, why don't you finish off that juice?

*X to put box away*

SHELBY. Forget the damn juice.

M'LYNN. Shelby'll be fine now. Anyway I always carry some mints in my bag just in case.

TRUVY. Then take some of the butterscotch in that dish. Throw some in her bag, Clairee. They are the best. They start out real hard, but once you suck all the coating off, they get real chewy. My two favorite things . . . crunchy and chewy and buttery . . . all in one. Delicious. (Clairee dumps some in M'Lynn's bag and notices something odd.)

CLAIREE. M'Lynn. You always carry candy in your bag?

M'LYNN. Without fail.

CLAIREE. Then tell me. Do you suck on this often? (Clairee pulls a huge gun from the bag. Gasps all around.)

M'LYNN. Clairee. Put that back. *X to her*

TRUVY. I hate it when people bring weapons into my shop.

SHELBY. How did you get Daddy's gun away from him?

M'LYNN. I had been waiting all morning for my chance. He finally put it down to go to the bathroom.

ANNELLE. I'd like to ask a question. I'm new here and all. Is my life in danger?

TRUVY. No. M'Lynn's husband's just been shooting at some birds. The trees around here are full of 'em this time of year.

M'LYNN. You see, our backyard is full of fruit trees *X*.

SHELBY. Which are full of birds. Daddy has been trying to frighten the birds out of the trees by making loud noises. I didn't want the guests at my reception to spend all night dodging bird *do*.

M'LYNN. The neighborhood is fit to be tied. Ouiser Boudreaux blames my husband's gunshots for the problems of that mangy dog of hers. She insists all the noise has made that stupid animal lose its hair.

TRUVY. Taking the gun was a stroke of genius, M'Lynn.

M'LYNN. I know. *to brag*

ANNELLE. What if he comes over here and tries to get his gun back?

M'LYNN. *↑* Drum would never set foot in a beauty shop. This is women's territory. He probably thinks we all run around naked or something.

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on chair*

*X to chair st*



ANNELLE. (Catching a glimpse out of the window.) There's somebody coming! A strange lady with a strange dog!

CLAIREE. That would be Ouiser.

ANNELLE. That is one ugly dog. What kind of dog is that?

CLAIREE. If Rhett had hair, he would be a collie.

TRUVY. Lord. Give us strength. (The door bursts open. It's Ouiser, very upset.)

OUISER. This is it. I've found it. I am in hell! *put hat on dryer*

TRUVY. 'Morning, Ouiser. *to kitchen*

OUISER. Don't try to get on my good side. I no longer have one. *to wear*

TRUVY. You're a little early. You're not expected 'til elevenish. *OK toward chair to deposit*

OUISER. That's precisely why I'm here. I have to cancel. *take stuff down*

(The phone rings. Ouiser picks it up and hangs up on the caller.) *put*

I have to take my poor dog to the vet before he has a nervous breakdown. My dog I mean. The vet is perfectly healthy. (To Annelle.) You must be the new girl.

ANNELLE. Hi.

OUISER. May I have a glass of water? I have been screaming this morning. (Exit Annelle.)

M'LYNN. I'm sorry this whole thing has gotten out of hand, Ouiser . . .

OUISER. It's not your <sup>XL</sup> fault, M'Lynn. I used to think that you were crazy for marrying that man. Then I thought for a few years that you were just a glutton for punishment. Now I realize that you must be on some mission from God. I have not slept in days. I look like a dog's dinner. However, when I got up this morning, I decided I would try to rise above it. I would start anew. Whatever that man has done, I would overlook it in honor of your wedding day, Shelby. I thought I would make myself a little presentable and floss up the house in case somebody wanted to drop in . . . it being a big day in the neighborhood and all. So I go out to cut some fresh flowers for the living room. I go down to my magnolia tree and there is not a bloom on it!

M'LYNN. Ouiser. The judge has not decided whose tree that is exactly. *pt. out window S.L.*

OUISER. It's mine! (Enter Annelle with glass of water.) Be that

as it may . . . it would not be too much to ask for me to have one blossom to brighten my home. I am all alone except for my dog. *picture toward window*

CLAIREE. You need something in your life besides that dumb animal. *to condemn*

OUISER. Put a lid on it, Clairee. I was standing there looking at my . . . *to mock* my naked magnolia tree when I saw Drum across the way loading what appeared to be a cannon. I asked him what happened to all those magnolia blossoms. He said the wind probably blew them off during the night. Then I asked him how the wind managed to blow them all off into your pool. Then he fired at me! Is that rude or what? *to hit*

M'LYNN. They're blanks. And Drum would never aim a gun at a lady. *to mark*

OUISER. He's a real gentleman. I'll bet he takes the dishes out of the sink before he pees in it. *to insult*

M'LYNN. That's uncalled for.

OUISER. All I know is my poor animal has to be sedated. He has a condition.

SHELBY. Are you sure that's true? Rhett is a very old dog.

OUISER. I am simply going on what the vet tells me.

CLAIREE. Which vet?

OUISER. Whitey Black.

CLAIREE. That's your first mistake. Whitey Black is a moron. I'm not even sure he has opposable thumbs.

SHELBY. Miss Ouiser, Daddy is not trying to drive you crazy. He's just trying to make my reception nice. His heart's in the right place. *doubtful sound of gun*

OUISER. But he cannot do this to my dog! My dog is on his last legs! What am I going to do with the poor animal?

CLAIREE. *(Holding up the recipe book.)* I've got a lot of good recipes here. *take water*

OUISER. *(To Annelle.)* Darling . . . whatever your name is . . . would you look out the window and check on my dog while I smack Clairee on her smart mouth? You may not believe this, but these are the dearest friends I have in this town. *+*

ANNELLE. His color's good. His skin is real pink.

SHELBY. I know for a fact there will be no more gunshots. So why don't you relax, Miss Ouiser? Have some coffee. *smack talk*

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TRUVY. Ladies. This is going to work out beautifully. I'm almost through with Shelby. Annelle can shampoo Ouiser. See. Life can be wonderful.

OUISER. All right. As long as there's no more gunshots, I'll stay. (To Annelle.) What is your name? Did you tell me?

toward

ANNELLE. Annelle.

OUISER. Fine. Are you new in town? I know everyone. I don't recall ever seeing you before.

ANNELLE. I just moved to town not too long ago.

OUISER. With your family?

ANNELLE. No'm. I don't have any family to speak of.

OUISER. With your husband?

ANNELLE. Uh . . . my husband? That's hard to say . . . I . . . uh . . . I don't know.

OUISER. You don't know?

ANNELLE. I'm not sure.

OUISER. I'm intrigued. Are you married or not? These are not difficult questions.

ANNELLE. Uh . . . we're not . . . he's not . . . I can't talk about it.

X to her

CLAIREE & TRUVY. Of course you can. to comfort X toward her

ANNELLE. I'm not sure if I'm married or not . . . he's gone!

sit in dry or hair

OUISER. Honey. Men are the most horrible creatures. to advise

ANNELLE. Everything is horrible. Bunkie . . . that's my husband. He left. We only moved here a month ago. He just vanished last week.

CLAIREE. No idea where he went? X more

ANNELLE. Nobody knows. He took all the money, my jewelry, the car. Most of my clothes were in the trunk.

TRUVY. There might have been foul play. Have you been to the police?

ANNELLE. No . . . but they've been to me. He's in big trouble with the law. Drugs or something. He never paid the rent so I got thrown out of our house and had to move in at crazy old Mrs. Robeline's. The police keep questioning me. But I don't know anything. They say my marriage may not be legal . . .

TRUVY. You should've said something. X kneel to her

ANNELLE. I was scared to. I need a job in the worst way and

I didn't know if you'd hire someone who may or may not be married to someone who might be a dangerous criminal. But I swear to you that my personal tragedy will not interfere with my ability to do good hair.

TRUVY. Of course it won't . . .

ANNELLE. I really don't think things could get any worse.

OUISER. Of course they can.

SHELBY. You are so brave.

TRUVY. You must be made of courage.

ANNELLE. I'm totally alone. Checks are bouncing everywhere. Everything is going wrong. I keep asking myself . . . why me? *Hug her*

SHELBY. We are awful. We are all hateful, awful people.

Here all we've been talking about is weddings and psychotic animals. We've been tearing you up inside, haven't we? I can't tell you how sorry I am. And you've had such a terrible time. Sometimes we don't know how lucky we are.

CLAIREE. What can we do to help?

SHELBY. I know one thing I can do. Tonight, you are going to drop by my house and have some bleeding armadillo groom's cake. It's going to be a great party.

ANNELLE. Oh, I couldn't. I still get real emotional sometimes . . .

SHELBY. I can't stand the thought of someone being unhappy or alone tonight. And if you feel yourself start getting sad, just watch my husband dance. It's very funny.

ANNELLE. You're all so nice.

TRUVY. We enjoy being nice to each other. There's not much else to do in this town.

ANNELLE. But I don't have anything to wear . . .

SHELBY. No problem. I'll bet I have something that'll do. I'll call the house. *(Shelby dials the phone.)*

TRUVY. Now. If you're interested, my garage apartment will be available soon. My son is living there now. Give me a day to straighten it up and sweep out the bed, then come look at it. I'm sure we can work out some arrangement with the rent.

ANNELLE. *(Overcome.)* Oh. *Hug Truvy!*

SHELBY. *(On phone.)* Good! Jonathan. You have to do me a favor. Yes, now! Go in my closet and bring me two or three of

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polka dot. N  
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M'LYNN. W  
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*stand her up*

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be exac*

my Sunday things. Just anything. Use **your judgement**. Very well. Bring the pink dress with the white collar, the pink suit with the cherries pinned on the jacket and the pink and white polka dot. No, Jonathan. Mama doesn't have Daddy's gun. Don't you have better things to do? What? Well stop him! Now! *(She hangs up. She is nervous.)*

CLAIREE. Is something the matter?

SHELBY. We'll see. *(There is a huge explosion.)* Yes.

OUISER. What in the hell!!! *(They all go to the window. The dog begins to bark uncontrollably.)*

M'LYNN. What happened?

SHELBY. Daddy tied explosives to Jonathan's GI Joe bow and arrow and shot them into the trees.

OUISER. Shut up Rhett!

M'LYNN. I hope nobody was hurt!

TRUVY. Well, the birds are flying every which-a-way. And there's white smoke billowing up from your backyard.

CLAIREE. Looks like Drum has set his trees on fire or he's just elected a new pope.

ANNELLE. I guess it worked. All the birds are leaving. *(They all come away from the window except Annelle.)*

OUISER. This is all she wrote. I am going to let that man have it.

ANNELLE. *(Still at window.)* Oh no! Your dog broke his chain! And he's heading toward the smoke!

M'LYNN. Oh, no! That dog will eat Drum alive. And Drum is unarmed!

CLAIREE. Ouiser! Do something! *at window*

TRUVY. Ouiser! Call your dog! He'll listen to you! *open screen door!*

SHELBY. Miss Ouiser! Please! It's my wedding day. Say something to your dog!

OUISER. *(Flings open the door and screams:)* Kill, Rhett! Kill! *(Everyone rushes out the door.)*

*Go in to Chapel*  
CURTAIN.

SCENE II

*It is later in the year. The Saturday before Christmas, to be exact. Not much in the shop has changed. Only half of*

*to state matter of factly*

*Explosion*

*Experiment w/this*

*Fade into Xmas music Country?*

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*the lights are on in the shop. When the lights eventually come back on, we see the subtle changes. The radio Shelby has given Truvy, and a small but festive Christmas tree, and several grotesque handicrafts. At curtain, M'Lynn is sitting under a dead hairdryer. Shelby enters, mystified by the lack of light and the lack of activity.*

*M'Lynn w/  
magazine w/  
pos. stuff  
on chair*

M'LYNN. Shelby!

SHELBY. Mama? Where is everybody? *hug*

M'LYNN. I thought you weren't coming to town until after lunch.

SHELBY. We got an early start because of the traffic. We wanted to drop in on Jackson's parents on the way down here.

M'LYNN. What a treat!

SHELBY. And you have to catch them early. On Saturdays they leave the house at the crack of dawn to start hunting furry little creatures.

M'LYNN. You must not have visited long. *touch her hair*

SHELBY. We didn't. I could tell they were anxious to start killing things. We stopped by the house first. Nobody was there. Where's Truvy?

M'LYNN. She and Annelle are out back sticking pennies in the fuse box. They decorated that little tree and when I plugged it in all the lights blew.

SHELBY. (Pointing to a pair of tacky earrings.) What are those things?

M'LYNN. Red plastic poinsettia earrings. They are a gift from Annelle. She has discovered the wonderful world of Arts and Crafts.

SHELBY. Are Tommy and Jonathan home yet? *x today*

M'LYNN. Yes. Jonathan got home yesterday morning. He loves his classes. It's all he can talk about. I think the main thing architecture school has taught him is how much he should hate his parent's house. Tommy arrived last night and immediately started terrorizing your father. It's nice having the family home for Christmas. *to the*

SHELBY. Some things never change.

M'LYNN. And how are you, honey? *1*

SHELBY. I'm so good, Mama. Just great.

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M'LYNN. You're looking well. Is Jackson at the house?  
SHELBY. No. You know how twitchy he gets. I sent him to look for stocking stuffers.

M'LYNN. Good thinking.

SHELBY. Uh. Jackson and I have something to tell you. We wanted to tell you when you and Daddy were together, but you're never together, so it's every man for himself. I'm pregnant.

M'LYNN. Shelby?!

SHELBY. I'm going to have a baby.

M'LYNN. I realize that.

SHELBY. Well . . . is that it? Is that all you're going to say?

M'LYNN. I . . . what do you expect me to say?

SHELBY. Something along the lines of congratulations.

M'LYNN. . . . Congratulations.

SHELBY. Would it be too much to ask for a little excitement? Not too much, I wouldn't want you to break a sweat or anything.

M'LYNN. I'm in a state of shock! I didn't think . . .

SHELBY. In June. Oh, Mama. You have to help me plan.

We're going to get a new house. Jackson and I are going house hunting next week. Jackson loves to hunt for anything.

M'LYNN. What does Jackson say about this?

SHELBY. Oh. He's very excited. He says he doesn't care whether it's a boy or girl . . . but I know he really wants a son so bad he can taste it. He's so cute about the whole thing.

It's all he can talk about . . . Jackson Latcherie Junior.

M'LYNN. But does he ever listen? I mean when doctors and specialists give you advice. I know you never listen, but does he? I guess since he doesn't have to carry the baby, it doesn't really concern him.

SHELBY. Mama. Don't be mad. I couldn't bear it if you were. It's Christmas.

M'LYNN. I'm not mad, Shelby. This is just . . . hard. I thought that . . . I don't know.

SHELBY. Mama. I want a child.

M'LYNN. But what about the adoption proceedings? You have filed so many applications.

SHELBY. Mama. It didn't take us long to see the handwriting

*M'Lynn sit  
Couch put  
down magazine*

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the way down

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to start hunting

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father. It's nice

*Sit in chair  
fall*

*to seek an ally*

*turn away on couch  
turn back to her  
to be hopeful*

*to interrupt*

ing on the wall. No judge is going to give a baby to someone with my medical track record. Jackson even put out some feelers about buying one.

M'LYNN. People do it all the time. *move toward*

SHELBY. Listen to me. I want a child of my own. I think it would help things a lot.

M'LYNN. I see.

SHELBY. Mama. I know. I know. Don't think I haven't thought this through. You can't live a life if all you do is worry. And you worry too much. In some ways it's a comfort to me. I never worry because I know you're worrying enough for the both of us. Jackson and I have given this a lot of thought.

M'LYNN. Has he really? *Stand K behind chair L*

SHELBY. Don't start on Jackson. *turns to her*

M'LYNN. Shelby. *to M'Lynn* Your poor body has been through so much. Why do you deliberately want to . . .

SHELBY. Mama. Diabetics have healthy babies all the time.

M'LYNN. You are special. There are limits to what you can do.

*to comment*

SHELBY. Mama *stand* . . . listen. I have it all planned. I'm going to be very careful. And this time next year, I'm going to be bringing your big healthy grandbaby to the Christmas festival. No one is going to be hurt or disappointed, or even inconvenienced.

M'LYNN. Least of all Jackson, I'm sure. *X to window*

SHELBY. You are jealous because you no longer have any say-so in what I do. And that drives you up the wall. You're ready to spit nails because you can't call the shots.

M'LYNN. I did not raise my daughter to talk to me this way.

SHELBY. Yes you did. Whenever any of us asked you what you wanted us to be when we grew up, what did you say?

M'LYNN. Shelby, I am not in the mood for games.

SHELBY. What did you say? Just tell me what you said. Answer me.

M'LYNN. I said all I wanted was for you to be happy.

SHELBY. O.K. The thing that would make me happy is to have a baby. If I could adopt one I would, but I can't. I'm

*X upstage of her cut angle*

going to ha  
M'LYNN. I  
SHELBY. M  
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*blaring.*)  
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TRUVY. M



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going to have a baby. I wish you would be happy, too.  
M'LYNN. I wish I . . . I don't know what I wish.  
SHELBY. Mama. I don't know why you have to make every-  
thing so difficult. I look at having this baby as the opportu-  
nity of a lifetime. Sure, there may be some risk involved.  
That's true for anybody. But you get through it and life goes  
on. And when it's all said and done there'll be a little piece of  
immortality with Jackson's looks and my sense of  
style . . . I hope. Mama, please. I need your support. I  
would rather have thirty minutes of wonderful than a life-  
time of nothing special. (The lights come up. The radio is  
blaring.)  
M'LYNN. They're on, Truvy!  
SHELBY. Please. Don't tell anybody yet. I want to tell  
Daddy first.  
M'LYNN. I never tell anyone anything. (M'Lynn goes to turn  
the radio volume down.)  
TRUVY. (Enters, carrying Christmas decorations.) Well! Look  
who's here! Give me a hug right here and now!  
SHELBY. Hi, Truvy! Merry Christmas! Put on a happy face  
TRUVY. Ho, ho, ho. (Calling through the door.) Annelle! We  
have a special mystery guest! (To Shelby.) You're just in time.  
You can have the honor of lighting the tree of beauty. X to  
SHELBY. How precious. What a novel idea to trim it with  
hair things. DSR  
TRUVY. (Annelle enters.) It's all Annelle's idea. She has quite  
an eye for the unusual. X up of table  
ANNELLE. Hi there! (Hugs Shelby.) to continue  
SHELBY. (The tree and the decorations.) Annelle, you did all decorating.  
this?  
ANNELLE. Guilty. Truvy just turned over the decoration  
responsibility to me. I like themes. And I despise the com-  
mercialization of Christmas, always have. So I went to the  
fire sale at the Baptist Book Store in Shreveport last month.  
They had mismatched Manger scenes at incredibly low  
prices. I cleaned them out of Baby Jesuses, which Truvy's  
husband helped me modify into ornaments. Very simple.  
Tiny white lights, Baby Jesuses, and spoolies. Hold up a few pt  
TRUVY. My husband has redone Poot's old room so An-

SXR

DSR

X up of table  
to continue  
decorating.

