

5-22-2006

Steel Magnolias: An Actor Directs

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STEEL MAGNOLIAS: AN ACTOR DIRECTS

A Thesis

Submitted to the Graduate Faculty of the
University of New Orleans
in partial fulfillment of the
requirements for the degree of

Master of Fine Arts
in
Drama and Communications

by

Michael Ashley Harkins

B.S. Southeastern Oklahoma State University, 2003

May 2006

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ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS:

I would like to offer my heartfelt thanks to the following individuals for their much needed help and support.

- Professor Dell McLain, Director of Theatre and the Theatre faculty and staff of Southeastern Oklahoma State University for allowing me the opportunity to direct this show so that I would not fall behind in my pursuit of my M.F.A. You have taught me a tremendous amount over the years and I would not be here today were it not for your guidance, support, and friendship.
- The cast of *Steel Magnolias*: Chelsea Bedwell, Dani Daniels, Samantha Dougless, Larissa Gomez-Rollins, Darla Shearer, and Heather Whitsell; for your hard work, dedication, and trust.
- The Stage Management crew and designers of *Steel Magnolias*: for keeping the ship upright and giving us a wonderful world in which to explore, live, and tell our story.
- Professor Phil Karnell, for his insight of the acting process. You tore me down and guided my rebuilding process on a new, solid foundation. I would not be the actor I am today were it not for your unbending precision.
- Professor David Hoover, for your guidance and support. You would never allow me to give up and your high expectations pushed me to challenge myself and grow not only as an artist but also as a person. And especially for the true friend that you are and will always remain.
- DRCM faculty, staff and fellow students for your support and your friendship, which made my tenure here so memorable.
- My parents, May and Jim Vasek, and the rest of my family for your emotional and financial support, for your undying support of my desire to be part of the unstable world of theatre and for the way you simply put up with me. By no means could my love and gratitude be expressed in words. You are the true reason for my success.

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ABSTRACT:

This thesis is an endeavor to accurately document and define my actor coaching process as a director through Robert Harling's *Steel Magnolias*. The following chapters contain a record of the development of my actor coaching process in this production, including character & actor analysis, a rehearsal log that provides a daily track of my progress, and an evaluation of the process and resulting performance.

INTRODUCTION:

This MFA thesis project began in November of 2005 as a replacement to my original thesis project due to Hurricane Katrina. My original thesis was creating the role of Bishop in Nicky Silver's *Fat Men in Skirts*. We were a week into the rehearsal process when we were evacuated and the rest is, literally, history. A month and a half into the break I chose to visit my undergraduate, Southeastern Oklahoma State University. While there, Dell McLain, the director of theatre, spoke with me about possibly directing Robert Harling's *Steel Magnolia*'s in their dinner theatre slot. He had spoken with David Hoover, my committee chair, and David, along with the rest of my committee, agreed to allow this project to substitute as my thesis project so that I would not fall behind in my schedule of graduating in May of 2006. When informed of this I gladly accepted the challenge.

David Hoover and I decided that since my specialization is in acting my thesis project should focus on the acting coaching and techniques therein. I approached the overall production as a director, coordinating all the aspects of the show, but agreed the actual thesis project should focus on the acting. I moved to Durant, OK towards the end of October and began to prepare for the auditions. While there, I also had the opportunity to assist Dell in his acting and directing classes. This was an important opportunity for me because I was taught by Dell and it was exciting to be able to teach and coach along side of him.

I truly did not mind the fact that I was an actor being asked to direct. In my years at SOSU, I had directed several productions including one entry in the Kennedy Center American

College Theatre Festival. Directing is second only to acting on my list of passions so this was looking to be an exciting experience. I find that, as an actor, you learn as much, if not more, directing and teaching other actors. If anything, it improves the manner in which you verbalize your process. This was also an opportunity for me to test other aspects of my craft, which I had not used much in my past, for instance, table work. I am accustomed to having the first read through and the next day immediately jumping into blocking. I chose to utilize the longer rehearsal process to experiment with some new approaches for me. *Steel Magnolias*, is a script that is centered around the relationships of six very different women. I felt I needed the extra time to tackle those relationships head on. Also the fact the script is well constructed and full of great moments led me to believe that this was a perfect play to focus specifically on the acting. In early November we held auditions and the process began.