X in front  
of S. to  
tree

Hold up a few pt

nelle can have a workshop for her handicrafts. That little garage apartment is so cramped. (*Truvy places grotesque handmade treetop ornament on tree.*)

SHELBY. Isn't that nice. Are your boys coming home for Christmas?

TRUVY. No. Louie brought home his girlfriend at Thanksgiving. The nicest thing I can say about her is that all her tattoos are spelled correctly. Guess it's just me, the old man . . . and Annelle. (*Offers Shelby the plug for the lights.*) Do the honors, missy. And hope it doesn't blow up again. (*Shelby lights the tree. Applause all around.*)

SHELBY. (*Triumphantly to M'Lynn.*) See. I know what I'm doing.

TRUVY. I know your mother is so happy you could get in early enough to make the festival. I hear it's going to be the best ever. More fireworks, a nativity made entirely of sparklers, and a huge new sign on the riverbank that says, "I Heart Chinquapin Parish." It's going to be spectacular. And guess who the grand marshall of the parade is? Wayne Newton!

SHELBY. I wouldn't miss a Christmas festival for the world. (*Truvy and Annelle begin decorating. Shelby gets M'Lynn's attention from under the dryer.*) Oh. Mama. While I'm thinking. I brought some white chocolate cherry cheesecakes for our open house.

M'LYNN. That doesn't sound like finger food to me.

SHELBY. They're bite sized. Like this.

M'LYNN. Fine. I'm sure you know what you're doing.

TRUVY. (*Seeking Annelle's approval on decoration placement.*) Annelle?

ANNELLE. Perfect.

SHELBY. And, Mama? I've been cleaning out closets . . . getting rid of stuff. I've brought you some things I don't want that I've hardly worn. I thought maybe your patients might be less disturbed if they had something stylish to wear.

TRUVY. (*Wondering where to put some decorations.*) Annelle?

ANNELLE. The chair. (*To Shelby.*) Uh. Excuse me, Shelby? Uh. If you don't have any special plans for the clothes . . . could I have them? Riverview Baptist has a

clothes clo  
dresses.

SHELBY.

I'll get 'em

TRUVY.

Methodist

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ANNELLE

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SHELBY.

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& table  
BOX  
stuffed  
animals

clothes closet for the poor. We're real low on women's dresses.

SHELBY. Sure. That's a wonderful idea. They're in the car. I'll get 'em in a minute.

TRUVY. It breaks my heart that she won't come to the Methodist church with me. I think Riverview Baptist is a little too ~~poor~~ "Praise the Lord" for my taste.

ANNELLE. (With an edge.) Some of them do get a little carried away. But there's nothing wrong with that.

SHELBY. No. A lot of Mama's mental patients are born again Christians. I mean that only in the best sense of the word.

TRUVY. We're just glad to see that Annelle is settling down and finding her way. She's had a few rough months, haven't you, honey?

ANNELLE. Oh. After they finally threw Bunkie Dupuy behind bars and I was rid of him, I went wild. I was drinking, running around, smoking . . .

TRUVY. Jezebel!

ANNELLE. But Truvy helped me see the error of my ways. I've realized I have something to offer. I joined a church last month. Truvy's helped me see I have talents. I've done guest lectures on beauty at the trade school . . .

TRUVY. Our little Annelle has become one of the hottest tickets in town.

ANNELLE. Truvy. Stop. I am enjoying the city more. And I am so excited about the Christmas festival today. I've wanted to come to it all my life. And now I live here!

TRUVY. Tell her who you have a date with.

ANNELLE. Truvy, will you hush? *X to same plane*

TRUVY. Tell her, missy. Shelby is pretty much totally responsible for the whole thing!

ANNELLE. Sammy DeSoto.

TRUVY. He has a body that doesn't stop anywhere.

SHELBY. How am I responsible? *X to C*

ANNELLE. He was bartending at your wedding reception last spring. That's when I met him. He makes a mean cherry coke.

TRUVY. Romance. This is what I live for. Can we do anything for you today, Shelby? *X to S*

*at chair  
Planning  
top*

*X to Y's  
station  
put some  
on menu*

*X to your  
put out  
disc*

*37 - counter w/ something for window*



tion her tiara properly on her head so it wouldn't slip around during the parade. I sprayed her hair within an inch of its life.

SHELBY. Why did I have to ask? I should have known. All you Marmillions are gorgeous. Beauty is genetic in your family.

CLAIREE. Nancy Beth is a pretty girl. <sup>5x</sup> Do you know she is Miss Merry Christmas, Miss Soybean, and Miss Watermelon?

TRUVY. But dumb as a post.

CLAIREE. Empty is the head that wears the crown.

TRUVY. You have to admit God did a little dance around that family. Drew is so successful. Belle does her own hair. Their children are perfect. They're like a family on TV. They don't have a care in the world.

M'LYNN. That's not necessarily true.

TRUVY. Oh?

M'LYNN. That's all I'm saying.

TRUVY. Oh.

SHELBY. I should've won Miss Merry Christmas the year I ran. My talent was very showy.

CLAIREE. We told you at the time, Shelby. Fire batons are not everyone's cup of tea.

SHELBY. Mama didn't approve of my twirling fire batons.

M'LYNN. I just don't approve when you insist on doing dangerous things.

SHELBY. Mama hated those fire batons.

M'LYNN. I have never hated anything, Shelby. I supported you, but I just couldn't watch you. Your father, on the other hand, had a field day. He got so much pleasure out of standing in the backyard for hours watching you practice, holding the garden hose so he could put you out when you caught fire.

SHELBY. My entire pageant ensemble was coordinated in shades of pink . . . soup to nuts. I twirled to the music from *Hawaii 5-0*. It was my theme song.

M'LYNN. But we were proud of her.

TRUVY. The year I competed, the swimsuit competition was my downfall. Most women look for a swimsuit that will lift and separate; I look for one that will divide and conquer. I've always been built for comfort, not for speed.

5x  
sit on  
karm  
of

gesture

SHELBY. Who got the title your year, Miss Clairee?

CLAIREE. Oh, child. Nobody. There wasn't even a Christmas festival when I was in high school. Why Jesus wasn't even born until I was a junior in college. I remember it distinctly. My friends and I were all out watching our flocks by night . . .

TRUVY. Get over here, Clairee. Annelle's gotta gift wrap your head. *X to Clairee*

OUISER. *(Entering in a huff.)* I could just spit.

TRUVY. 'Morning Ouiser.

OUISER. The parade doesn't even start for four hours and already people are parking on my lawn. It will flatten my grass.

CLAIREE. *(Mock sincerity.)* Here. Let me hold you.

OUISER. I hate out of town tourists.

SHELBY. Hello!

OUISER. Shelby! What are you doing here? *X R. shake hand*

SHELBY. Being a tourist, I guess. But I won't flatten your grass, I promise.

OUISER. Good God. You've had the good sense to move away from this festival madness. *(I can't understand why you'd drag yourself back for a couple of firecrackers and drunk teenagers earping on your shoes.)* *pat hand*

SHELBY. I like it.

ANNELLE. Miss Ouiser. I think you need a healthy dose of Christmas spirit. *(Annelle interrupts conditioning Clairee to get a present from the tree.)* *X to her*

OUISER. I have so much Christmas spirit I could scream.

ANNELLE. *(Handing her a present.)* Merry Christmas!

OUISER. *(Opening present.)* I just finished putting out my yard decorations.

CLAIREE. Ouiser. Keep off the grass signs are not Christmas decorations.

OUISER. They are bordered in holly. *(Pulls out poinsettia earrings.)* You made them, didn't you?

ANNELLE. With my own two hands.

OUISER. Your present is . . . uh . . . back at the house. I haven't wrapped it yet.

SHELBY. How's Rhett?

OUISER. He's getting along. As a matter of fact, he's the

poster dog for the Christmas festival. (*Ouiser points to a poster on the wall with a picture on it.*)

TRUVY. That is Rhett! I didn't recognize him.

CLAIREE. It's nice to see Rhett with some hair again.

SHELBY. I have to run some errands, but before I go . . . Miss Ouiser. I have met an old friend of yours.

OUISER. Oh?

SHELBY. Owen Jenkins.

OUISER. Oh.

CLAIREE. Owen? Now there's a blast from the past.

SHELBY. Do you remember him? He remembers you.

OUISER. Of course I remember him. He had the longest nose hair in the free world.

SHELBY. He doesn't now. He hardly has any hair anywhere.

CLAIREE. Owen's been gone from Chinquapin since God was a boy. I'd forgotten he'd ever existed.

SHELBY. Well now Owen lives in Monroe and goes to First Presbyterian. He sings in the choir. One night at choir practice we were doing an especially beautiful Mozart thing and I was moved to tears. He offered me his handkerchief and we got to talking. When he found out where I was from he asked me if I knew you. I said not only did I know you, but you were a neighbor and your dog has almost killed my father on numerous occasions. He's had a very interesting life. He lived in Ohio somewhere. His wife just died recently and he moved back down here.

OUISER. Does this story have a point?

SHELBY. No, not really. He just remembers you fondly, I think.

OUISER. Can't imagine why. He wasn't a bad fellow. But I managed to run him off and marry the first of two total deadbeats.

TRUVY. Unrequited love. My favorite.

SHELBY. Maybe sometime I could arrange for us all to get together.

OUISER. Maybe not.

SHELBY. Why not?

OUISER. Shelby. I managed in just a few decades to marry the two most worthless men in the universe and proceed to

*arm of chair*

*to hint*

have the three most ungrateful children ever conceived. The only reason people are nice to me is because I have more money than God. I am not about to open a new can of worms.

CLAIREE. Do I detect a negativity in your tone?

M'LYNN. If this is really the way you feel, Ouiser, it isn't healthy. Maybe you should think about coming down and talking to someone at the Guidance Center. We're there to help.

OUISER. I'm not crazy. I've just been in a very bad mood for forty years.

SHELBY. Well, Annelle? What do you want me to do with these old clothes? I need to get them out of the back seat.

ANNELLE. Just bring 'em in.

SHELBY. O.K. Then I'll go finish my Christmas shopping, Mama.

TRUVY. I could shoot you. I haven't even started.

CLAIREE. Please. I haven't even washed the dishes from Thanksgiving.

ANNELLE. What did you get your mama?

SHELBY. I told her this morning what part of it was.

TRUVY. Well, let's hear it, missy.

M'LYNN. I think it's a secret.

OUISER. Obviously there's no such thing in this room.

M'LYNN. It's up to you, honey.

SHELBY. I'm going to have a baby. (*Whoops and joy all around. Except for M'Lynn.*)

TRUVY. Congratulations! No wonder you haven't said much this morning, M'Lynn. (*Taunts.*) Grandma! Aren't you excited? Smile! It increases your face value!

SHELBY. June 21.

TRUVY. And those doctors said you couldn't have children. What do they know? I guess you showed them.

M'LYNN. The doctor said Shelby *shouldn't* have children. There's a big difference. I guess you showed us all, Shelby.

SHELBY. I've got to get the clothes. Miss Ouiser? Are you bringing your shrimp meat pies to our open house tonight?

OUISER. Don't I always? They'll be there.

SHELBY. Good. So will Owen Jenkins. I opened the worms for you. (*Shelby exits.*)

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OUISER. I can't believe she did that. Owen? After all these years? I'm not sure I can be gracious under pressure.

M'LYNN. Shelby, Shelby. Her heart does get the best of her sometimes.

TRUVY. This baby. That's not exactly great news, is it?

M'LYNN. She wants this so badly. I just don't know . . .

CLAIREE. Oh boy . . .

TRUVY. Oh, honey. I wish I had some words of wisdom . . . but I don't. So I will focus on the joy of the situation. Congratulations.

OUISER. Absolutely.

M'LYNN. Diabetics have healthy babies all the time.

ANNELLE. It will all be fine.

CLAIREE. Of course it will.

M'LYNN. Thank you, ladies. You're right. We'll make it through this just fine. You know what they say. That which does not kill us makes us stronger.

OUISER. *(Looking out window.)* What is that girl up to?

ANNELLE. Shelby's donating some clothes to the poor.

OUISER. *(Opening door for Shelby.)* I hope poor people like pink.

TRUVY. *(To Shelby.)* Just dump 'em on the couch.

ANNELLE. Miss M'Lynn, you sure you don't mind me taking them? If your patients need them . . .

M'LYNN. No, no. Shelby <sup>stand</sup> said you could have 'em. And what she says goes.

SHELBY. That's not true, Mama.

M'LYNN. Shelby, you always insist on having the last word.

SHELBY. *(At the door.)* I do not. *(She slams the door and runs off. Lights out and the bombastic sounds of Handel's Messiah fill the air as we have . . .)*

CURTAIN.

#28 Xmas  
CD

Fade into  
Rhonda Vincent #2  
Play thru intermission

## ACT TWO

*In the blackout before curtain, we hear the radio. It is a male D.J. for KPPD. Totally fatuous and self-possessed, it is his voice we hear over the radio throughout Act II.*

D.J. You're listening to KPPD, the station of choice in Chinquapin Parish. Now stop by the shopping center this afternoon. I'll be broadcasting al fresco . . . that means out of doors for those of you that aren't Latin scholars. There'll be prizes, and a battle of the bands, all sponsored by KPPD. Swing on by and meet me in person. See how good-looking I really am. Coming up now . . . a half hour of nonstop music so I can make it over to the shopping center. Let's hope none of these records has a scratch on 'em, 'cause I'm outta here. I'm gonna kick things off with one of my personal all-time favorites. (*Song starts to play.*) See ya at the shopping center!

### SCENE I

#1 Women of Country CD

*It is June, eighteen months later. The radio is playing. Nothing much in the shop has changed. Maybe new curtains and a Mr. Coffee. Truvy is cutting Shelby's hair. The hair is very short, very boyish. There is an underlying uneasiness in Shelby's behavior. Clairee is being "done" by Annelle. Shelby's radio plays, but fades in and out. Truvy and Annelle have to whack it from time to time to make it play. Clairee has been regaling them with a story and they are laughing.*

SHELBY. But didn't he scare you to death coming by so late?  
CLAIREE. It wasn't that late. About 9:30, I guess.  
SHELBY. Still, somebody knocking on my bedroom window after dark would scare the daylight out of me.  
CLAIREE. Not me. Hope springs eternal, I suppose. I was so disappointed when I realized it was only my nephew.

The Visitor

SHELBY  
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CLAIREE  
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CLAIREE  
it.  
SHELBY

Fading!

SHELBY. Well I just think it's awful of Drew to throw his son out of the house. Parents should never throw their children out of the house.

CLAIREE. My brother can be very hotheaded when he wants to be. But he really didn't throw Marshall out. Marshall just came over to my house while his daddy cooled off. I adore Marshall. We stayed up half the night talking last night.

radio. It is a half-possessed, about Act II.

ce in Chin- this after- means out of There'll be by KPPD. d-looking I of nonstop nter. Let's 'cause I'm y personal e shopping

Radio Stops

TRUVY. (Finishing Shelby's hair with a flourish.) Well. That's it. Are you ready to see the new Shelby Latcherie?

SHELBY. I . . . don't know.

TRUVY. You're gonna have to sooner or later. Our world is full of reflective surfaces.

SHELBY. I can't believe I'm getting so worked up over something as silly as a haircut.

CLAIREE. You look precious.

SHELBY. O.K. I'm ready. (Truvy turns Shelby into the mirror.)

Oh, gosh . . . it's so weird . . .

TRUVY. (Referring to a magazine picture.) I did what you wanted, didn't I, honey?

SHELBY. Yes. I didn't mean . . . of course. You did a beautiful job. I've never had short hair, that's all.

TRUVY. Well this is what we Cosmo girls call a "rite du passage." (Shelby is visibly upset.)

SHELBY. I'm sorry. I'm being so ridiculous.

TRUVY. It's O.K., honey. Please don't . . . please don't cry because you know . . . I will, too. I have a strict policy that no one cries alone in my presence.

CLAIREE. Ladies . . . ladies. Please. (Clairee and Annelle hand them Kleenex.) Remind me never to take these two to see Dark Victory. They'd never survive.

SHELBY. (Rallying.) Enough! I love my hair!

TRUVY. Whew! My artistic nature is so relieved.

ANNELLE. It's very becoming. I guess with that baby, you don't have time to spend hours fussing with your hair. You need something you can just run your fingers through and go.

CLAIREE. It's totally adorable. Your mother's going to love it.

SHELBY. Mama's going to freak out. She just thinks I'm

is playing. be new cur- Shelby's hair. underlying ing "done" in and out. ne to time to with a story

Radio Comes on

by so late? ess. m window

se. I was so he

Tap fingers on mirror

(Rapid out)

Real hair turn her from mirror

Transformation

X to hit radio

Rallying

getting a trim. I wasn't up to a big debate with her this morning. Now! Truvy! Let's do my nails!

TRUVY. This *is* a treat! No one around here ever wants a manicure. I don't even know what to charge for a full day of beauty.

SHELBY. I want the works. I want to feel completely pampered today. Mama's gonna want a manicure, too.

TRUVY. I am going to paint my front door red and change my name to Elizabeth Arden.

CLAIREE. Manicures, saucy new hairdos. What's going on?

SHELBY. We're always up to something . . . you know that. (Changing subject.) But I want to get back to this Drew

and Belle nonsense. I hope they reconcile with Marshall. Speaking as a parent, they better get their act together. I do not approve of friction between parents and children.

CLAIREE. Oh, I think it'll all blow over. I have to admit. He did go about it the wrong way.

TRUVY. What did he do? *X to sit*

CLAIREE. He marched in unexpected from Los Angeles while Drew and Belle were preparing for the annual Mar-million shrimp boil. Marshall without so much as a hello says, "Mama and Daddy. I have something to tell you. I have a brain tumor. I have three months to live." Well, naturally Drew and Belle became hysterical. Then Marshall says, "Hey folks, I'm just kidding. I'm only gay."

SHELBY. That was his idea of breaking the news gently? *to Clairee*

CLAIREE. Drew became incredibly distraught and started throwing wet shrimp at him, screaming at him to get out of his sight, so Marshall came to my house, smelling like a can of cat food.

TRUVY. What do you think Drew and Belle are feeling right now?

CLAIREE. I don't know. They just considered themselves to be a model family for so long. First with Nancy Beth dethroned from her Miss Merry Christmas title after that unfortunate motel thing. . . .

SHELBY. What motel thing? I don't live here anymore, remember?

TRUVY. Nancy Beth was discovered in a nearby motel with a high political official.

*X to sit*  
*Shock Value*

*take off her shoes*

CLAIREE  
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TRUVY  
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SHELBY  
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A Start Playway

CLAIREE. They were both high. They'd been smoking everything but their shoes.

TRUVY. To be the only Miss Merry Christmas in history caught with her tinsel down around her knees was a very humiliating experience for the Marmillion family.

SHELBY. How do you feel about Marshall?

CLAIREE. Haven't really thought about it. But I want you to know he's always welcome at my house. I'm very proud of him. He built up that chain of sportswear stores all by himself without a penny of family money. He says, "I am a self-made man. I pulled myself up by my own jockstraps."

TRUVY. He could always turn a phrase. *(Truvy is about to use a bottle of something for Shelby's manicure, but she realizes the bottle is empty. She turns to ask Annelle for some, but Annelle is in silent prayer. Uncomfortable, Truvy waits for Annelle to finish. The others also notice Annelle.)*

ANNELLE. Amen.

TRUVY. Amen. Annelle? I'm out of uh . . . *(Holds up the bottle.)*

ANNELLE. Is it still next to . . . ?

TRUVY. No. It's over the . . .

ANNELLE. O.K. *(Annelle exits.)*

SHELBY. Was she praying?

TRUVY. Yes.

SHELBY. Why?

TRUVY. Got me. Maybe she was praying for Marshall and Drew and Belle. Maybe she was praying for us because we were gossiping. Maybe she was praying because the elastic is shot in her pantyhose. Who knows? She prays at the drop of a hat these days.

SHELBY. How long has she been this way?

TRUVY. Ever since Mardi Gras. She had her choice of going to a Bible weekend with her Sunday School class or to New Orleans with me and two other sinners. She left that Friday a pleasant, well-adjusted young lady and she returned on Tuesday a Christian.

SHELBY. What does her boyfriend say?

TRUVY. Sammy's so confused he doesn't know whether to scratch his watch or wind his butt. He's crazy about her. He says he could deal with another man in her life, but he has

Dishin'  
The  
Dirt

Holy  
Rollin'

Radio  
Fades

trouble with the father, the son, and the Holy Ghost.  
SHELBY. Well, I'm pretty religious, but that stuff makes me feel kind of creepy.

TRUVY. Well, I'm torn. I've got two sons that I'm afraid are going to hell in a handcart and a semi-daughter that strives to be the kind of girl Jesus would bring home to Mama. I don't know what to think. I don't understand those people . . . but they sometimes seem to have a peace about things that I've never had. Maybe I'm just jealous. *(Annelle enters, smacks the radio to make it play. Clairee changes subject.)*

CLAIREE. And Marshall is so thoughtful. He brought me this pin. *(Clairee reveals a piece of jewelry under her beauty smock.)* It's gold and enamel.

TRUVY. It's a bug.

CLAIREE. It's fine jewelry. It's little eyes are rubies, my birthstone.

SHELBY. Does Marshall have a . . . uh . . . you know . . . friends?

CLAIREE. We talked a little bit about that. I'm such a nosy old thing. I asked him how he . . . met people. 'Cause in my day you could tell by a man's carriage and demeanor which side his bread was buttered on. But today? In this day and age? Who knows? I asked Marshall, "How can you tell?" and he said, "All gay men have track lighting. And all gay men are named Mark, Rick, or Steve." He is such a nut . . . track lighting. *(Everyone laughs.)*

OUISER. *(Enters carrying a sack.)* Morning.

TRUVY. Morning, Ouiser!

OUISER. What's so funny?

SHELBY. Miss Clairee was just telling us the true story of track lighting.

OUISER. I love mine. It highlights my new artwork.

CLAIREE. Since when do you have track lighting?

OUISER. About three weeks. It's in my foyer and up the stairs. It was my grandson's idea.

SHELBY. I haven't seen him in ages. How is he?

OUISER. Steve's fine. I brought you all some tomatoes. First of the season. I didn't expect to see you in town, Shelby.

SHELBY. Well, I'm here.

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kitchen.  
TRUVY  
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atoes. First  
Shelby.

X to S  
Philosophies

OUISER. Take some tomatoes back home with you. There's plenty. Boy! Your hair's short. Looks good!

SHELBY. Thank you, Miss Ouiser. Jack Jr. loves tomatoes . . . he smears them on the cafe curtains in the kitchen.

TRUVY. Your mama says you have become an incredible gourmet cook.

SHELBY. I try. When we first married all Jackson wanted was meat and potatoes and vegetables just the way his mama made them . . . cooked to mush. But I've broken him of that. I even got some pâté down him last week. He swore it was dog food. Jack Jr. loved it, though.

OUISER. Clairee. How many tomatoes do you want? Tomatoes have no calories and are full of . . . (She throws away a wormy rotten one.) . . . things.

CLAIREE. Ouiser, you're almost chipper today. Why are you in such a good mood? Did you run over a small child or something? *tease*

OUISER. Do you or do you not want tomatoes?

CLAIREE. Don't give me all of 'em.

OUISER. Somebody's got to take them. I hate 'em. I try not to eat healthy food if I can help it. The sooner this body wears out the better off I'll be. I have trouble getting enough grease into my diet.

ANNELLE. Then why do you grow them?

OUISER. I am an old Southern woman. We're supposed to put on funny looking hats and ugly old dresses and grow vegetables in the dirt. Don't ask me why. I don't make the rules.

CLAIREE. You should get some gloves. Your hands look like a couple of T-bone steaks.

SHELBY. Health is the most important thing, Miss Ouiser. Trust me on this.

OUISER. And. While I have everyone's attention. This morning I went to my mailbox and found that someone . . . (Directed at Annelle.) has put me on the mailing list for the Riverview Baptist Church. Lucky me. I am now receiving chain letters for Christ.

ANNELLE. They aren't chain letters. They're part of my

bag-  
by foot  
counter

filling  
bags

X to C  
to C

X to  
Transf  
to give  
TIS

Junk Mail

prayer group's "Reach out and touch" project. We were each supposed to write somebody in the community that we thought might be in spiritual trouble and invite them to worship. (*Ouiser plops down a big wad of mail.*) I guess you made everybody's list.

OUISER. I think it is in the worst possible taste to pray for perfect strangers. †

CLAIREE. "Reach out" to Ouiser and you'll pull back a bloody stump. Shelby! I just realized! You've saved me a phone call. Next Friday Sis Orelle and I are driving up to Monroe and we'd like to take you and Jackson to dinner if we may.

SHELBY. Uh . . . I can't Friday night. I'm sorry. What's the occasion?

CLAIREE. This is going to sound a little silly, but we're coming up to go to the Little Theatre. We have tickets to a play.

TRUVY. I didn't know you went to see anything that didn't have a goalpost at either end.

CLAIREE. Up to now, I haven't. But Sis and I decided at bridge one day that we needed to keep up. We wanted to expose ourselves to a little more culture. And that's not easy to come by in this neck of the woods.

TRUVY. Exactly what are you "exposing" yourself to?

CLAIREE. I don't know. Something. The last thing we saw there was pretty good. It was Shakespeare. I was a little apprehensive at first, but you know what? When you get right down to it . . . he writes pretty straightforward stuff. I have to admit when they hide behind curtains and put little masks over their faces to fool people . . . that got kind of silly. Sis fell for it, but I didn't.

OUISER. Sis Orelle is so dumb. She thinks Sherlock Holmes is a subdivision.

CLAIREE. Anyway. Sis and I like it so much, we're planning a theatre trip to New York.

TRUVY. New York?! Oh, Clairee. I'm green with envy. Promise me you'll go to the first floor of Bloomingdales and come back and tell me everything. *Woman's Day* says it's impossible to walk through there and not get made up.

O p  
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in trash  
Spreading  
my  
wings

Trepidations

CLAIREE  
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TRUVY. I  
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Miss Clair  
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OUISE  
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they're



CLAIREE. We're just talking. I'm scared to death of getting on a plane.

TRUVY. It's a piece of cake. You're safer flying than you are in a car. Just sit in the rear. That's the best place to survive the crash.

SHELBY. Miss Ouiser. Why don't you go to Monroe with Miss Clairee?

OUISER. I am not exposing myself to anything.

CLAIREE. You should broaden your horizons.

OUISER. You broaden your horizons your way. I'll broaden my horizons mine. I have plans next Friday. I'm going to Shreveport to have my colors done.

CLAIREE. Your what?

OUISER. I'm going to get my colors done. I'm going to find out if I'm a summer or spring or fall or winter. It's a present from Owen.

CLAIREE. What are you talking about?

OUISER. Every person has a particular coloring . . . summer, spring, so on. You determine what season you are, then you know what colors look best on you. Then you're given samples of the colors that are in your palette. It's most helpful when you shop for clothes. It gives you fashion courage.

CLAIREE. That is the stupidest thing I have ever heard of.

OUISER. It's all the rage.

SHELBY. A lot of my friends in Monroe have had it done.

TRUVY. There's a quiz on that very topic in that *Family Circle* right over there. I am the epitome of winter.

OUISER. Why don't you have it done, Shelby? You're so fashion conscious.

SHELBY. No. I'm scared to. I might find out that pink is not in my palette and I'm not sure I could live with that.

CLAIREE. I have heard it all. Well. I am going to the theatre. I am going to support the arts in our area.

OUISER. I'll write a check. I will support art. I just don't want to see it.

CLAIREE. It wouldn't harelip you, you know.

OUISER. Let's get one thing straight. I don't see plays because I can nap at home for free. I don't see movies because they're all trash and full of naked people. And I don't read

Look at Maggie's

-to be proud

Baby Steps

Leave me alone

books because if they're any good, they'll be made into a miniseries.

SHELBY. I'm surprised you and Daddy don't get along any better than you do. Miss Ouiser? How're things with Owen? I try to check up on you, but I haven't been able to lately.

OUISER. They're alright. I enjoy his company . . . on occasion.

CLAIREE. I can report that the Sherwood Florist delivery truck stops by her house at least twice a week.

OUISER. He knows I like fresh flowers.

CLAIREE. And I can report that a strange car is parked in her garage at least once a week.

OUISER. There. My secret's out. I'm having an affair with a Mercedes Benz.

TRUVY. Ouiser. Forgive me. I have been dying to ask this. Are you and Owen . . . you know? *Pause all look*

CLAIREE. Wait, wait wait! I have to get a mental picture of this.

OUISER. A dirty mind is a terrible thing to waste. Not that it's any of anyone's business, but no. We are friends. He would like more. I'm dealing with that. But I am old and set in my ways.

SHELBY. You are playing hard to get.

CLAIREE. At her age she should be playing "Beat the Clock." She's just like her old dog . . . both have trouble with their new tricks.

TRUVY. Ah! No talking trash in my shop! *to express shock*

OUISER. I can't help it if men find me desirable. *to brag*

TRUVY. Shelby? When are you going to bring that baby of yours by?

SHELBY. Oh! I brought a picture of him. Let me show you! *Show to*

TRUVY. Has he gained any weight?

SHELBY. He's about fifteen pounds now. *(Proudly showing pictures.)*

OUISER. God. He is a tiny thing. *X to S*

SHELBY. He only weighed a pound and a half when he was born. But he'll catch up. Give him time.

CLAIREE. Bless his heart. Boy, those were some anxious hours, weren't they? We didn't know who to worry about the most . . . you or that baby. *to take pictures to call*

*Pinching & Poking*

*The Sweet & the bitter*

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CLAIREE  
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ANNIE

SHELBY. I certainly wouldn't recommend having a baby three months premature.

CLAIREE. I get upset thinking about it . . .

SHELBY. Then let's don't. Yep. Jack Jr. is a little fighter. And he's going to wear me out. I wish I knew where he gets all that energy.

TRUVY. Don't try to do it all yourself. You get that husband of yours to help. They're supposed to be helping out this decade.

SHELBY. He helps, I guess. Mama doesn't think he does. But he does. Sometimes. When he thinks about it. Which isn't often. Most of the time he doesn't do a damn thing. And every weekend he's off hunting.

TRUVY. (*Surprised.*) Oh. But . . . Jackson certainly is a good provider.

SHELBY. Yes. That's true.

TRUVY. And he'll come around. And when he does, I want you to run tell me how you accomplished it. And I'll get to work on that sofa slug I'm married to. (*Truvy offers a choice of nail polish colors.*)

SHELBY. This one's pretty . . .

TRUVY. I thought so. Private passion is my favorite. It's luscious without being sleazy. (*Truvy remembers.*) Now, ladies? Next Saturday we have to make time adjustments. I'm going to be here all by my lonesome. Annelle is taking a well deserved vacation.

CLAIREE. That's nice. Are you taking a trip?

ANNELLE. Yes, I am.

CLAIREE. Aren't you going to tell us where you're going?

ANNELLE. (*Directed to Ouiser.*) No.

OUISER. Please Annelle. I don't know how I'll get through the week without this information.

ANNELLE. You'll just make fun.

OUISER. Annelle. You know I love it when you go on and on about your spiritual growth. I just can't get enough.

TRUVY. She has a very nice little trip planned to Camp Crossroads in the Ozarks.

CLAIREE. I don't believe I've ever heard of a Camp Crossroads . . .

ANNELLE. It's in the middle of Arkansas. It's a Christian

Look on the Bright Side

O X back to girl  
peltone  
look  
at color

Defense

X to her

set  
Tidman

camp. There's just cabins, a chapel, a dining hall in the middle of the mountains with a lake. I will spend a week in Bible study, prayer, and meditation. You're in the middle of nature, surrounded by the beauty of the Lord.

OUISER. Are there waterbeds?

CLAIREE. Ouiser, leave her alone.

OUISER. I'm just trying to find out more about Camp Cross-eyed. I might want to go.

CLAIREE. That's a laugh. You've never done a religious thing in your life.

OUISER. That's not true. When I was in school, a bunch of my friends and I would dress up like nuns and go barhopping.

CLAIREE. Is your boyfriend going with you?

ANNELLE. No. He said he'd rather eat dirt.

OUISER. I'm going to check up on my granddaughter and make sure she's still going to the Episcopal church. This born again process seems awfully tedious.

ANNELLE. I have to say this, Miss Ouiser. And I don't mean to hurt you. But . . . I worry about your faith sometimes.

OUISER. My faith is fine . . . *(Affecting a lisp.)* Ith my hair that needth the moht work. *to enjoy*

CLAIREE. Ouiser. One of these days somebody's going to cut the feet out of your stockings.

TRUVY. Ouiser, have you no shame?

ANNELLE. Oh, that's all right, Truvy. I love Miss Ouiser. I pray for her everyday . . . sometimes twice. *(This catches Ouiser off guard. M'Lynn enters carrying a package.)*

M'LYNN. Morning everybody! *(Shelby's haircut hits her like a ton of bricks.)* Shelby . . . ?! *Walk to her*

SHELBY. Mama. Please don't say anything. I like it. It'll be so much easier to deal with.

M'LYNN. Oh, honey. Bless your heart. *I can kiss her cheek*

SHELBY. It'll dry so quick. All I have to do is run my fingers through it.

M'LYNN. The last time you had short hair was . . . kindergarten. *fun w/ hair*

SHELBY. I know. I decided today that I'm going to get my hair all cut off every twenty-five years.

M'LYNN. I love it. I do.

*big more at transition*

*Smart aleck*

*fun to her Mommy?*

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Reacquainting

SHELBY. It's not too perky, is it?

M'LYNN. It looks great. How're you doing? *take hand*

SHELBY. Fine, Mama. How are you?

M'LYNN. Just fine. Here. I brought you a goodie . . . you can open it later. *(M'Lynn hands Shelby the package.)*

CLAIREE. M'Lynn. It must be nice having your entire family home this weekend.

M'LYNN. It's rare indeed. But it has been very nice.

TRUVY. Any special reason?

M'LYNN. Just to get together. Last week was our anniversary.

CLAIREE. Why didn't you say something to remind me? I would've baked you something. Drum loves my nut surprise cake.

M'LYNN. We've never considered it a major occasion before.

TRUVY. Which one is it?

M'LYNN. Thirtieth.

ANNELLE. Ooo! That's a big one. What is the thirtieth anniversary?

M'LYNN. How do you mean?

ANNELLE. You know . . . first anniversary is paper. Twentieth is china. Twenty-fifth is silver. Thirtieth must be . . .

M'LYNN. Valium.

TRUVY. What would Drum say if he heard you say that?

M'LYNN. Nothing. He doesn't have any idea what Valium is. The man prides himself on never having any tension. Which is amazing considering the amount he has created over the years . . .

Hm . . . listen to me. I've got to stop taking potshots at Drum all the time. He's a good man, he's crazy, but he's a good man.