CHARACTER/ACTOR ANALYSIS:

In this chapter I will show my analysis of each character along with my analysis of the actors who play them. Since my focus is on the actor coaching, the analysis of the actors will focus on the strengths and weaknesses and my approach towards handling each.

Truvy (Dani Daniels):

Dani and I, after looking at several possible objectives for Truvy, finally chose “To have a family”. We went with this choice because of certain points in the script. Truvy speaks about Poot, her son, and misses him terribly. This objective also can explain the fact that she takes in Annelle so quickly. She doesn’t hesitate to offer Annelle a place in her home and eventually her family. A mother-daughter relationship develops between the two and Truvy becomes very protective of Annelle. This is seen when Truvy is openly worried about Annelle’s joining the religious group. As Truvy achieves this objective we see changes not only in her but her husband as well. She speaks of him actually getting off the couch and taking her dancing and, even more interesting to me, he actually helps Annelle make the baby Jesus Christmas ornaments. Truvy is successful in obtaining her objective and the evidence is when she refers to Annelle as her ‘semi-daughter’ and also herself as a ‘semi-grandmother.

I cast Dani for several reasons. She has a strong stage presence, is very energetic, and she has a natural ‘motherly’ quality about her that works for the character of Truvy. Another reason she received the role is because during the audition process she kept improving and using my notes, so I figured she would continue this trend during the rehearsal process. Dani had limited stage experience and most of it was in musical theatre. She told me that this was her first substantial ‘straight’ theatre role. There were a few issues that I knew I would have to work with

her on. One is that she tends to play the same action too long. Also, I needed to push her to make cleaner changes when she switches tactics. The largest issue was her confidence. She was not comfortable with herself on stage enough to go with her instincts and make strong choices. I could tell that she had a fear of appearing fake or even over the top. I expected this to be an issue with her musical theatre background because often actors separate the two, but I feel that you need to tell the truth in either, so this should be a good experience for her as she continues her main focus on musicals.

My approach to working with Dani was mainly to push her, hard. I actually was tougher on her than any of my other actors. I felt that she needed me to stay on her and not let up. I vocalized this to her in a discussion and assured her that it was not coming from a place of disappointment in her work, but rather the fact that I had very high expectations of her abilities and was confident that she would get there. I guess you could refer to it as ‘tough love’ with a dose of encouragement. I spent most of my time on specific moments to illustrate to her what I needed from the character and would not let her move on until the moment was right. It took painfully long at times and I could see frustration building in her but as soon as a moment clicked, it was well worth the effort. I feel like this was the best approach to take with her and it was successful. Out of all my actors, Dani grew the most in this process. Dell McLain, the director of Theatre, supported this claim in a discussion I had with him at the end of the run. He informed me that it was by far the best work he had seen her do in her time at Southeastern. I took this response as a success.

Annelle (Heather Whitsell):

For the character of Annelle we chose the objective 'to gain acceptance'. This objective is well supported in the script. Her obstacles are her past and her lack of trust in others. Annelle is the only character that is new to this group of friends and is quite secretive about her past when she first joins the group. This shows she is afraid that her past will cause the group to not accept her. The script also supports this with the quickness of the relationship developing between her and Truvy. In a relatively short period of time the two journey from strangers to a mother-daughter relationship. Annelle joins a Christian group during the course of the show, which also signifies that she is searching for acceptance. She is successful in achieving her objective as seen in the resulting relationship with Truvy and her husband, her acceptance into the tight circle of friends, and her marriage to Sammy Desoto. In the course of the play we see Annelle journey from a shy girl who doesn't even want to speak, for fear of saying the wrong thing, to a woman who is strong enough to jump in and encourage M'Lynn with her tactics for dealing with the loss of Shelby. In fact, none of the other characters know how to respond and it is Annelle that makes the best argument that they need to celebrate Shelby's life instead of dwelling on the loss.

Heather showed up at auditions reading for Truvy but I had her later read the scene I just described. Her delivery of the monologue in that moment with M'Lynn was exactly what I wanted. She was closer to Annelle than anything I could have even hoped to find. It was such a powerful moment that many fellow auditionees were close to tears. I knew right then that I had my Annelle. I was actually fearful that I might mess her character up in the process. Most of the issues that I had with Heather were technical in nature. She had a tendency to get too soft, volume wise, and she also would upstage herself at times. These were good issues to have and

were easily fixed. Also there were some changes that I made for purely comedic purposes. For instance, I adjusted where she gets the ‘hotdogs in the water’ section. I didn’t want her to realize her mistake until Truvy asked her to make a new pot of coffee because I wanted the audience to be in on the joke and see her realization. We added a vocal utterance, an ‘oh’, before she apologizes and leaves to make more coffee to facilitate this. It also helped setup Truvy’s, “She’s probably not an international spy,” punch line to be a little clearer. My approach with Heather was mainly to back off and let her work. The only real struggles came towards the end of the process. Since I didn’t have many notes for her, I could feel her beginning to get stagnant and bored with her choices. To try to curb this, I began throwing new choices at her simply to force her to think and then, closer to opening, we reverted back to most of her original choices. This helped bring back some freshness to her performance. Dell informed me that this was also her first substantial role since joining SOSU and he was very pleased with her growth as well. Now, Heather’s resulting performance was quite fine, but I think I lost some of her original choices that I loved at auditions and take full blame for that. I needed to find more ways to keep things fresh for my actor and I feel that I failed her in that respect.

Clairee (Chelsea Bedwell):

Finding Clairee’s objective was actually the most difficult of all the characters in the script. It is the least clearly defined because the character does not speak of herself or her wants very often at all. Chelsea and I chose to look for key moments of Clairee’s and try to search for something solid to grasp on to. She speaks of dealing with life now, with her husband deceased, after spending many years in the ‘whirlwind’ of being the mayor’s wife. Clairee never had a

clear problem to overcome. She is well spoken, confident, humorous, wealthy, and seems mostly satisfied with her life. Bringing her husband back from the grave was obviously not an option so we had to look farther into the script. Two things stood out to us. One, she is highly active in the local high school football program because her husband was. This caught my attention because she points out the fact football cannot be parlayed into a 'reason to live'. The largest change that we found is after the purchase of the Radio Station. This seemed to stand out as a large moment for her. From this we chose her objective to find self worth or a usefulness to society. She needed to find a reason to exist, to find 'worth through independence'. This is a rather strong objective but the problem lies in the fact that there is simply not as much clear information in the script to back it as compared to the other characters. Her obstacle would lie in dwelling on her husband's death instead of moving on with her new life as a widow. There is no specific reference to her being more satisfied with her life after purchasing the station but there is a general improved attitude and she mentions her husband only in reference to him being in heaven to help Shelby with her speeding tickets. This again was not being supported in the script near as much as I would have preferred. I do not believe that Clairee completes this objective, but rather takes some steps toward her goal. She is moving in the right direction.

Overall I was pleased with the character that Chelsea brought to the process. I had worked with her in the past, both as a director and actor, and now she seemed to have a better grasp on her approach and analysis techniques. Chelsea informed me that the table work was the most useful part of the process to her and that finding those relationships before we got on our feet helped her immensely. She had a good natural presence on stage, had a nice feel for the sarcastic humor, and also she carried herself with the definite feel of an upper class woman who had lived life. The only concerns that I approached were rather minimal and technical. I needed

to work some on the speed at which she moved. I had to remind her often that Clairee is not a young woman. She needed to move with a slower more determined pace to illustrate the age. The only other points I really had to work were more in the timing of some of her jokes and offhanded remarks. It was more about pacing than anything. I know the resulting performance was the most credible work I personally have seen her do and I give all the credit to her. She brought some great choices to the table and I mainly just guided her through.