COUISER. He seems to be behaving himself lately. He was most civil in the Piggly Wiggly yesterday. I was caught off guard and smiled before I could help myself.

M'LYNN. The most bizarre thing has happened. Drum and I seem to be rediscovering those things that brought us together in the first place. I don't know if we buried them or became blind to them.

SHELBY. Used to be, the thought of our parents being

X to  
out  
coffee  
  
X to  
man  
area

Cough  
town  
O.

# Reminiscing

romantic made me and my brothers sick to our stomachs, but it's actually very sweet. It's been a lovely week.

M'LYNN. Every now and then Drum and I seem to find these moments of magic. I don't know. I don't know if I'm lucky to have what I have . . . or lucky to know what I have.

CLAIREE. That's too deep for me. I have to go get my tires rotated.

ANNELLE. *(She's ready to shampoo Ouiser.)* Miss Ouiser . . . ?

TRUVY. M'Lynn. Maybe you should write a romance novel based on your recent experiences. I could help you with the dirty parts.

M'LYNN. No one would believe it. Shelby. You look a little pale.

SHELBY. *(Gently.)* I'm fine, Mama. How are you? *(Clairee takes off smock, tips Annelle, leaves money on counter.)*

CLAIREE. Well, ladies. If you're out and about this afternoon, stop by the Dixie Plaza Shopping Center. The radio station is sponsoring a summer fiesta with lots of prizes and a live band. They call themselves "Single Bullet Theory." *(Truvy is working on Shelby's nails. Truvy pushes Shelby's sleeves back to get them out of the way and sees Shelby's bruised arms . . .)*

TRUVY. Shelby?! What have you done to yourself?

SHELBY. Oh. It doesn't hurt.

TRUVY. What have you been doing? Have you seen this, M'Lynn?

M'LYNN. Yes, I have.

SHELBY. The doctor's just been trying to strengthen my veins. They're in terrible shape.

CLAIREE. *(Crosses to Shelby and examines her arms.)* It looks like you've been driving nails into your arms. What's going on here?

SHELBY. Shall we tell them, Mama?

M'LYNN. I guess so. No point in keeping it a secret any longer. Shelby's been driving nails into her arms.

EVERYONE. M'Lynn?!/Stop that./Be serious./What's going on?

SHELBY. It's my dialysis. *(Except for M'Lynn, the room is in shock.)*

ANNELLE & OUISER. What?

X back  
Transitions



not recorded  
X intradio

Cat's  
out of  
the bag!

X blind

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SHELBY. Dialysis. It's when . . .

ANNELLE. I know what it is. *step down*

TRUVY. Please tell us what's going on, honey!

SHELBY. It's not any big thing. No big thing. Don't look at me like that.

OUISER. How long have you been doing this dialysis?

SHELBY. A couple of months.

CLAIREE. Mary Lynn Eatenton! I am without words! Why haven't I been told? *X toward her*

SHELBY. We, uh . . . there was no point. Sometimes you don't want to talk about things.

M'LYNN. What would have been the point? There's nothing you could do. *at S and X to S.R (their whoopee)*

ANNELLE. We could have done something.

CLAIREE. I can't believe you didn't say anything. This is selfish. This is very selfish of you. *X about S*

SHELBY. Hold it. You're all talking like this is something.

TRUVY. This isn't something?

SHELBY. Having Jack Jr. put too much strain on my kidneys and now they're kaput. That's all. The doctors said this would probably happen.

TRUVY. That's all? That's all, she says . . .

SHELBY. I'm responding beautifully to dialysis. Do I look bad?

TRUVY. You look beautiful, but . . .

CLAIREE. Well? Maybe you'll let us in on what's going to happen?

OUISER. Do you do this dialysis forever? *X down L*

SHELBY. I could I suppose. But that's not real convenient when you are trying to keep up with a fifteen month old ball of fire. So. I'll just have a kidney transplant and I'll be fine.

OUISER. Is it that easy?

SHELBY. Sure. They do them all the time in Shreveport. Three or four a week.

ANNELLE. They do. Our Sunday school class was praying for one just the other day.

OUISER. But the hard part is finding the kidney, isn't it?

CLAIREE. I saw something about it on the news. It's so dramatic. These medical teams fly all over the place taking

*Criticisms*

*Cock-Eyed Optimist*

hearts and kidneys and who knows what else. And you know the thing that impressed me the most? They carry those organs in beer coolers.

TRUVY. Stop.

CLAIREE. I would not lie in a moment as serious as this. Those doctors take out their six-packs, throw in some dry ice and a heart and get on the plane.

SHELBY. She's right.

ANNELLE. But you never know when one will pop up, do you?

SHELBY. No. I'm registered on the nationwide transplant computer.

TRUVY. How long do you have to wait?

SHELBY. There are people at dialysis that have been waiting for years.

TRUVY. That must be agony.

SHELBY. I suppose. But I'm lucky. I don't have to wait anymore. Mama's going to give me one of her kidneys. *(More shock all around.)*

EVERYONE. What?/M'Lynn!/You're not serious!/No! /Etc.

CLAIREE. When?

SHELBY. We check in tomorrow morning.

CLAIREE. You're giving Shelby a kidney tomorrow and you haven't even mentioned it?

M'LYNN. Truvy. Please do my hair. I'm in a bit of a rush.

TRUVY. I never thought there'd ever be a time that words would fail me . . . but I think this is it.

OUISER. Why didn't you tell us? *X to M'Lynn*

M'LYNN. We just told you. We haven't known that long. We were all just tested last week. I'm the closest match.

ANNELLE. What do you mean, match?

M'LYNN. There are four categories for an organ match. I matched the best.

ANNELLE. Categories?

SHELBY. Swimsuit, evening gown, talent, and personality interview. *Laugh*

CLAIREE. I'm going to yank you bald-headed, smarty. *grab her*

OUISER. We are very upset here. *leer*

Side Bar

The Bomb

pause all look at M'Lynn

Disbelief



X hit  
radio  
#10  
Women  
of  
Country

stand for M'Lynn

TRUVY. I passed upset a long time ago . . .  
SHELBY. I'm sorry. That's Tommy's joke. I think it's very funny.

TRUVY. No wonder your whole family's in town. *to realize*

M'LYNN. I'm just so relieved it was me. The boys are young. I would never want them to go through it. And who would want one of Drum's mean old organs? But! The best thing about all this is that with all the tests and stuff, I have discovered I have the constitution of someone ten years younger. How about that? *X to T's chair*

OUISER. It must be so painful.

SHELBY. Not really for me. My operation's simple. Mama's is awful. They basically have to saw her in half to get the kidney. It's major, *major* surgery for her. *X to her*

TRUVY. They have to saw you in half? *it's not*

M'LYNN. They do it on Circus of the Stars all the time, *sit*

CLAIREE. This is no laughing matter! *to be emphatic*

SHELBY. Trust me, Miss Clairee. There have been more than enough tears.

M'LYNN. It'll make my waist smaller because they take out my bottom ribs to get my kidney out.

TRUVY. Cher had her ribs taken out to have a smaller waist.

CLAIREE. Please. That woman's out of her mind.

OUISER. Look. Shelby? Earlier this morning I said I'd be better off when my body wears out. I didn't mean that. You know better than to pay any attention to anything I say. *X to her*

SHELBY. Miss Ouiser. Forget it.

OUISER. Well, uh . . . I'm a terrible person.

CLAIREE. No you're not, Ouiser. You'd give your dog a kidney if he needed one. *an animal?*

OUISER. Absolutely.

TRUVY. But you two seem so calm and collected . . .

M'LYNN. I'm happy. Look at the opportunity I have. Most mothers only get the chance to give their child life once. I get a chance to do it twice. I think it's neat. And Shelby needs her health to chase after that rambunctious kid of hers. I've got two kidneys and I only need one. I'm just glad we can get it over with before it gets too hot.

SHELBY. Ain't that the truth.

Resignation

Shame

Renaissance

ANNELLE. I'm going to postpone my vacation a day so I can sit with your husband during the operation. I can run get co-colas and things.

X Raise in thought  
to plan  
to encourage

M'LYNN. That's sweet of you . . . but don't change your plans.

OUISER. We'll make sure Drum has enough food.

CLAIREE. Yes. You must put your house out of your mind. We will take care of everything.

M'LYNN. I appreciate that. And I know Drum does too.

OUISER. M'Lynn. You are brave, you are brave.

ANNELLE. You know? If I didn't know better, Shelby, I wouldn't even know you'd ever been sick a day in your life.

SHELBY. That's the biggest compliment anyone has ever paid me.

OUISER. Poor Shelby . . .

SHELBY. (Firmly.) Don't say that. I have my baby. I'm very happy. If this is part of the price I have to pay, then I have to pay it. I can deal with it. (Beat.) Now. If I'm not mistaken, someone has a present to open.

TRUVY. (Noticing package.) Ooo. Is this for me?

M'LYNN. Only if you can wear a size four.

TRUVY. I can take it in.

SHELBY. (With package.) Mama, would you . . . [open it?]

M'LYNN. Sure. It's just a little something I picked up. It was on sale . . . truthfully. (Shelby's nails are wet, so M'Lynn helps her open the gift.)

Cheering Section

SHELBY. (Carefully holding up pink bed jacket, taking in her appearance.) Ladies? Do I look fabulous, or what?

ANNELLE. God bless you, Shelby.

TRUVY. You're going to be the sassiest girl in that hospital.

M'LYNN. Well, what about me?

SHELBY. You ladies better come visit us!

CLAIREE. I'll be sitting right by your side when you wake up. Yours too, M'Lynn. I'll manage it somehow.

OUISER. And I'll keep Drum calm during the operation. (She laughs.)

SHELBY. We're in such good hands. Mama, you're going to be a while, so I'm going back to the house and spend some time with Daddy.

X to her

Lift Her up

M'LYNN. Good. *(To the room.)* Drum's not taking this very well. He gets so emotional over the least little thing.

SHELBY. Truvy? This is probably going to gross you out, but could I have my hair? Is that too repulsive?

TRUVY. People do it all the time. *to admonish*

SHELBY. I had it for so long. I guess it represents an era or something. *(Shelby reaches for the long lock of hair, but her nails are still wet.)*

TRUVY. Honey . . . your nails . . . I'll put it in a box and give it to your mama.

SHELBY. I love you all! *(Shelby starts out the door. Then she comes back.)* Miss Clairee? Would you do something for me?

CLAIREE. Of course. *x to her*

SHELBY. Next time you talk to Drew and Belle? I know they're upset about Marshall and all. But tell them I said that if that's the most disturbing thing that's ever happened to them . . . they should just get over it.

CLAIREE. I'll tell them today. *to cheer*

SHELBY. Truvy? Why isn't my radio playing? *(Shelby taps the radio. It plays. Shelby's fingernails are still wet. Shelby exits.)*

*Hanging on*

*X up to get it*

*x to her Mending Fences*

*#5 Women of country*

CURTAIN.

*Fade to #8 Off Brother Cue up to words*

Grandma's calendar

SCENE II

*During the scene change, the song that closes Scene I fades into the following speech to denote the passage of time. It is the KPPD D.J.*

Gossip

D.J. (*Fading in.*) . . . proud of our Devils on their fourteenth straight victory and if they keep playing like this the Devils might just have another state championship to call their own. That final playoff score again . . . twenty-seven to six. There is no new word on the lawsuit brought by the Reverend Q.T. Bennett against the Chinquapin Parish Board of Education. The Reverend, who is pastor of the Riverview Baptist Church, has filed suit charging that the use of the devil as a mascot for our high school team encourages Satanic behavior in the youth of our community. When reached for comment about the Reverend's lawsuit, Devil's head coach Waddy Thibodeaux said, and I quote, "Tell him to go to hell." (*Lights up. The radio continues to play under Truvy's phone call. It is November and is unusually cold. Clairee and Ouser are in the chairs. Annelle is doing Ouser's hair in silence. Annelle is visibly pregnant. Clairee is halfheartedly reading Reader's Digest.*)

Cold Souls

TRUVY. (*On phone.*) I'm sorry honey. You know I would if I could, but I just can't today. I could squeeze you in first thing Monday. Fine. See you then, Susan. (*Truvy hangs up, then gazes out the window deep in thought. No one speaks for a moment. Annelle is listening to the weather report.*)

ANNELLE. Thirty nine degrees! You were right, Truvy.

RADIO D.J. My personal congratulations to Waynetta Bench of 134 Debbie Jean Drive. She is the winner of the Halloween sweepstakes sponsored in part by KPPD and Marmillion Mills. Mrs. Bench wins an all expense paid weekend in Baton Rouge and a year's supply of plywood from Marmillion Mills . . . the finest plywood money can buy. If you're going out today, bun-

~~TRUVY~~

The SCOOP

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at post paper ready

TRUVY. It's too cold for this time of year, I'm gonna write a letter.

OUISER. I don't like it one bit. I turn blue when it's this cold. And blue is not in my palette.

dle up. We'll be doing good to get up to 39 degrees. Last night was the coldest Halloween since 1948. I'm not used to this arctic weather. (Music plays.)

CLAIREE. Anne Boleyn had six fingers.

OUISER. Who's Anne Berlin?

CLAIREE. Anne *Boleyn*. She was one of the six wives of Henry VIII.

OUISER. I never watch public television.

CLAIREE. She had six fingers.

OUISER. What happened to the other four?

CLAIREE. She had eleven total.

OUISER. Are you trying to confuse me? What are you talking about?

CLAIREE. This article says that she had six fingers on one hand. So she had all her dresses made so the sleeves hung down to her fingertips so she wouldn't look weird.

OUISER. *Reader's Digest* is a font of useful information. (They lapse into thoughtful silence.)

TRUVY. (Her scarf is tied around her neck.) Clairee. I just love my scarf. You are so thoughtful. It really jazzes up this outfit.

CLAIREE. The only thing that separates us from the animals is our ability to accessorize.

ANNELLE. I want to spray just a little more of my French perfume. I love it so much. I love it when the smell just fills the air. (*She sprays a mist and walks through it.*)

TRUVY. Don't waste it! That stuff ain't cheap.

OUISER. Save it, honey. We're going to have to burn our clothes as it is.

TRUVY. I'm just so touched that you remembered us.

CLAIREE. I had a ball shopping. I don't care what anyone says, the French people are very friendly. And most of them had the courtesy to speak English.

TRUVY. (Ouiser has pulled her scarf out from under her smock. It is a wild print. As Ouiser examines it.) And I love Ouiser's,

Small Talk

to ridicule

the sofa

Goodies

Thanks

X to get C

too. I may want to borrow that sometime.

X to your spot

OUISER. You're welcome to it.

CLAIREE. You don't like it, do you?

OUISER. It's perfect for me. A print this busy'll never show dog hair.

ANNELLE. My feet are like two blocks of ice. *do with grace*

OUISER. (*Sips coffee.*) This tastes like it was made in a rubber tire.

TRUVY. Annelle, remember to get that new thing for the Mr. Coffee.

ANNELLE. (*After a beat.*) Have any of you seen her this morning?

CLAIREE. I haven't. I went directly to the house when I got in. Only the boys were there.

ANNELLE. Do you think she'll come by?

OUISER. I doubt it. I'm sure her hair is the farthest thing from her mind.

TRUVY. Who knows what's on her mind. But she might need something and I just wanted to be here for her.

CLAIREE. I'm glad you decided to stay open today.

OUISER. How are the boys?

CLAIREE. As well as can be expected . . .

TRUVY. My husband and I are taking some barbecue over there later.

CLAIREE. I have never seen so much food.

ANNELLE. You can never have enough at times like these. My husband's back at the apartment cooking up a storm. He's convinced that his red beans and rice will make everyone feel better.

TRUVY. Maybe he's right. That's why we call it soul food. I'm gonna have to get his recipe.

ANNELLE. You'll have to ask him. Sammy runs me off whenever he starts cooking. That kitchen is so tiny he's scared he'll hit me in the stomach with a spatula.

CLAIREE. When are you moving, Annelle?

ANNELLE. Next month.

TRUVY. You had to bring it up. I can't stand it that she's moving away now that I'm about to be a semi-grandmother.

ANNELLE. It's just down the street, Truvy. A hop, skip, and a jump. That apartment is so squunched Sammy and I

Treading Lightly

New Beginning

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CLAI  
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have to step outside to change our minds. You're toying with me, aren't you?

TRUVY. A little bit. Not a lot. Guess it's just me and the old man.

CLAIREE. Truvy. Be thankful. You'd miss him if he were gone.

TRUVY. (Chuckles.) You know? Last night, he actually got up off the couch and said, "Let's go out to eat." Well . . . after I came to, I asked him, "What's the matter?" I thought Deputy Dawg had been preempted. Then he said he's got a good shot at doing the electrical contracting for the new college library! I'm not supposed to tell anybody!

(Everyone is excited. M'Lynn enters. No one knows what to say.

M'Lynn is very together.)

M'LYNN. Hello everybody. (They all hug her.) Welcome home, Clairee. How was Paris?

CLAIREE. Perfectly beautiful. I ate too much. I brought you something pretty.

M'LYNN. You shouldn't have. (The radio is playing something inappropriate. Truvy goes to turn it off.) Don't turn off Shelby's radio. I like the noise.

CLAIREE. There's special programming today. I had Jonathan go down to the station and pull music that Shelby would have liked and they're going to play it until noon.

M'LYNN. He told me. I think you're going to be surprised at some of the stuff you hear.

CLAIREE. That's O.K. It's for Shelby.

OUISER. M'Lynn. Just tell us. What can we do?

M'LYNN. Thank you. Truvy? Do you think you could work a little magic? I know I look like ten miles of dirt road.

TRUVY. Let me get my wand and my fairy dust! (M'Lynn sits.) How are you doing honey?

M'LYNN. I'm fine. I am a little worried about Drum. The boys got in last night. I really don't know how they're doing. Jackson is . . . Jackson. And he has his hands full with Jack Jr. I will admit it's hard to be somber with a baby running around.