Shelby (Samantha Dougless):

Shelby's objective is very clearly defined in the script. She wants some semblance of a normal life. She consistently has statements about having a family and that her dream is to grow old and have a lapful of grandchildren. Samantha and I chose to take this objective and focus on the more tangible goal of 'to be a mother'. This is an objective that she fights for consistently. Her obstacle to this is her obvious health problems (diabetic) and the pure risk of her having a child. Shelby is more than aware (M'Lynn reminds her of it constantly) that having a child would strain her body too much and could very likely cause death. This is a chance that Shelby is willing to take and she in turn becomes pregnant and has a child. Another item we looked at with regards to her objective was her relationship with Jackson, her husband. We found it interesting that Shelby never speaks of him in a way to suggest any form of true love for each other. We had the feeling that he was almost, as rough as this sounds, a tool for her to reach the desired result. Their relationship seemed to be more out of sheer usefulness to each other rather than any real emotional connection. Shelby is the prettiest girl in town and Jackson is the successful Louisiana lawyer. It was just expected for them to be together. Shelby achieves her objective and gives birth to a baby, Jackson Jr. In the short time after she has her child she

seems quite satisfied with her choice even though it pushed her body to the limit and ultimately resulted in her death.

Samantha came in with an extremely strong grasp of the more dramatic moments of the show. In auditions, her and Larissa (M'Lynn) read the scene when Shelby brings forth the information regarding her pregnancy. It was a wonderful scene with great investment and conflict between the two. Samantha is a naturally gifted actress, amongst other things; she also is a very talented scene painter and designer. She had some of the standard problems that are seen in young actors. She drops off at the end of her lines and tends to speak too fast. I had to repeat notes throughout the rehearsal process telling her to slow down because we could not understand her. My main focus with Sam, however, was on her trouble investing in Shelby's successes. While her confrontations with M'Lynn were strong and she fought hard for her objective, the problem was in her moments when she is close to achieving her goals. She couldn't seem to invest in the 'happy' moments as much as the 'rough' ones. It takes just as much investment in the character and moments to laugh and enjoy as it takes to cry. One moment in particular is when she says that she is pregnant. This is a huge step towards her objective that she has been fighting so hard to achieve. To put it simply, it must be a good thing, a very good thing. She said it as if she was saying that she bought a new dress. This had to burst from her because it is everything to Shelby. I worked on this moment with her numerous times and it improved but had not reached the level that I needed it to be at. As luck would have it, Larissa (M'Lynn) found out that she was pregnant near the end of the rehearsal process. After she told us, I congratulated her first of course, but then turned to Samantha and asked if she noticed anything useful in the exchange. Sam's response was that she realized the importance of that moment the second "I'm pregnant!" came out of Larissa's mouth. Thanks to the God's of

Theatre for that piece of assistance. The moment improved immediately after that. I could have still used a little more juice behind it but was satisfied with the result. Another area that Sam needed to work on was using her vowels. I drove this point more at the earlier moments of the show like when she is speaking of the wedding arrangements. I needed her to really paint a picture of the beauty that it would be so that the conflict would be stronger when M'Lynn came in later and began pointing out all the flaws. This area improved as well but I feel I still could have pulled more out of the moment. Overall, I feel that Samantha grew in the process and I am more than confident that she will overcome these small issues to become quite a fine actress. Dell said that this also was one of her first substantial roles and stated that he was quite satisfied with her growth as well.