CLAIREE. M'Lynn. I'm beside myself. Wasn't Shelby fine when I left? Can you talk about it?

to side bar

to hope to protect

Enter S.L

The Wounded

to jump

to cheer

Hands on shoulders

to distract

er show

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to skip,

my and I

Holding On

M'LYNN. Oh, sure. Basically . . . after the transplant failed, she went back on dialysis . . . you knew that. She'd been doing fine the last few months. But last Monday, everything went wrong. It was like dominoes. They thought they could correct things with a little surgery. As they wheeled her down, she said, "Mama. I'm going to feel so good when this is over." They gave her the anesthetic . . .

ANNELLE. In a way she was right. Maybe she knew she was going to be with her king.

M'LYNN. (*A little shaken.*) Yes, Annelle. Maybe so. - Radio Off

ANNELLE. We should be rejoicing.

M'LYNN. You go ahead. I wish I could feel that way. I guess I'm a little selfish. I'd rather have her here.

a child shall lead them

ANNELLE. Miss M'Lynn. I don't mean to upset you by saying that. You see. When something like this happens, I pray very hard to make heads or tails of it. I think in Shelby's case, she wanted to take care of that baby, of you, of everybody she knew . . . and her poor body was just worn out. It wouldn't let her do everything she wanted to do. So she went on to a place where she could be a guardian angel. She will always be young. She will always be beautiful. And I personally feel much safer knowing she's up there on my side. I know some people might think that sounds real simple and stupid . . . and maybe I am. But that's how I get through things like this. *to hope*

to hide

M'LYNN. (*Gentler.*) Thank you, Annelle. I appreciate that. And that's a very good idea. Shelby, as you know, would not want us to get all mired down and wallow in this. She would look on it as just one of life's occurrences. We should deal with it the best way we know how . . . and get on with it. That's what my mind says. I wish somebody would explain that to my heart.

to rally

TRUVY. Tommy said you didn't leave her side.

M'LYNN. Well. I wasn't in the mood to play bridge. (*Beat.*) No. I couldn't leave my Shelby. It's interesting. Both the boys were very difficult births. I almost died when Jonathan was born. Very difficult births. Shelby was a breeze. I could've gone home that afternoon I had her. I was thinking about that as I sat next to Shelby while she was in the coma. I would work her legs and arms to keep the circulation going. I

My Sweet Shelby



told the ICU nurse we were doing our Jane Fonda. I stayed there. I kept on pushing . . . just like I always have where Shelby was concerned . . . hoping she'd sit up and argue with me. But finally we all realized there was no hope. At that point I panicked. I was very afraid that I would not survive the next few minutes while they turned off the machines. Drum couldn't take it. He left. Jackson couldn't take it. He left. It struck me as amusing. Men are supposed to be made of steel or something. But I could not leave. I just sat there . . . holding Shelby's hand while the sounds got softer and the beeps got farther apart until all was quiet. There was no noise, no tremble . . . just peace. I realized as a woman how lucky I was. I was there when this wonderful person drifted into my world and I was there when she drifted out. It was the most precious moment of my life thus far.

to remind  
to prod  
to fall  
to despair  
to soften  
to cherish  
Evermore  
a whisper

TRUVY. (*Putting the finishing flourishes on M'Lynn's hair.*) Well I don't know how your insides are doing. But your hair is holding up beautifully. All it needs is a lick and a promise. Did you have it done in Shreveport?

to distract

M'LYNN. No. I did it myself . . .

TRUVY. Hold it, Missy. I don't want to hear that kind of talk.

to tease

M'LYNN. Doing my own hair was so odd. I had no idea about the back . . .

Someone  
Help  
Me!

TRUVY. You did a lovely job. I just smoothed out the rough spots. In fact. I'm going to be looking for temporary help when Annelle goes on maternity leave . . . interested?

M'LYNN. (*Struggling for control.*) It was just with so much going on, I didn't know if I would have time . . . would feel like coming here. (But this morning I wanted to come here more than anything.) Isn't that silly?

to flutter

TRUVY. No. go to her right

M'LYNN. Last night I went into Shelby's closet for something . . . and guess what I found. All our Christmas presents stacked up, wrapped. With her own two hands . . . I'd better go.

TRUVY. (*Handing M'Lynn a mirror.*) Check the back.

M'LYNN. Perfect . . . as always. (*M'Lynn continues to gaze into the mirror.*) You know . . . Shelby . . . Shelby was

right. It . . . it does kind of look like a blond football helmet. (M'Lynn disintegrates.)

TRUVY. Honey. Sit right back down. Do you feel alright?

M'LYNN. Yes. Yes. I feel fine. I feel great. I could jog to Texas and back, but my daughter can't. She never could. I am so mad I don't know what to do. I want to know why. I want to know why Shelby's life is over. How is that baby ever going to understand how wonderful his mother was? Will he ever understand what she went through for him? I don't understand. Lord I wish I could. It is not supposed to happen this way. I'm supposed to go first. I've always been ready to go first. I can't stand this. I just want to hit somebody until they feel as bad as I do. I . . . just want to hit something . . . and hit it hard. (Everyone is unable to react, overcome with emotion. Eventually, Clairee has an idea. She pulls Ouiser next to M'Lynn and braces Ouiser as if Ouiser were a blocking dummy.)

CLAIREE. Here. Hit this! Go ahead, M'Lynn. Slap her!

OUISER. (Dumbfounded.) Are you crazy?

CLAIREE. Hit her!

OUISER. Are you high?

TRUVY. Clairee! Have you lost your mind?

CLAIREE. We can sell T-shirts saying "I Slapped Ouiser Boudreaux!" Hit her!

OUISER. Truvy! Dial 911!

CLAIREE. Don't let her beauty stand in the way. Hit her!

ANNELLE. Miss Clairee. Enough!

M'LYNN. Hush, Clairee. (Everyone is beginning to lighten up.)

CLAIREE. Ouiser, this is your chance to help your fellow man. Knock her lights out, M'Lynn!

TRUVY. Clairee. You're gonna piss God off if you're not careful!

OUISER. Let go of me! (Clairee does so.)

CLAIREE. Well, M'Lynn. You just missed the chance of a lifetime. Most of Chinquapin Parish'd give their eyeteeth to take a whack at Ouiser.

OUISER. You are a pig from hell.

CLAIREE. O.K. Alright. Hit me, then. I deserve it.

OUISER. Whatever would we do without Clairee's own special brand of humor?

Despair

to pull

to collapse

to hit

to pull

to twist

to stamp

to stomp

pull Ouiser to M'Lynn

hand out over O's shoulder

slap

OXR

straightening self

If I didn't laugh, I'd cry!

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TRUVY. Clairee. You are evil and you must be destroyed.  
CLAIREE. Darling. Mother Nature is taking care of that,  
faster than you could. Things were getting entirely too seri-  
ous there for a moment. I'm sorry M'Lynn. We are all enti-  
tled to our sorrow.

apologies?

M'LYNN. That was very funny, Clairee.

ANNELLE. I have to admit I laughed . . . even though  
that wasn't a very Christian thing to do, Miss Clairee.

CLAIREE. Annelle, honey. You're going to have to lighten  
up.

turn to her

ANNELLE. My husband says the same thing.

CLAIREE. (*Giggles.*) I'll bet Lloyd got a kick out of that one.

OUISER. Lloyd did get a lot of enjoyment at my expense  
when he was alive.

sit on couch

CLAIREE. M'Lynn. You know how much Lloyd adored  
Shelby. I am sure he's up there now showing her  
around . . . fixing her speeding tickets . . .

Heavenly

M'LYNN. Shelby was always crazy about Lloyd.

Eavesdroppers

CLAIREE. She worshipped the quicksand he walked on.  
And I'm sure when Shelby got up there, he was very happy to  
see a familiar face. He was a Louisiana politician. We don't  
know many people that went to heaven. (*Clairee turns her  
attention to Ouiser.*)

OUISER. Clairee . . .

CLAIREE. Ouiser? You know I love you more than my  
luggage.

sit on arm put hand on shoulder

OUISER. You are too twisted for color TV.

push hand away + slide over

CLAIREE. Thank you.

TRUVY. Now that you two have made up, we had better let  
this woman go. She has to pull herself together. She cannot  
be a pillar of strength with eye makeup running down her  
neck.

take Kleenex to her

SISTERS

ANNELLE. Go on out there, Miss M'Lynn . . . we'll be  
just fine.

M'LYNN. I shouldn't have gone on like I did. I made every-  
body cry. I'm sorry.

TRUVY. Don't be silly. Laughter through tears is my favor-  
ite emotion.

M'LYNN. Maybe it was about time I had an emotional out-  
burst. Maybe I'll start having them at home more often.

Drum will be so pleased / I'm so glad I came by. Shelby would've had a good time here this morning.

TRUVY. I'm sure she did.

OUISER. M'Lynn. Tell your family . . . especially Drum . . . that they've been in my prayers. *(There is a reaction from Annelle. Ouiser acknowledges.)* Yes, Annelle, I pray. There! I've said it. I hope you're satisfied.

ANNELLE. I have suspected this all along.

OUISER. But don't you go trying to get me to come out to your church to one of those tent revivals with all those Bible beaters doing God-only-knows-what. They'd probably make me eat a live chicken. *Sit*

ANNELLE. *(After a calculated beat.)* Not on your first visit. *(This remark takes everyone by surprise.)*

CLAIREE. Very good, Annelle! Spoken like a true smart ass!

OUISER. M'Lynn. Owen wanted me to tell you you're in his thoughts. *✓ to L of chair*

M'LYNN. But I didn't think you and Owen were . . .

OUISER. He's coming in Monday to take me to Shelby's service. That girl will do anything to get us together.

M'LYNN. I'd better go.

TRUVY. M'Lynn. You promise you'll call if you need anything, you hear?

ANNELLE. And if her line's busy, you call me.

CLAIREE. Call me. I have call waiting. Just got it. *✓ L*

M'LYNN. I will.

ANNELLE. Oh! Miss M'Lynn. I don't know if this is the time or the place, but I wanted to tell you that *S nmy* and I decided if this is a girl, we want to name it Shelby . . . since she was the reason we met in the first place. If you don't mind.

M'LYNN. Mind? Shelby would love that. I'm tickled pink. *(She smiles.)* Pink.

CLAIREE. What'll you name it if it's a boy?

ANNELLE. Shelby, I guess.

M'LYNN. That's the way it should be. Life goes on.

TRUVY. M'Lynn. I know it hurts. But it'll get better. And if you feel like taking a whack at something . . . come on over and hit on me. I won't break.

*Resolutions*

*stand*

*pop  
last  
high*

*Dial-a-Friend*

*X to  
M'Lynn*

*An End  
A Beginning*

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*turn* M'LYNN. I may take you up on that. *start to leave* (To Truvy and group.)  
You have no idea how wonderful you are . . .  
TRUVY. Of course we do . . . (As M'Lynn leaves the shop, she passes Shelby's radio that has ceased to play during the scene. M'Lynn stops, looks at it lovingly, then hauls off and gives it a mighty whack. It starts playing the theme from Hawaii 5-0 softly.\* M'Lynn smiles and tells the group on her exit . . . )

M'LYNN. There. That's better. (Ensemble reaction. After M'Lynn's exit, Clairee takes Ouiser's hand in friendship, noticing Ouiser's need for a manicure. Annelle offers a silent prayer, which Ouiser exasperatedly acknowledges, but respectfully does not interrupt. Truvy, who has been watching M'Lynn out the window, returns to working on Clairee's hair. The action in the shop continues as the lights fade and the music swells.)

CURTAIN.

Life Goes On!

Curtain Call  
#10 Sister

~~\*H.S.O~~  
~~\*Goin to the Chapel~~

\*See special note on copyright page.

**CENTRAL WASHINGTON UNIVERSITY  
THEATRE ARTS GRADUATE PROGRAM**

**THESIS PROJECT/PRODUCTION PERFORMANCE EVALUATION**

**STUDENT-** Jana Petersdorf

**SS#-**

**UNDER CONSIDERATION IS DIRECTION OF:** Steel Magnolias

**EVALUATOR-** Michael J. Smith

**TITLE-** Assistant Professor

**PLACE OF PERFORMANCE-** Tulare Western High School  
824 W. Maple Ave.  
Tulare, CA 93274

**DATE OF VIEWING-** April 20, 2002

**DESCRIPTION OF PERFORMANCE VENUE:** The performance space is a proscenium stage ensconced at one end of a carpeted classroom. The stage is hardwood floor raised two feet above the carpeted classroom floor. I would guess the proscenium to be approximately 25 feet across and perhaps 20 feet deep. The ceiling slopes from downstage (approx. 12 ft.) to upstage (approx. 10 ft.). There is approximately four feet of offstage room on stage left, with two doors leading outside the building. There is approximately 6-8 feet of offstage room on stage right, with a door leading directly to a dressing room with three fully-equipped (mirrors and lights) makeup stations.

The lighting is a challenge. This is a track lighting system, with virtually untenable hanging positions and not a lot for a lighting designer to do other than to try and cover the stage. There are six instruments out front, six downstage, and two gutted par cans on a raised platform audience left. These were used as additional coverage for stage right, as the track lighting (as already noted) only covered right center to stage left. There are two dimmer packs with four channels each in the stage manager's booth (audience up right). The lighting board is an NSI MC7016. Lighting should be a priority for the future, as this system is a glaring weakness in an otherwise workable environment.

The stage manager's booth has three four foot by four foot windows that do not open. Sound and lighting operators have to depend on Midland wireless headsets in order to hear the action. If any upgrading was done to the facility, I would strongly recommend at least one sliding window in the stage manager's booth. Wireless microphones are notoriously twitchy, and if they go out the lighting and sound operators are left in an untenable position.

The sound board features a Mackie CFX 12 mixer, two computer monitors, and two boom boxes hard-wired to the mixer (!). A sound engineer might be able to make some improvements regarding their equipment (and use of it), but I do not possess the expertise to be able to make any meaningful suggestions.

**DESCRIPTION OF CONCEPT:** With a cast of six (plus a live DJ voiceover), ranging from experienced seniors to rookies, the production evolved in a mostly organic way. Jana allowed the characters to develop at a reasonable pace, with the action revealing them much like the layers of an onion. The script at times reads somewhat like a soap opera, but the production – thankfully – spared us from much of the potential melodrama inherent in the script. Jana approached the material with honesty, integrity, humor, love, and an understated quality that sat quite well with me.

Much of the humor comes out of the situation instead of being forced into it. Jana allowed the relationships between these diverse women to evolve naturally and logically, and rarely did I sense that pace was a significant problem. Thus, although the production ran 2:55 (with a 15-minute intermission), I did not notice many people in the audience fidgeting about or checking their watches. In retrospect, I would have liked Jana to consider more internal cuts, if only to help her actors keep the action moving at a somewhat snappier pace.

Several of the girls were required to take on roles that demanded them to be much older than their chronological years. Their carriage, demeanor and makeup mostly helped to make up for their lack of life experience, although one still notices lines (however effectively drawn) when painted upon 17-year-old faces. However, Jana's actors did a lot of movement and character research, which went a long way to help mitigate the age-old problem of portraying people many years one's senior.

**DESCRIPTION OF THE ACTUAL PRODUCTION DIRECTION AND/OR REALIZED DESIGN OF SETS, PROPS, COSTUMES, LIGHTING, SOUND:** Although you will see many of these elements in the video, I would like to give some of my impression regarding the design elements. The main curtain (blue) was closed before the audience entered. Lively bluegrass music played for half an hour (at an appropriate level) as the audience entered.

Upon our first glimpse of the set, we notice the pastel colors of the walls and trim, the feminine touches (plants, couch & armchair with throw pillows and women's magazines), which lets us know immediately that we are in a distinctly feminine environment. There are two hair styling/cutting stations and a station for hair washing/rinsing. I appreciate the attention to detail, especially when it comes to paint treatment of the walls and set/costume accessories. Note: The only real problem I had with the set was the nail station's prominent (and permanent) placement DLC. It was only used a few times during the show, and thus took up valuable acting space.

The costumes and wigs were, on the whole, very good. It is difficult to make a young woman appear matronly or even old, but the costume designer managed to garb these young women in clothing that was appropriate not only to their age but to their characters as well. The wigs were mostly effective, but - again - it is a stretch of one's suspension of disbelief to see a high school girl in an old-lady gray wig. That said, I applaud the costume, wig and makeup designers for not turning the older characters into caricatures.

I do not know the quality of the video, but I can say that articulation was, overall, very good. Rarely did I have to strain to hear or understand the actors, although the character of Clairee had a habit of delivering lines upstage, which sometimes made it difficult to understand her. In fact, a number of the actors might have opened to the audience more effectively, thereby rendering moot any hearing/understanding problems. The actors' dialects were, overall, not intrusive, although there was not complete harmony in their pronunciation of the Louisiana drawl.

Sound effects were mostly well-orchestrated, although there were a few glitches on the night I saw it. If they had a CAD system or a more user-friendly set-up in the booth, I feel that these might have been eliminated. Apparently, there were a few times that the sound operator had to perform sleight-of-hand with the cassettes in order to piggyback some sound cues.

I have already gone off about the lighting, so I will only say that it was sometimes adequate and periodically a distraction. At the opening of the show, the lights came up very fast, which gave us no time at all to take in the environment before the action commenced. Also, at the end of Act I, the lights went to black before the curtain was not quite halfway closed. This abrupt end to Act I was jarring, especially as it wiped out the humorous interaction that ended the act.

**HOW DID THE PRODUCTION DIRECTION IMPLEMENT THE IDEAS EXPRESSED IN THE CONCEPT STATEMENT?** I really feel that Jana's concept allowed the actors to explore their characters in an honest, effective way. Jana uses the words "loyalty", "true", "humor" and "inspired" in her Director's Notes. This show seemed to be as inspired as it was inspiring, surmounting the obstacles of age, life experience and dialect.