M'Lynn (Larissa Gomez-Rollins):

Larissa and I didn't have to search very hard for M'Lynn's objective either. It is the other most clearly defined objective in the script. M'Lynn simply wants to 'Protect her child (Shelby). She even goes as far as giving Shelby a kidney in an effort to save her life. M'Lynn will do anything to protect Shelby even at the risk of her not being liked. She can be quite hard on Shelby and externally, to others around, it could almost be considered cold or mean, but the motivation behind it is for good. One moment in particular that stood out to me is during the scene when Shelby is having her diabetic attack. In this moment Shelby tells M'Lynn that she is going to leave and M'Lynn responds with, "I would love to see you try." This is one of those moments where it could be perceived that she is diminishing or belittling Shelby's potential. We looked at it from the aspect that M'Lynn knows that Shelby will try to fight her and it is a challenge to push her instead of an insult. M'Lynn is the one character that clearly does not

achieve her objective as in the fact that Shelby's surgery is not successful and she passes away. M'Lynn's explosive final scene is the result of not being able to protect her child and it is the most powerful moment in the play.

Larissa is another actor that I had previous experience with many times. We were in undergrad at SOSU together for three years. I knew that she could easily tackle this role's extreme emotional states because she has always been able to invest fully in those types of moments. The only coaching I had with Larissa regarded two areas. There was some work on the comedic moments mainly in the timing of them and not so much the delivery. Also I had to push her to be harsher when battling with Shelby. I needed a balance between the two. If M'Lynn were gentle in her approach to Shelby then Shelby would come off as a spoiled, arrogant child. On the other hand, if she was too harsh and cold, than M'Lynn would appear to be simply a mean, controlling mother. During the rehearsal process I felt that Larissa, who is an extremely loving and caring person, was being far too gentle in her approach. We needed to have two strong willed women butting heads with neither overpowering the other. So really, I just pushed her to be stricter with the way she handles Shelby and urged her to trust that if it becomes too much, I will see it and pull her back. I was extremely satisfied with Larissa's resulting performance and I did not have to do much for her to get there. She receives all the credit for it; I was just smart enough to cast her.

Ouiser (Darla Shearer):

To find Ouiser's objective I simply looked for the moment she changed. After her relationship starts with Owen she is suddenly nice, to clarify, nice for Ouiser. The objective we settled on was 'to be loved'. This is an easily strong objective and her only obstacle is herself.

She is an extremely brash woman who had made up her mind about life... it centers around her. She does not hesitate to point out other people's flaws and becomes quite defensive of her own, for instance, when Annelle questions her faith. Once she becomes involved with Owen she begins to show signs of a softer more caring person. So, she achieves this objective, at least for now, and she is changed because of it. The larger issue with this character is trying to find the other levels of her personality. Darla and I had to make sure that we did not make any judgments of the character. She very easily could be painted as a one level, mean person. We had to work to find where these outward actions come from, what drives her. I believe it comes from an angle of insecurity. Ouiser is protective of herself because she is not happy with herself. This insecurity is the reason that she seems unapproachable and bitter.

Darla was a non-traditional student who had not been on stage for twenty years. She came into auditions and had the bitterness and aggressiveness of Ouiser right off the bat. I also was thrilled to have an actress who was actually closer to the age of these characters. Darla was quite nervous about performing on stage again so I treated her much more gently than the others. I needed to build her confidence so that she would be willing to take more risks with her choices. I never had to touch the more aggressive moments of the character because she walked in with those readings down pat. The focus was mainly on finding the truth behind Ouiser. Darla agreed completely to the idea that Ouiser was more than a mean old woman but she struggled to get it across in her performance. When the gentler moments came, she simply pulled back on volume and flatly said the lines. After a couple of weeks, I came to the conclusion that Darla had one of the same problems that I struggled with as an actor, investment. It was easier for Darla, as it used to be for me, to hide behind the character. Those moments of truth are more difficult because you must use more of yourself in them. You are much more at risk as an actor