**APPROPRIATENESS OF CHOICE OF SCRIPT FOR ABILITIES OF PERFORMERS, AUDIENCE, VENUE, AND/OR ACADEMIC SETTING?** Despite my initial trepidation about high school actors portraying four characters over the age of forty, I now have come to see this play as a timeless tale of women triumphing over the myriad obstacles that life places before them. Whether young or old, these women deal with obstacles in their own unique ways, which leads to both great hilarity and ultimate tragedy. However, one feels that – even in the darkest of times – these women will persevere. A sisterhood of support is always present, and each character is tied to the other by this virtually umbilical knot. Jana created an harmonious, generous ensemble of spirited, deeply-involved young people. The performance I saw was virtually sold out, with almost all of the attendees being the friends, classmates, and loved ones of the people involved in the show. The response to the show was overwhelming, although not false and gushing like so many high school productions I have attended. Everyone involved with this production deserves to be commended. There was a commitment to excellence in all areas, whether it was onstage, backstage or in the booth.



**ADDRESS THE FOLLOWING IF APPLICABLE: CLEAR DELINEATION OF UNITS OF ACTION, MOTIVATED BLOCKING, VISUALLY INTERESTING COMPOSITION, VISUAL EXPRESSION OF METAPHOR, USE OF PICTURIZATION IN STORYTELLING, CLEAR AND BELIEVABLE CHARACTERIZATION, ADEQUATE USE OF BODY AND VOICE, UNITY OF PRODUCTION ELEMENTS, CREATIVE PROBLEM SOLVING.** I am pretty sure that you can make these determinations yourself based upon Jana's written documentation combined with the videos.

**WITHIN THE CONFINES OF THIS PARTICULAR PERFORMANCE VENUE, WAS THIS PRODUCTION SATISFACTORY OR UNSATISFACTORY?** More than satisfactory, I found it laudable.

**Response to Steel Magnolias**

**Directed by Jana Petersdorf**

**Associate Professor Brenda Hubbard, Respondent**

**July 6, 2002**

The following response is based on a viewing of the Petersdorf directing Project on videotape. As is often the case with video taped performances, the quality of the taping did not permit me to pick up all the nuances of the performance. For example, I was unable to observe the actor's facial expressions, see details of the costumes and props, or even to hear some of the dialogue. Given the constraints of such a viewing, I will attempt to respond to Ms. Petersdorf's production which, overall, I found to present an accomplished and unified production experience. I thought the design elements of set, costumes and lights all worked well to create the world of the beauty shop. The actors seemed to all be at a similar level of experience and seemed to enjoy their roles and bring a level of commitment to them. While I quibble with some of the individual choices made by the director, I feel that the production exemplifies Ms. Petersdorf's accomplishment of the skills needed to show mastery of theatre production. The following comments will address the areas I found lacking, although it should be remembered that overall, I thought it an excellent project.

**Aural components**

The choice of music seemed odd to me. Perhaps because of the recent familiarity audiences have with the soundtrack from the movie, *Oh Brother, Where Art Thou?*, I got set up to expect a different world of the play than the one presented. In terms of period, location in the South, and class portrayed in the play, the song "Big Rock Candy Mountain" seemed inappropriate. Later, when the song "Chapel of Love," was used, I was, again, confused about period. If a director is using many songs from many periods, it sets up an expectation that everything will be different in order to compare and contrast what is being shown. However, if a director uses only several songs from different periods, it can draw attention to the choice and confuse the audience. Thus was the case for me.

Another element in this play is its Southern location, dialect and rhythms. The director attempted to handle the dialect by having the actors use one. This is an appropriate choice and tricky with inexperienced actors. The

unfortunate result in this production was that there was little variation in rate, pitch, and inflection among the women. As a result there was a sameness vocally that tended to flatten out the pacing of the play. Voices did not grab my attention at key moments like the very beginning of the play or when key bits of storytelling information were being shared. Actors tended to take on each other's rhythms, which flattened out necessary highs and lows of the production at times. Line readings became predictable. Perhaps my response focused more on the aural aspects of the production because I was unable to see other aspects of it. However, the director would be advised in both casting and directing the show to shut her eyes at times and listen to play. Do we know who is speaking when we aren't seeing them? Do we know, just by listening, the most important lines needed to tell the story? I think, had she done this, she might have given greater attention to the aural components of the production.

### Focus

A similar question could be asked about visual focus in the play. If we blocked out our hearing and simply watched the play, could we tell who is speaking at all times and who is in primary focus? There were times I was confused about where I was supposed to look. The director needs to remember the importance of movement as a means of drawing focus. An example of this would be Shelby's telephone call, when the focus needed to shift over to her.

Another component of the staging concerns the rising and falling of action at the ends of each act. I found the ending of the acts to lack a clean "button" that brought the action to a stylized conclusion of some sort. At the end of Act One, I missed the lines and thus the reason for everyone rushing offstage. At the end of Act Two, there seemed to be a lack of a build, which would have brought us to the end with some emphasis.

However, from what I was able to discern from the tape, the overall production was well received and treated the material in an honest and inviting way. Congratulations to Ms. Petersdorf on a project well done.

**Brenda Hubbard**

Please note:

This signature has been redacted due to security reasons.

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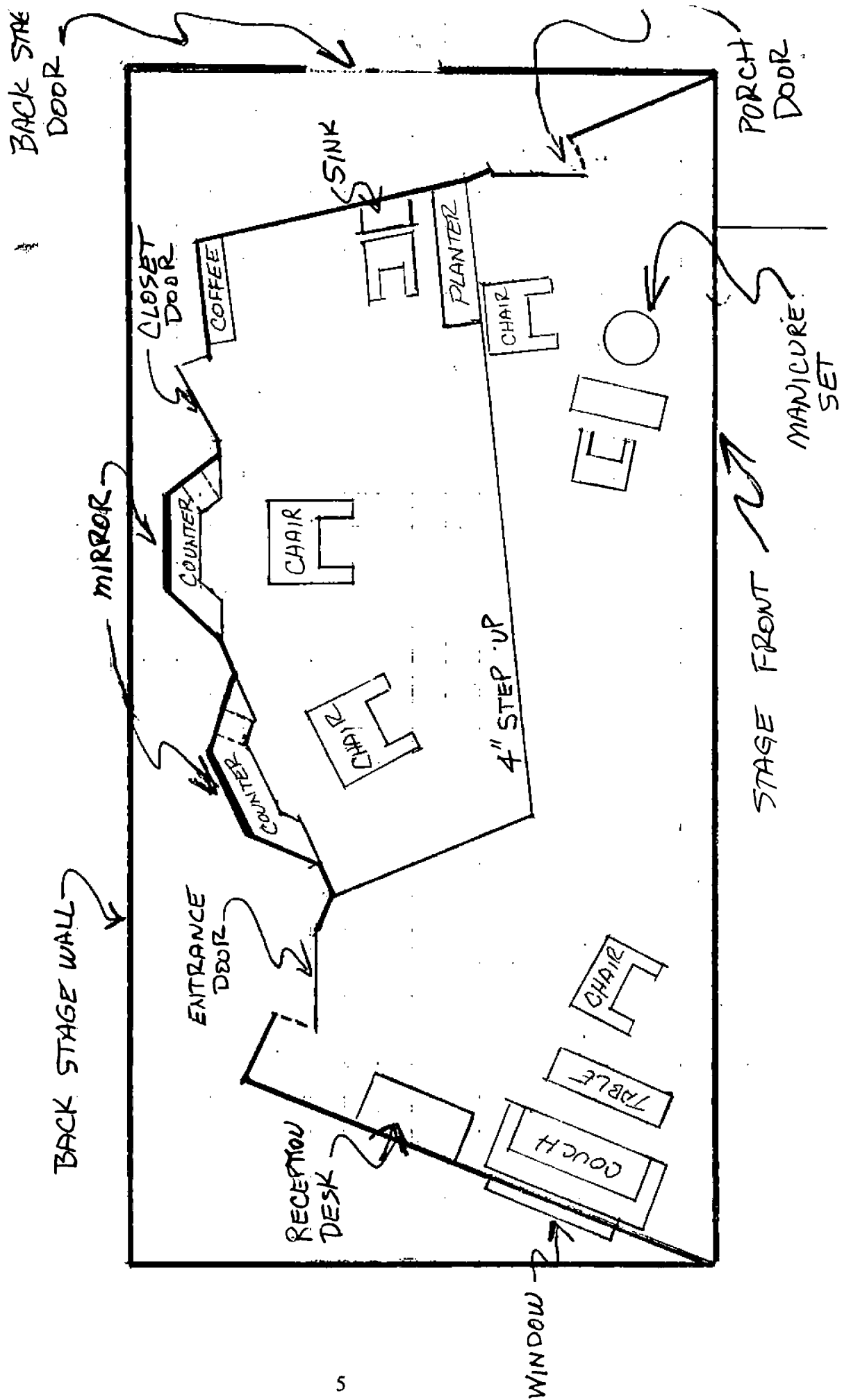
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# STEEL MAGNOLIAS

*By Robert Harling*



*Originally produced by the W.P.A. Theatre, New York City, 1987. (Kyle Renick, Artistic Director)*

# Technical Staff

*Director.....Jana Petersdorf*

*Assistants to the Director.....Erin Braithwaite  
Jerri Guerrero*

*Publicity.....Erin Braithwaite  
Kiersten Wooden*

*Set Construction.....Ed Fletcher  
David Summers*

*Costumer.....Nancy McGinnis*

*Properties.....Erin Braithwaite*

*Vanessa Anaya, Jerri Guerrero, Andrea Pires, Pamela Soto  
Joleen Thornsberry*

*Scenic Painting.....Vanessa Anaya, Shane  
Brown, Tamera Swanson, Tangie Scott, Pamela Soto, Stacy  
Chavez, Melissa Cruz*

*Sound.....Daniel Moore, Eddie  
Torres*

*Lights.....Steve Lamar, Sasha Smith*

*Set Crew.....Jerri Guerrero, Pamela  
Soto, Tamera Swanson, Vanessa Anaya,*

*House Management.....Andi Swayne, Tangie Scott, Tiffanie  
Fierro, Kiersten Wooden, Kristin Moody, Jennifer Castellanoz*

*Make up.....Krystal Baldwin, Jana  
Petersdorf*

*Dressers.....Sarah Alwidrez, Andrea Borges, Ashlie  
Jones*



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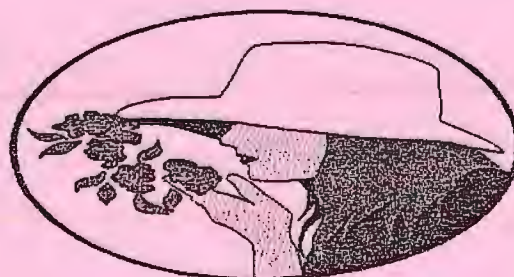
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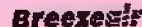
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Best Wishes for a successful show to  
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Ashley and Haylie.

Love, Mom, Dad and Shelby





# STEEL MAGNOLIAS

MARCH 2002

SUN MON TUE WED THU FRI SAT

						1 MEASUREMENTS JOURNALS	2
3	4 Contracts Due WARM ups Block Pg 7-19 3:30-5:30	5 BLOCK 19-31 3:30-5:30	6 WARM Ups BLOCK 32-43 3:30-5:30	7 BLOCK 44-53 3:30-5:30	8 WARM ups BLOCK 54-61 3:30-5:30		9
10	11 WARM Ups BLOCK 62-71 3:30-5:30	12 RUN 7-31 Rear/Sa. SHOES Due 3:30-5:30	13 RUN 32-53 3:30-5:30	14 RUN 54-71 Make up due 3:30-5:30	15 NO TEHERAS!! STUDY THOSE LINES!!	16 PROPS DUE FOR MONDAY	
17	18 CHARACTER QUOTES RUN ACT I FLIERS OUT TODAY 3:30-5:30	19 WARM Ups Act II 3:30-5:30	20 POUSH 7-31 LINES Due 3:30-5:30	21 POUSH 32-53 LINES Due 3:30-5:30	22 POUSH 54-71 LINES Due 3:30-5:30		23
24	25 Easter Vacation Yeah!!	26 	27 Get some BUNTS!!	28 Practice THOSE LINES!	29 Keep Working on Your Companys!!	<b>LOVE ALL THAT WE DO WONDER!</b>	





I'd rather have thirty minutes of wonderful than a lifetime of  
nothin' special!

April 2002

SUN	MON	TUE	WED	THU	FR	SAT
	Character Quotes Due PUSH Act 1 Tech- Lights and Sound 3:30-5:30	PUSH Act II Lights/Sound 3:30-5:30	FULL RUN THRU 3 3:30-7:00 W/ tech DINNER INCLUDED	FULL RUN THRU 4 W/tech 3:30-6:30 BRING SNACKS	RUN TROUBLE AREAS 5 3:30-5:30	REHEARSAL OF SOUTHERN LADIES' LUNCHEON 12:00
Production Week 7 Starts Tomorrow! Sandwich Boards Due	FULL RUN THRU 8 ADDS Due 6-9:30	DRESS REHEARSAL 9 W/ old age MAKE UP 6-9:30	FULL DRESS 10 REHEARSAL 6-9:30 PROGRAM Due	FINAL DRESS 11 REHEARSAL CALL 6:00 SHOW 7:00-?	OPENING NIGHT! 12 CALL 6:00 SHOW 7:30 BREAK A LEG!!	CALL 6:00 SHOW 7:30
A Day of Rest			LINE DRILL and MUNCHES 3:30-?		2ND WEEKEND 19 CALL 6:00 SHOW 7:30	CALL 6:00 SHOW 7:30 Cast Party TBA
Congratulations!	ON A	JOB	WELL	DONE!!	YOU SHOULD be proud!	THANK YOU!

**From:** "Sandy warren" [REDACTED]  
**To:** [REDACTED]  
**Date:** 4/16/02 1:33PM  
**Subject:** Steel Magnolias

Hi Jana!

Muchos kudos with "Steel Magnolias"! Once again you did an outstanding job of bringing culture to Tulare. Every year your plays become a bit more introspective and refined. This year was no exception. I thought the actors did an excellent job of portraying their respective roles; the setting was fantastic, with drawers that actually opened, realistic props (where did you get the salon chair?), and lighting and music which only enhanced a well-performed play.

Even when the actors forgot or flubbed lines, they covered well. They seemed well-prepared and the acton flowed smoothly.

Thank you for another lovely evening of wonderful entertainment. Sandy

Jana Petersdorf - Bravo!

Page 1

**From:** Steve Nylander  
**To:** Jana Petersdorf  
**Date:** 4/22/02 2:43PM  
**Subject:** Bravo!

Jana:

The play was absolutely fantastic. Really strong performances by every cast member!! Really excellent!

I can't believe that I got an evening of outstanding entertainment and credit for "dootie" too!  
Steve

**From:** Nilza Bettencourt  
**To:** Jana Petersdorf  
**Date:** 4/17/02 10:29AM  
**Subject:** Play

Steel Magnolias was a great play. I thoroughly enjoyed the performance of our students. They all did an excellent job and made their characters so real. It was an amazing evening and one that I am recommending to our staff and student body. Thanks, for doing such an outstanding job.

Dear Jana,

Congratulations on  
your success with  
Steel Magnolias and  
on completing your Master's  
Degree.

We are proud of you, but  
we are not surprised  
at your accomplishments.

Love,  
Bro + Neva

## Top-notch Spokane Civic Theatre's 'Steel Magnolias' makes the most out of a humorous, forthright story

*Spokesman Review*, Spokane; Feb 29, 2000; Jim Kershner Staff writer;

Sub Title: [SPOKANE Edition]

Start Page: D7

Personal Names: Parton, Dolly

Abstract:

*"Steel Magnolias" continues through March 11 at the Spokane Civic Theatre. Call 325-2507 for reservations.*

*I knew I was enjoying the Spokane Civic Theatre's production of "Steel Magnolias" - that hard laughter was a dead giveaway.*

*On this, probably my fourth viewing of this Southern beauty-shop gabfest, I realized exactly what was so good about Robert Harling's 1987 script.*

Full Text:

*(Copyright 2000 Cowles Publishing Company)*

"Steel Magnolias" continues through March 11 at the Spokane Civic Theatre. Call 325-2507 for reservations.

"Steel Magnolias"

Saturday, Feb. 26, Spokane Civic Theatre

I knew I was enjoying the Spokane Civic Theatre's production of "Steel Magnolias" - that hard laughter was a dead giveaway.

But it wasn't until later that I realized just how good this production is.

On this, probably my fourth viewing of this Southern beauty-shop gabfest, I realized exactly what was so good about Robert Harling's 1987 script.

Besides being fall-down funny, it is also uncommonly honest, well-written and non-manipulative. Only a quality production can make you love a script you thought you only liked.

Director Jamie Flanery has created a fine, fast and funny piece of work here. Besides setting a perfect tone of congenial Southern hair-dryer camaraderie, he has also assembled a cast that works as a true, seamless ensemble.

All six of the women in the cast create fully drawn characters, all of them become complex personalities. It takes a lot of hard work to do that, but they make it look easy. All are comfortable and relaxed on stage.

All six share equally in the success, but Kathie Doyle-Lipe, as usual, is the unquestioned comic star of the show. As Ouiser, the cynical and eccentric millionaire of Chinquapin Parish, Louisiana, she comes on stage looking like a cross between Carol Burnett as a bag lady and Claire Peller.

Then she proceeds to send the audience into hysterics with her foghorn voice and her stooped, old-lady . By the second act, all she had to do was walk through the door to send the audience into a ing fit.

2/29/01 10:34 AM

Kelly Beck is notably impressive as M'Lynn, the mother of the diabetic Shelby. She carries the bulk of emotional weight of the show, as she spends much of the play worrying about Shelby, and then the end of the play dealing with the grief when her worries prove to be justified.

As Truvy, the beauty shop owner, Kimberly J. Roberts creates a character far different than the Dolly Parton character in the movie. She is not as perky as Parton or as country "cute," but she is stronger, more compassionate and more emotionally honest.

"Emotionally honest" is, in fact, what makes this play so good. Harling wrote this play after the death of a beloved relative, and it all rings true.

M'Lynn puts up a strong facade in the face of adversity, then her facade collapses in a cascade of tears, and afterward, she feels even stronger for the collapse. This is, in fact, the way people deal with tragedy.

The script thankfully avoids the urge to manipulate our emotions. There is a tragedy at the heart of the play, but Harling never shoves it into our faces.

We hear about Shelby's death only after the fact, in the heartfelt words of M'Lynn. We see the aftermath, and the grief, without ever feeling we are being jerked around by a playwright for cheap effect.

I must give credit to Nik Adams for designing an exceptionally realistic beauty-shop set. Not only does this set and honey set make us feel as if we are there, in Louisiana in the 1980s, but his set also evokes feelings of comfort.

We feel as if Truvy's is, indeed, the kind of haven that everyone should have in their lives.

#### [Illustration]

Photo; Caption: From left, Kimberly J. Roberts, Kelly Beck, Claire Ryman, Kathie Doyle-Lipe and Jan Neumann appear in the Spokane Civic Theatre's production of "Steel Magnolias." Photo by Brian Plonka/ The Spokesman-Review

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## PREVIEW: CENTERSTAGE PRESENTS 'STEEL MAGNOLIAS'

*The News Tribune*; Tacoma, Wa.; Aug 7, 1999; J. Andrew Lingwall; For The News Tribune;

**Start Page:** SL12

### Abstract:

*That's a good thing for a production like "Steel Magnolias." Women bonding and rediscovering themselves through one another is what this play is all about. "The humor and interplay has been so much easier to find because everyone is having such a great time," [Laurel] Watt said. "We have three generations of women represented here, and each one is just the right age for her character."*

*Centerstage Theatre Arts, a community theater group based in Federal Way, is presenting "Steel Magnolias" through Aug. 21. Shows run in the Knutzen Family Theatre at the Dumas Bay Centre, located just outside Dash Point State Park in Federal Way.*

*In keeping with the spirit of female sharing and kinship, "Steel Magnolias" is an ensemble piece. There are no starring roles. The six women who go to Truvy's Beauty Salon in Chinquapin, La., each week for manicures, perms and cuts each stands out in her own way - for putting up with deadbeat husbands, for braving illnesses, just for surviving to old age. Truvy (Patty Day), the proprietor and head gossip, dispenses shampoos and free advice to anyone who'll listen, including Clairee (Jayne Ross) and Ouiser (Jody McCoy).*

### Full Text:

*Copyright Tacoma News, Inc. Aug 7, 1999*

Laurel Watt says there's a reason rehearsals have gone so well this summer for the cast of "Steel Magnolias."

~~"Right at the addition, these women bonded together,"~~ she said. "And now they've become great friends. For me as the director, it's made a tremendous difference in the creative process."

According to Watt, who is directing the play, even the women who didn't get cast had such a good time they wanted to come back and visit.

~~That's a good thing for a production like "Steel Magnolias." Women bonding and rediscovering themselves through one another is what this play is all about.~~ "The humor and interplay has been so much easier to find because everyone is having such a great time," Watt said. "We have three generations of women represented here, and each one is just the right age for her character."

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According to Watt, Robert Harling wrote "Steel Magnolias" in the mid-1980s in honor of his own sister. Like Shelby in the play (Kristin Hanson), she was a diabetic who died of kidney failure after giving birth to her first child. Harling relates the tale through the eyes of Annelle (Stefanie Sertich), who is a newcomer in town.

"In some way, Shelby touches each of the women significantly throughout the play," she said. "By the end, they have all grown and discovered a lot about themselves. Harling wanted to make the point that no matter how short your life might be, you can still make a big difference in the lives around you."

The Knutzen Family Theatre is about a 30-minute drive north from Tacoma. Make the trip, and you'll be rewarded with scenic views of Puget Sound and posh surroundings inside that are hard to match in a community theater setting. There's not a bad seat in the house.

"It's a lovely theater," Watt said. "The seating is comfortable, and the colors are warm and inviting. The acoustics and sight lines are wonderful, too."

Looking ahead, Centerstage Theatre Arts' second production of the 1999-2000 season, "Bus Stop, opens Oct. 7 and runs through Oct. 23. If you go for all-American-style stories with romance and humor that's easy to grasp, this William Inge comedy might be a good choice. The story unfolds as a pack of snow-stranded bus travelers are forced to hole up together for the night in a diner near Topeka, Kan. A gnarly cowboy has decided he's taking a Kansas City showgirl home to Montana with him, whether she's willing or not. When the sheriff steps in, the fireworks start.

"What I love about this one is that all these strangers are trapped together in a snowstorm and they're forced to deal with each other," Watt said.

"Each one of the characters is lots of fun, as well."

---

Preview

What: "Steel Magnolias"

Where: The Knutzen Family Theatre, 3200 S.W. Dash Point Road, Federal Way

When: Thursdays-Saturdays at 8 p.m., Sundays at 2 p.m., through Aug. 21

Tickets: \$25-\$10

Information: 253-661-1444

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## THE WALL STREET JOURNAL.

### Theater: The Real Thing, Well Almost

*Wall Street Journal*; New York; Aug 19, 1987; By Sylviane Gold;

**Edition:** Eastern edition

**Start Page:** 1

**ISSN:** 00999660

**Abstract:**

*Who says theater can't be real? In order to get to your seat at Romulus Linney's "Holy Ghosts," you've got to walk through the packed earth that surrounds the Theatre 890 stage. If you happen to be wearing sandals, your toes get dirty -- really. And when Diana Castle, as a resentful Southern wife, grabs a broom and starts sweeping, the dust blows up -- really. Her tatty little shift, the bare plank floor, the spare furniture are all blatantly real.*

*Farther downtown, at Robert Harling's "Steel Magnolias," a Louisiana beauty salon complete with swivel chairs, manicure table and hair dryers has been faithfully reproduced on the stage of the Lucille Lortel Theatre. As the play progresses, various characters have their hair washed, set and combed out -- really. The rollers and hair spray, the multicolored smocks, the flowery wallpaper are all dead-accurate. And there's even a program credit for "Hair Design and Supervision" (to Bobby H. Grayson, if you want to know).*

*In the first play, the final offering of this summer's New York Theater Exchange, realism serves to describe the misfits and rejects drawn to a sect of Pentecostal snake-handlers, and the second's to limn the lives of a genial, often comic group of female friends. But they have more in common than their insistently authentic Southern settings. Both writers give us access to a sanctuary to which we couldn't otherwise gain admission; both plays allow us to inspect at close range the refugees we wouldn't otherwise encounter.*

**Full Text:**

*Copyright Dow Jones & Company Inc Aug 19, 1987*

NEW YORK -- Who says theater can't be real? In order to get to your seat at Romulus Linney's "Holy Ghosts," you've got to walk through the packed earth that surrounds the Theatre 890 stage. If you happen to be wearing sandals, your toes get dirty -- really. And when Diana Castle, as a resentful Southern wife, grabs a broom and starts sweeping, the dust blows up -- really. Her tatty little shift, the bare plank floor, the spare furniture are all blatantly real.

Farther downtown, at Robert Harling's "Steel Magnolias," a Louisiana beauty salon complete with swivel chairs, manicure table and hair dryers has been faithfully reproduced on the stage of the Lucille Lortel Theatre. ~~As the play progresses, various characters have their hair washed, set and combed out -- really. The rollers and hair spray, the multicolored smocks, the flowery wallpaper are all dead-accurate.~~ And there's even a program credit for "Hair Design and Supervision" (to Bobby H. Grayson, if you want to know).

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In "Holy Ghosts," the refuge is the Rev. Obediah Buckhorn's makeshift church, where Ms. Castle's character, Nancy, has found shelter from the boorish redneck she naively married. As we meet her fellow parishioners, we find that they, too, are in flight from the pain of a terminal illness, of a promiscuous past, a lost pet, a lost job, a lost life.

The problems in "Steel Magnolias" are no less serious, but the remedy is less drastic. The Chinquapin, La., beauty shop serves as a haven where the neighborhood ladies can trade gossip, recipes and enemies without interference from the outside world -- made up, of course, primarily of men.

Messrs. Linney and Harling are both using theater as a sociological tool, which explains both the strengths and the weaknesses of their plays. Mr. Linney wants us to understand what draws people into a form of worship so ecstatic and irrational that its practitioners are willing to pass poisonous snakes from hand to hand. So he turns his congregants into case studies. He has tried to inject some tension by dragging Nancy's angry, deserted husband onto the scene, but this plot line seems thin and contrived. The meat of the play is in its case histories, and well-performed though they are in this San Diego Repertory Theatre production, they never become anything more than a census.

As for Mr. Harling, his purpose is implicit in his title. He wants us to see these traditional, small-town women, with their big-time hairdos, as heroic -- blushing flowers with innards of forged metal. So the oldest of them finds new youth in a business venture; the crankiest is softened by a rekindled romance; the most pathetic redeemed by friendship and an evangelical church and a new job. But Mr. Harling also wants us to know that he's smarter and more sophisticated than his characters, so he makes jokes at their expense. Since they are, on the whole, entertaining jokes, the play works well enough, in its genial, limited way -- until Mr. Harling falls off a dramatic cliff.

Interestingly, it's exactly the same one that Mr. Linney falls from in "Holy Ghosts." Both playwrights break faith with their audience by abandoning the verisimilitude they have worked so hard to establish.

In "Steel Magnolias," Mr. Harling quite unaccountably allows one of the characters to die. And even though he's led us to believe that we were in for an evening of sentimental comedy, we let him get away with it. But when he brings all the survivors onstage to weep disconsolately at their loss, and then, with a single mean line of dialogue sets them all laughing again, we won't buy it. The playwright is trifling with us -- a theatrical sin unforgivable in everything but a murder mystery.

We are similarly let down when Mr. Linney gets to the climactic moment of his play. When Nancy's husband kicks the innocent-looking wooden crate he's been sitting on, it emits an evil rattle. But when Obediah's singing, dancing followers lift the lid, there's nothing in it. The actors mime the culmination of the worship, and instead of writhing, scary snakes, we get air.

This might pass if we hadn't been made to notice the dirt floor, the real broom, the deadly hiss. And most people, I suspect, could do without seeing live snakes in a theater -- I was once ready to bolt when a bunch of uncaged mice turned up in the cast of a show. But a play is a kind of tightrope act -- one misstep and all the skill and daring that's preceded it goes for naught. In this play, snakes -- or some literal representation thereof -- are absolutely essential even if the audience feels jittery. Realism can work in the theater -- but not if you're going to be namby-pamby about it.

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## 'Magnolias' Delivers Heart and Humor

*The Los Angeles Times (Pre-1997 Fulltext); Los Angeles, Calif.; Oct 25, 1996; PHILIP BRANDES;*

**Sub Title:** [Home Edition]  
**Column Name:** THEATER BEAT  
**Start Page:** 33  
**ISSN:** 04583035

### Abstract:

"Steel Magnolias," Robert Harling's 1987 Southern tear-jerker, is frequently performed, but seldom as well as the deeply affecting production from Actors Co-op at the Crossley Theatre.

*With its intimate focus on six women coping with personal tragedy in a small Louisiana town, Harling's drama affords ample opportunities for shameless heart-string-plucking. Director Andi Chapman and her seamless cast appreciate the difference between cliched sentiment and genuine feeling, and they navigate the minefield of potential schmaltz without striking a single false note.*

### Full Text:

*(Copyright, The Times Mirror Company; Los Angeles Times 1996 all Rights reserved)*

"Steel Magnolias," Robert Harling's 1987 Southern tear-jerker, is frequently performed, but seldom as well as the deeply affecting production from Actors Co-op at the Crossley Theatre.

~~With its intimate focus on six women coping with personal tragedy in a small Louisiana town, Harling's drama affords ample opportunities for shameless heart-string-plucking. Director Andi Chapman and her seamless cast appreciate the difference between cliched sentiment and genuine feeling, and they navigate the minefield of potential schmaltz without striking a single false note.~~

Particularly impressive in this regard is Callan White as M'Lynn, transparently registering a mother's conflicting emotions when her dangerously diabetic daughter, Shelby (vibrant, earthy Renee Roque), decides to carry her pregnancy to term despite her doctor's warnings. The courageous good humor with which M'Lynn endures Shelby's physical deterioration sets up a devastating opening of her pent-up floodgates in the final scene.

Another standout is Kristina Lankford as the beauty shop assistant who mutates hilariously from mousy victim to party girl to born-again fundamentalist. Bighearted beautician Truvy (Lori Berg) and her regulars, a wisecracking widow (Janet Raycraft) and cantankerous divorcee (Cathy Thomas-Grant) round out the well-cast ensemble.

~~The show's abundant humor is more than a sugar-coating for tragedy--incisive banter is the principal shield with which these ladies keep heartbreak at bay. Still, Harling's witty repartee sometimes borders on Noel Coward sophistication at the expense of its down-home context--perhaps the highest compliment to be paid this cast is its ability to pull off quips like "She adored the quicksand he walked on" without disrupting the emotional momentum.~~

\* "Steel Magnolias," Crossley Theatre, 1760 N. Gower St., Hollywood. Thursdays-Saturdays, 8 p.m.; Sundays, 2:30 p.m. Ends Nov. 17. \$15. (213) 964-3586. Running time: 2 hours, 20 minutes.

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# The Atlanta Journal-Constitution

## Movies 'Women's film' genre is diversity in storytelling, if not stories

*The Atlanta Constitution (Pre-1997 Fulltext)*; Atlanta, Ga; Oct 6, 1995; Bob Strauss ENTERTAINMENT NEWS WIRE;

**Start Page:** P/18

### **Abstract:**

*A decade of scrounging for enough actresses to fill out the Academy Awards competition - or even trying to find a decent date movie that wasn't drenched in testosterone - has been redressed with the likes of "Boys on the Side," "While You Were Sleeping," "A Little Princess," "The Bridges of Madison County," "Clueless," "Something to Talk About," "Dangerous Minds" and "Moonlight and Valentino."*

*But it does bring us to the next question. There are apparent similarities marking "American Quilt," the just-released "Valentino" and the upcoming "Now and Then" and "Waiting to Exhale" - and they are traits shared with such recent hits as "Little Women," "The Joy Luck Club," "Fried Green Tomatoes" and "Steel Magnolias." Do those similarities suggest that the Hollywood "women's movie" has hit a kind of artistic plateau? Can we see what the next step might be?*

### **Full Text:**

*(Copyright 1995 The Atlanta Journal-Constitution)*

After a long drought, Hollywood is unleashing something of a flood of films by and about women.

A decade of scrounging for enough actresses to fill out the Academy Awards competition - or even trying to find a decent date movie that wasn't drenched in testosterone - has been redressed with the likes of "Boys on the Side," "While You Were Sleeping," "A Little Princess," "The Bridges of Madison County," "Clueless," "Something to Talk About," "Dangerous Minds" and "Moonlight and Valentino."

And more are on the way. "How to Make an American Quilt" is the second of the fall releases, after "Valentino," with a large female cast and a number of women in major, behind-the-scenes creative positions. This has to be cheerful news to anyone who values diversity in storytelling, indicating that such movies are moving up on the agendas of studio decision makers (most of whom are male).

But it does bring us to the next question. There are apparent similarities marking "American Quilt," the just-released "Valentino" and the upcoming "Now and Then" and "Waiting to Exhale" - and they are traits shared with such recent hits as "Little Women," "The Joy Luck Club," "Fried Green Tomatoes" and "Steel Magnolias." Do those similarities suggest that the Hollywood "women's movie" has hit a kind of artistic plateau? Can we see what the next step might be?

"American Quilt" producer Midge Sanford is happy to be in a position to address that question. " 'Joy Luck Club,' 'Steel Magnolias,' 'Enchanted April' - studio people say, 'Well, someone seems to be going to them, so I guess we'll let those kinds of movies be made.' Which is said, perhaps, with a slight edge," she says with, well, an edge in her voice. "What might be the next step? I don't know, but it's a really interesting question because we certainly don't want to be repeating ourselves. I haven't seen any of the other three movies coming out, but I have read the book 'Waiting to Exhale' and it does seem rather different from 'American Quilt.' Hopefully, we can all move on to another place."

Based on Whitney Otto's best seller, "American Quilt" recounts the romantic travails of a group of older women (played by Maya Angelou, Anne Bancroft, Ellen Burstyn, Kate Nelligan, Jean Simmons, Lois

Smith and Alfre Woodard) who gather to make a wedding quilt for Burstyn's granddaughter (Winona Ryder). A little conflict, a bit of bawdiness, some tears, much nurturing and forgiveness are spread over an episodic course of intimate conversations and illuminating storytelling.

Not all these elements and patterns appear in every female-centered film of 1995. But a surprising number pop up again and again, even in such unexpected places as the teenage comedy "Clueless." And none of these pictures even flirts with the unpredictability and edginess of what many recall fondly as the best "women's movie" of recent vintage, "Thelma & Louise."

Of course, it must be said that this genre-in-the-making is nowhere near as rigidly uniform as the hundreds of male-centered action movies Hollywood has churned out in the past dozen years. And even if the newer women's pictures do share a certain sensitivity, their creators are aiming to make them no less tough than all that guy stuff.

"We wanted edge, intelligence and wit. We really didn't want this movie told through gauze," says "American Quilt" producer Sarah Pillsbury, whose previous films with partner Sanford include such flavorsome fare as "Desperately Seeking Susan," "River's Edge" and "Eight Men Out." "We don't think of women's stories and women's lives as soft. Actually, most women's lives are pretty damn hard, and the idea that there's not a hard edge to a women's story because no one pulls out a gun and shoots somebody is really offensive to us."

#### [Illustration]

Notes: Photo: Australian filmmaker Jocelyn Moorhouse directs a scene from "How to Make an American Quilt." / Universal Pictures

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**Please note:**

**This article has been redacted due to copyright restrictions:**

“The View From/Mamaroneck; Shampoo and Stage Set, Please.”

Lynn Ames.

New York Times. February 21, 1999 Late Edition (East Coast)

Link: <http://www.nytimes.com/1999/02/21/nyregion/the-view-from-mamaroneck-shampoo-and-stage-set-please.html>

**This article has been redacted due to copyright restrictions:**

“Film: All-Star Girl Talk”

Julie Salamon

Wall Street Journal. November 16, 1989 Eastern Edition

This article is not open access.