when you invest fully in a moment because if others respond negatively to that moment, then you can feel as though they are negatively responding to you personally. When I realized that this was the case, I have to admit, I was not sure what to do. It took me completely stripping down my process, starting from scratch, and slowly rebuilding it with a more solid foundation to eventually begin to grasp the idea of truly investing in the moment. It is an exciting journey to take and once I found it I discovered how exhilarating it could be. The problem being, it took me two and a half years of my graduate school here in New Orleans to go through that process and I only had two more weeks to work with Darla. I chose to simply keep giving different actions to her to attempt to get her closer to the truth. I believe she took strides toward the desired results and grew immensely through the process, but it was too ambitious of a task to complete in that short of a time. I was consoled by the fact that her larger moments stole the show and she was greatly appreciated by the audience for her comic abilities. She struggled some on opening night with the lines, which I chalked up to nerves, but once she realized that she was funny and was giving the part some do justice, she was just fine. In talking with her after the rehearsal process she was greatly appreciative of me casting her and she said it made her realize that she still loves to act. I believe she will be auditioning again at Southeastern in the future and it feels good to have some part in renewing an artist's love for the theatre. My response to her thanks was, "I cast you because you earned it." She did.

REHEARSAL LOG:

10/23/05 Auditions

The turnout for auditions was quite impressive and a little overwhelming. Over thirty women were there fighting for only six roles. I requested that they audition with a one-minute monologue from the script. So at least they are guaranteed a chance to show me something from the script. The goal of this first night was to narrow the field down to three actors for each of the roles so that callbacks can be more intensive. I announced to all the actors that, as an actor myself, I would be solely casting by those who gave me the best readings. Also, I informed them, that since I had not worked with a majority of them before, I would be working their scenes so I can get a feel for how they take my notes and use them. After the monologues, I broke the women into group scenes and gave everyone a chance to read for the parts that they desired. I also worked with the groups, giving each actor notes on what I want them to work on. I gave them time to work the scenes again in private and they presented them to me one last time. This gave me a good feel for their openness to explore.

As far as specific options for each role, I am concerned about two in particular. I have several options, and strong options at that, for M'Lynn, Ouiser, Clairee, and Truvy. The problem lies with Annelle and Shelby. I haven't had anyone really show me what I am looking for. There is one student who has given pretty decent readings and definitely looks the part, but after working her scene with different M'Lynns, she hasn't changed one bit. She has trouble with listening to her partner and also has not used the notes I gave her. If I have no other options I believe she could work, but I would rather not take on too much of a project. I know there are two other actors that won't be able to make it until callbacks. Maybe I will get lucky and they will show me the Annelle and Shelby that I am looking for.

Other than that, I have a solid group of three actors for each role to take into callbacks. I am certain that out of this group I will be able to put together a solid cast. Also, there has been a tremendous battle for M'Lynn and Ouiser. I am looking forward to seeing who steps up their game and takes the roles from the others.

10/24/05 Callbacks

I guess the Gods of Theatre are looking out for me. The two new actors who showed up tonight brought some excellent choices to Shelby and Annelle. They each chose monologues that were not those characters but after seeing them, I switched them to reading the parts that fit. One actor, whom I have worked with before, has really separated herself from the field in the battle for M'Lynn. Her and my new Shelby option did the scene where Shelby tells M'Lynn she is pregnant, and it was beautiful. They were listening to each other and invested in the moment so well that there were not many dry eyes in the area. They had a definite connection and have made the choice on those two roles actually quite easy.

A Ouiser has separated herself as well. She is a non-traditional student who has not been on stage for twenty years. Her general character is dead on, but there will be some work involved in finding the truer moments of the role. She attacks too much but she is my strongest actor for the part. An Annelle came in and stood out from the group as well. She was so wonderful in the readings that I am actually a little afraid of screwing her up in the rehearsal process. That is a good problem to have. The two actors that I am looking at for Truvy have been a lot closer together. One, who I have worked with before, started out as the front-runner but didn't evolve and improve in the audition process. I was missing the motherly nature of the part. Another, who is younger and less experienced, started off slightly weaker but listened to

my notes and improved to emerge as the front-runner. I feel that she will keep making these improvements in the process so she will get the part. A Clairee separated herself as well, it was close, but one carried herself with a little more grace and age than the others. She also had the dry wit that is needed for the character.