Link: <http://search.proquest.com/docview/398119724>



## STEEL MAGNOLIAS

Directed by Herbert Ross  
Screenplay by Robert Harling

BY RICHARD SCHICKEL

Men have hunting, ball games and bars—plenty of opportunities to practice the hearty, necessary rituals of male bonding. Feminist theorists

monopersonally. [REDACTED]

It was observant of playwright Robert Harling to see that a small-town beauty parlor function as a little lodge hall for women, a place where they can pour their hair-down wine it is being put up. It was clever of him to stock *Steel Magnolias* with Southern belles, wicked of eye and tongue, though ultimately forgiving of heart. It was shrewd of him to work the successful off-Broadway drama [REDACTED] into a movie. His characters may be exotic, but their [REDACTED] are amazingly familiar.

Above all, it was brave of Harling to place at the center of what might otherwise have been an episodic comedy the true, tragic story of his sister, a diabetic who doomed herself to early death in order to bear a child, and his mother's struggle to come to terms with that choice. It gives the piece the dramatic focus and the emotional weight it requires.

The play was a swell show; it had something for everyone. The main thing preventing it from being an equally swell



Southern belles: MacLaine and Field, top; Parton and Dukakis

movie is the fact that it is a movie. A film must offer us something a little more spectacular than half a dozen white chicks sitting around talking. Accordingly, Harling's adaptation hustles them out of the beauty shop and into the life of the town. Suddenly the people they talked about so amusingly behind their backs must be met face-to-face. The conflicts and confusions that sounded so hilarious in the recounting are spread out realistically. And reality, as we know, is never that amusing when confronted head on.

The stylized bitchiness of Harling's writing requires a stage setting. Failing that, it requires a director willing to let his actors throw good lines away or overlap them in ways that work in the movie's naturalistic context. But Herbert Ross insists on theatricality. His editing even provides awkward little pauses for the audience to fill with laughter, just as if this were still a play. As a result, some very good performers (Shirley MacLaine, Olympia Dukakis, Daryl Hannah, Dolly Parton) function less as full-scale sorority sisters than as chorus members who elbow their way up front in a crowd of even sketchier characters.

The film's center lies in the bond between Julia Roberts as the young woman serenely accepting the risk of childbirth and Sally Field as her tightly wound mother, wanting to scream warnings at her daughter but only able to whisper despairing support for her—right through the final coma. Their characters are fully and finely realized, and their work is supported, not subverted, by the style and mood of a film that cries more easily, and more persuasively, than it laughs. ■

## VALMONT

Directed by Milos Forman  
Screenplay by Jean-Claude Carrière

Call it by its rightful name, *Les Liaisons Dangereuses*. Call it *Dangerous Liaisons*. Call it, if you must, *Valmont*. But in any case it looks as if we can now call it a day for stage and movie adaptations of Pierre-Ambroise-François Choderlos de Laclos's intricate, instructive novel of sexual gamesmanship among the 18th century French aristocracy. For Milos Forman and Jean-Claude Carrière, while fiddling with the plot of this deliciously nasty tale, have studiously embalmed its spirit. *Valmont* arrives stiffened by the elegant, inert formalism of Forman's direction, and chilled by Carrière's all too sober respect for his source and by their mutual determination to apply modern psychological understanding to the behavior of the principal figures.

The script is almost clinically clear about why the Marquise de Merteuil (Annette Bening) and the

Vicomte de Valmont (Colin Firth) embark on a campaign to debauch a 15-year-old virgin, Cécile de Volanges (Fairuza Balk). The older woman is gripped by temporary insanity because she loves the man who intends to marry the adolescent. The vicomte too has his excuses. He is possessed by a passionate nature, the ill effects of which, it is implied, are also temporary. Give the kid some time, and

he will probably turn out to be an admirable citizen. Indeed, his second amorous campaign—to bed a virtuous young wife, Madame de Tourvel (Meg Tilly)—is not presented as idle and amoral womanizing but as proof of his capacity for authentic emotion. Too bad he has what we now are fond of calling "an intimacy problem," and, as a result, this affair and ultimately his life come to a bad and premature end.

How could anyone think it helpful to impose upon the behavior of a long-lost era and a vanished social class the wisdom of modern Pop psychology? It prevents the actors from tearing into their roles with the black comic gusto that Glenn Close and John Malkovich brought to their feverish performances in *Dangerous Liaisons* last year. But besides spoiling the fun, this approach blurs the work's value as a cautionary tale, capable of reminding us that motiveless malignity is a potent force in every age and one that not even Freud—let alone humanistically inclined moviemakers—can explain away. —R.S.

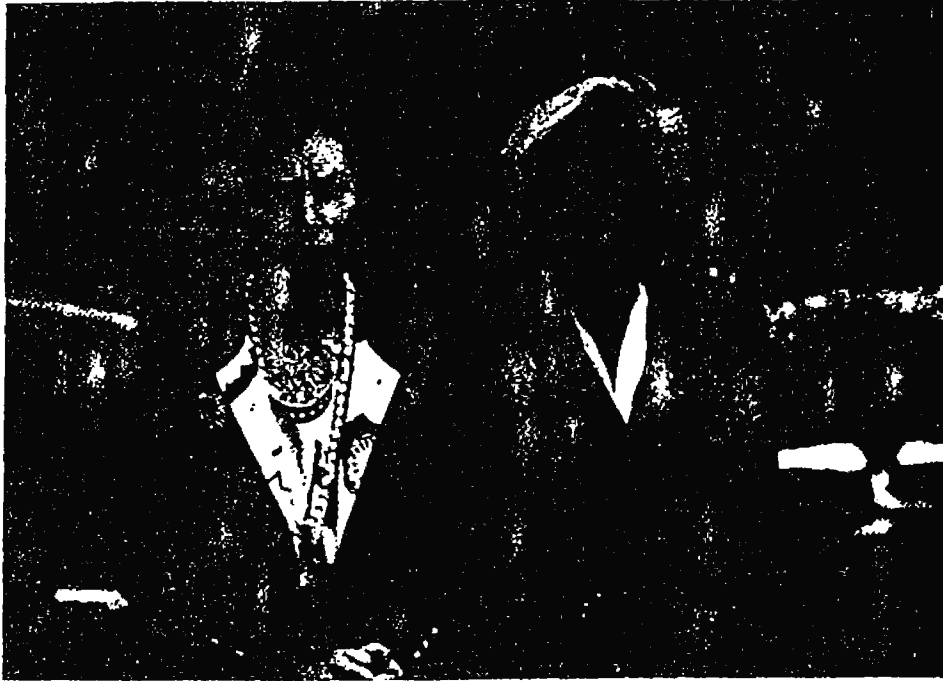


Malign campaigners: Bening and Firth

The wisdom of Pop psychology spoils the fun.

# STEEL MAGNOLIAS

*Shirley MacLaine proves there is life after being a leading lady*



**E**CCENTRIC, YOU KNOW, IS ALMOST like vanilla in the South," says Shirley MacLaine of her role as Ouiser (pronounced "Weeser") Boudreaux, the town crank in Robert Harling's screen adaptation of his off-Broadway play *Steel Magnolias*. MacLaine, a Southerner by upbringing, finds the character of Ouiser "not all that unusual. There's a Ouiser in every small town in the South. There has got to be a town cynic, someone around whom gossip can swirl, because all these people in small Southern towns love to sit around and tell stories about each other. She does have a lot of money, and she's traveled a great deal, so she doesn't have to give a damn what other people think."

Shirley MacLaine adds to her growing gallery of eccentric supporting roles in *Steel Magnolias*, costarring would-be First Cousin Olympia Dukakis.

Completing the circle of strong, Southern women whose shared loves and losses form the heart of this tragic-comedy are Sally Field, Olympia Dukakis, Dolly Parton, Daryl Hannah and Julia Roberts. "People expected fireworks, combustion and temperment," says MacLaine, "but we had no ego, no

sense of competition. And also [with] women working together, there is not that kind of 'territorial imperative' that happens when you deal with men."

It was the first time MacLaine has worked on a picture so singularly female. "When I worked with Audrey [Hepburn, on *The Children's Hour*], there were a lot of women, but Jim Garner was very prominent. And when I worked with Annie Bancroft [*The Turning Point*], it was a large cast. This is really the first time it's been . . . what I call all-feminine energy."

Ouiser, although the smallest part, was her immediate favorite, "because she's so mean and funny and real. I landed on Ouiser faster than I have on most parts I've played. I knew her. Maybe it's a part of me I never had the guts to be. I'm not cynical like that. I'm not bitterly comedic." She laughs, "Well, maybe sometimes I am."

The only difficulty she had with the part, she says, was "maybe a little bit to let myself look like that. Just coming off

of Sousatzka and letting myself look like the wrath of God, and overweight and having no makeup." In fact, she seems to be making a career out of playing "older" this past year, with Madame Sousatzka and Ouiser and a new role in Mike Nichols' *Postcards From the Edge*.

The transition from leading lady to character actor started in her early '40s with *Terms of Endearment* and was assisted by, of all people, Jack Nicholson, "because he so easily moved into character acting. Maybe I was always a character actress, but when you started as long ago as I did, you were sort of thought of as a leading lady."

The one role that MacLaine still longs to play is "a very soft, vulnerable person who doesn't have that strident quality that I get offered so many of these days. I seem to have graduated to these demanding, imperious, impossibly funny women. I'd like to do something like the part in *Room at the Top* that Simone Signoret played. A love story with vulnerability."

After a career of more than 30 films, MacLaine believes she has been guided by a lucky star and "maybe one day I'll go to it," she says, laughing at the possibility. —Janet Fitch

## Henry V

*Kenneth Branagh and a Bard for All Seasons*

WHEN KENNETH BRANAGH DECIDED to make a new film version of *Henry V*, his biggest challenge was breaking what he terms the "Shakespeare barrier." "A lot of people are put off by Shakespeare," says the 28-year-old director, "and I wanted to have a hand in making the story more available to those people. I don't kid myself that we'll do the same business as *Batman*, but I want people to feel that *Henry V* is of the same world as *Batman*—that it, too, is 1989."

Branagh's primary motivation for

**Please note:**

**This article has been redacted due to copyright restrictions:**

“Steel Magnolias’ Finds a True Home in Drag Production”

Lauren Ray Pollard

Seattle Times. November 13, 1995

Link:

<http://community.seattletimes.nwsourc.com/archive/?date=19951113&slug=2152250>

# STEEL MAGNOLIAS

**BY ROBERT HARLING**



Presented by  
The Tulare Western Curtain Call Players  
April 12, 13, 19, and 20  
at 7:30 pm  
in The Little Theatre/Room 811  
Call 686-8751 for more info.

































































# Western play serves as basis for teacher's master's thesis

el Magnolias'  
s dual purpose  
r Petersdorf.

ene Fitchette  
ance-Register  
er Jana Petersdorf has some-  
common with her students  
ill turn in a paper at the end  
master.

dorf, who has taught English  
ma at Tulare Western High  
or 11 years, is writing a mas-  
s about producing the high  
y "Steel Magnolias." She ex-  
col- plete the master's degree  
at Central Washington Uni-  
nis summer.

ulare Western High School  
Call Players opened the play  
weekend and it will be per-  
again April 19-20 at 7:30 p.m.  
ittle Theatre, room 811.

dorf said she wanted to fur-  
c education because "when  
something you want to teach  
tely, to the best of your abili-  
can nurture that love in the  
."

at to bring that [passion for  
out in them," she said.

dorf recalled how producing  
Magnolias" has been "a long  
anning started nearly a year  
he begged and pleaded with  
essors to allow her to direct it  
master's project despite it con-  
our characters over the age

essages of the play go far be-  
e challenge of making 18-  
s look 67 or 47. Both the au-  
nd those performing in the  
forced to consider if "we live  
to the fullest" and "Can we,  
y did, be forever satisfied and

optimistic about the lot life has hand-  
ed us or are we just living "a lifetime  
of nothin' special?"

"The play has inspired me a great  
deal, and I truly admire that 28-year-  
old mother [Shelby] who sacrificed  
everything for her "30 minutes of  
wonderful," Petersdorf said.

Petersdorf said she took some dif-  
ferent steps to produce this play since  
she is working on her paper com-  
pared to what she would normally do.  
For example, she hired someone to  
design the sets, which "allows me to  
concentrate on props, lights and  
sound [in the renovated theater] and  
help the actors as we go along."

During her research for her thesis,  
Petersdorf examined the unique ways  
women deal with grief, sorrow and re-  
lationships with each other. This is  
similar to the journal her students  
kept while researching their parts.

Petersdorf chose the play written  
by Robert Harling because she has a  
strong group of female actors.

"You choose plays where your tal-  
ents are," she said.

Petersdorf said the play gives stu-  
dents an idea of how a college play is  
produced, with specialists doing the  
makeup and sets. Students also see  
the job opportunities available be-  
hind the scenes of a production.

Students were asked to sign a con-  
tract committing to participate in the  
play. The contract explained that Peters-  
dorf would use the production to write  
her master's thesis. At the same time,  
"the success of the students in all our  
productions is even more important."

Senior Sanisha Alvarado, who  
plays "Ouiser (pronounced Wheezer)",  
and junior Haylie Machado, who  
plays "Shelby", commended Peters-

*"If she is putting  
this much effort  
[into the play] then  
we should be  
putting out this  
much effort, too."*

**Haylie Machado, student**

dorf for the effort she put into the  
play and thesis.

Alvarado likes the way Petersdorf  
remains calm about directing, but  
"gives us verbs to help us out" and  
"makes sure we understand [the best  
technique for bringing out the charac-  
ter]."

"She shows there's a lot of hard  
work that goes into set design and  
getting along with the students and  
helping them out," Alvarado said.

Alvarado is glad she spent time  
with a make-up artist. She signed up  
for a class offered through College of  
the Sequoias by Estes Institute of  
Cosmetology.

Machado said she has put more  
work into this production than other  
plays. To prepare for the part, she was  
required to visit a dialysis center.

"She made me realize she is a real-  
ly hard worker," Machado said. "If she  
is putting this much effort [into the  
play] then we should be putting out  
this much effort, too."

Petersdorf's finished thesis will  
See **PLAY**, page A2

## Play

Continued from page A1

contain components includ-  
ing an analysis of characters,  
character dialogue and dra-  
matic action, a production  
journal and self-evaluation.

The process also requires  
the student to take an oral  
examination conducted by  
the Thesis Project Commit-  
tee. Sample questions may  
include which form of re-  
search was most helpful and  
why, why certain music was  
chosen for intermission and  
what techniques in working  
with actors was most produc-  
tive.

With a master's degree in  
hand, Petersdorf would like  
to produce a college-level  
play and community theater  
with an adult cast.

Information: 686-8751.

# SOUTHERN 'STEEL'

Tulare Western students tackle funny, sad 'Steel Magnolias'

by Laura A. Maldonado

Basically, it's a chick flick. But you may want to show up to hear how women talk about you when you're not around.

The themes in "Steel Magnolias" are universal enough to appeal to men and women of all age groups — the transitions from youth to adulthood, illness, marriage, parenthood, desertion, divorce, death and even disgruntled neighbors.

No single character has to deal with all of these plot elements.

But the play features an ensemble of six, and what happens to one affects them all.

"It's kind of a real chick play because of how these women relate to each other," said Ashley Machado, 15.

The play's title may seem an oxymoron. After all, the creamy pink flowers of the magnolia are known for their delicate nature — susceptible to being their early blooms to wither at strong winds. If they survive, however, the flowers provide a brilliant sea of white.

The characters deal with the joys and sorrows of life with grace and bravery," director Patricia Petersdorf said while applying lines of makeup wrinkles onto performer Sanisha Prado's face.

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## How to attend

What: "Steel Magnolias"  
When: 7:30 p.m. April 12, 13, 19  
| 20

Where: Tulare Western High  
School's Little Theater, Room 81  
Tickets: \$6 adults, \$5 students  
Information: 686-8751



**Above:** In the foreground, Sanisha Alvarado, a 17-year-old Tulare Western High School senior, rehearses a scene from "Steel Magnolias" with Haylie Machado, a 16-year-old junior. **Below:** From left, Kathryn McEachern, a 16-year-old junior, Machado and Kathryn Hoffman, a 17-year-old junior, rehearse a scene.



# Steel

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Alvarado, 17, fills the role of Ouiser, a cantankerous "town curmudgeon" who "complains about everything, but her heart is in the right place," Petersdorf said.

Also in the cast is Kathryn Hoffman, 17, as Clairee Belcher, the widow searching for a way to make life whole again without her husband.

"I'm old and elegant, don't talk to me that way," Hoffman quips after being teased about her realistic-looking, aged appearance in an ash-blonde wig.

"She reminds me of myself [the way] she makes funny comments," Hoffman said. "She's still recovering from her husband's death. She's realizing there's more to life [than being the mayor's wife]."

Ashley Machado, 15, plays Annelle, the young wife whose husband just left her.

"He kind of left her hanging, so she tries to find herself and gets real religious," Machado said.

do, 16, plays Shelby, the soon-to-be bride coping with severe diabetes, the restrictions it places on her life and her mother.

Shelby adores every nuance of the color pink, and at one point humorously stresses the importance of the different shades of the hue incorporated into her wedding scheme.

Kathryn McEachern, 16, fills the role of Shelby's protective and doting mother, M'Lynn Eatenton.

As McEachern's brunette hair was coifed expertly into a bouffant by costume designer Nancy McGinnis, she described the tug-of-war between the characters as Shelby moves toward marriage.

"She has a hard time controlling her daughter and the choices she makes," McEachern said.

Sounds familiar. As in many mother-daughter relationships, the squabbling doesn't erase the

underlying love.

"It's one of those plays that makes you feel good afterwards," Haylie Machado said.

The closeness of the cast even before rehearsals started will be apparent in the performance, she said.

In the play, the women dish about every personal topic imaginable in the beauty parlor owned by Truvy Jones, who is

played by Gabby Villarruel, 16.

During show preparation, similar gossip takes place backstage. Chatter about boys, family and clothes fills the dressing room as, layer by layer, the young women become their characters.

"If people can stick together, they can get through anything," Hoffman said. "That's what friends are for."