I put the cast list up and am very happy with my group. My M'Lynn is the most experienced of the cast so I suspect she will become a leader and a strong example for me. The rest of the cast, I was surprised to find, don't have much stage experience outside of some musicals, so a realistic play will be new to them. I know I will have my challenges in coaching them on my acting process but I am confident that the journey will be a good one. Also, since this is an educational environment, I posted that if any of the actors who auditioned wanted to discuss why they were not cast, that I would be more than willing to talk with them about it. Usually I do not like it when actors approach me with these questions but I felt that they could learn from the experience and take some of my reasoning into their next audition. A few actors took me up on it and we had very productive conversations.

10/25/05 1st Read

Now that we have a cast, today's goal was just to simply hear the actors for the first time. I wanted to get a feel for what each of them wants to bring to the characters. I also asked the actors to think tonight on what they believe their character's objective for the play is. They are supposed to bring this to the next rehearsal. I gave the cast a brief overview of the process that I use and how I will approach the piece. The designers were there to listen and make notes. We read the script, talked about scheduling, and that was all I wanted to accomplish that day. This day also gave me an idea of what sections are going to be more work. Shelby's 'insulin'

moment will be a tough challenge. Luckily enough, that sounds bad, but several of the cast and crew have family members with the same problem so they have all said that they would talk to them to see what it is like to go through that experience. I prefer to get this first hand knowledge as opposed to reading an article on it. I am already excited with the choices and energy the cast is bringing to the table.

10/26/05 Tablework I

Today I wanted to discuss the objectives that everyone brought, talk about relationships, and then go back to working in the script. Most of the cast brought in objectives that were along the lines of what I thought. Some needed to be refined and strengthened. (see character analysis) We struggled some in trying to figure out Clairee's, but I think that we ended up finding one that fit.

We then began to discuss the relationships of the characters. I had each actor go around the room and talk about what they thought about each of the other characters including backstories. This discussion ended up using all the rehearsal time, but it was well worth it. This is an exercise that Riley Risso, a faculty member and General Manager of the Oklahoma Shakespearean Festival, had done with me once in my first show that I acted in at Southeastern Oklahoma State University. It was the first time I used this with one of my own casts, but the result was wonderful. The cast really got into it. They argued and defended each other and all I did was sit back and listen. My only involvement was to ask periodic questions to guide the discussion in a new direction. It was exciting to see that all of them were passionate about their characters and had put a tremendous amount of thought into them. My M'Lynn was sick for this exercise and was unable to be there, that was my only disappointment. But, I have every

confidence in her that she will catch up quickly. We didn't get to everything I wanted today and I am perfectly happy about that. The success of this exercise was more than enough for me.

10/27/05 Tablework II

The first thing I wanted to do today was to get M'Lynn caught up with the relationship discussions, which we had last rehearsal. I had the rest of the cast tell her what they thought of their relationship with her and she did the same with them. As I suspected, she didn't miss a beat and had already put thought into it. This did not take very much time and was very productive.

My main goal was to get back to the script and read through Act I. This time however, I was not concerned with their characters at all. I wanted to work through it together solely looking for clues that the playwright gives us, the given circumstances. I asked the cast to look for key information that gives us insight into the characters, turning points, background clues, information the audience needs to follow the story, and simply anything that jumps out at them as being important. We slowly plugged through the first act, stopping after every page to point out items of importance.

My main reason for trying this approach was the fact that I was not sure what level of script analysis the members of the cast had, if they had had any at all. It also was a good way to get everyone on board with telling the same story. Another useful part of this was that everyone was looking for important information about all the characters and not just their own. This is another first for me as an exercise with my cast and I am very glad I did it. Not only is the cast finding things that they hadn't caught before, but, quite frankly, so am I. This was just as useful an exercise for me as it was for the cast.

After this rehearsal I had a few cast members come to me individually to tell me that they are really excited about the approach we are taking and wanted to let me know they are learning a lot of new information about the acting process. This was very nice to hear, because it puts me in a great spot. Now, knowing this, I already feel that this project has been a success. If any of my actors walk away with a larger appreciation of the work that goes into creating a role or if they simply walk away with more confidence in their analysis techniques then, I feel, I have done something useful.

10/28/05 Tablework III

Today I wanted to continue the script work the same as yesterday but with Act II. Also Dell needed about thirty minutes to get some mock up shots for the poster and publicity. Today's tablework was not quite as exciting or energetic as the previous nights. I think I can site a few reasons for this, first, there is not as much new information in Act II as there is in Act I, so there was less to point out. Second, I believe that being in the seminar room for three hours for the third day in a row is starting to suck some of the energy out of the room. Lastly, I think the cast is just ready to get on their feet, as am I. Maybe two days of tablework is just enough. We got through Act II and Dell got the shot he wanted for the poster. Overall, I think the tablework that I used on this show has been very successful so I plan on using it again in the future.

10/30/05 Cast Bonding

After two days of auditions and three days trapped in the seminar room, I wanted to get away from the script for a day. Also, my cast was not completely familiar with each other because of the fact that two of them do not attend SOSU. I decided we would use today to get

together and go to someone's house for some cast bonding. I need these women to be friends. It was pretty fun and successful I thought. I just stayed out of the way and observed. They were all very giggly and girly, doing each other's nails, coloring one of their hair (which was needed by the costume designer), overall they were just having fun. I was glad that I didn't need to get involved too much because it gave me time to watch them and get a feel for who they are and gave me some clues on how to approach them differently. Some, mainly the older three, seem to want to treat me more as a colleague while others seem to want a teacher or mentor. I will do my best to treat them all the way they desire to be treated. I got what I wanted out of tonight which was the beginning of some friendships, I hope, because the girls have to love each other, or at least appear like they do.

10/31/05 Blocking Act I

Today we are finally on our feet. I want to just start blocking Act I. I am hoping to get through the first twenty pages or so. Scene one is very long, thirty pages, so I didn't expect to get all the way through it. The set was taped out for us when we arrived so we spent some time talking through where everything was. Also we decided to adjust the location of the stations, the hair dryer, and the makeup/nail station. The makeup station is only used once for a short time, so I don't need it to be in a prominent location. It is now portable so we can move it out for the required scene. We moved quickly through blocking once we started and actually made it all the way through scene one. Almost halfway through the show on the first blocking day. Nice. There are some things that obviously will change once we start actually working with the hair, props, and set but I am happy with where we are. I am especially glad to be ahead of schedule.

11/01/05 Blocking Act I

Today, considering how fast we moved yesterday, I figured that we could easily finish up the remaining twenty or so pages of Act I. I also wanted the actors, especially Truvy, to start looking for extra business on stage. I needed them to begin to think of extra props and set décor that should be around for them to play with. I really wanted Truvy to be involved in this process since it is not only her beauty shop but also her home. I need this space to feel ‘lived in’. It needs to be full of trinkets and simply covered with set dressing. Also any independent activities will help with the realistic nature of the show. All my actors need to feel at home in the shop.

We finished blocking Act I. I know that blocking is not my strong point so there are some awkward spots that I will need to fix down the road. One of the problems is the placement of the stations against the ‘4th wall’ It provides no furniture for the actors to move around. Also another problem I am noticing is that I don’t have enough depth in my pictures. I haven’t used the upstage platform enough nor the stairs and upper landing. I need to find more ways to get my actors there. Perhaps I can use the kitchen by having people fetch drinks or snacks from there. Also, instead of an end table by the upstage settee, I have decided to place a small refrigerator. This will serve not only as a tool to draw my actors upstage but also is a very practical spot to quickly retrieve the juice needed for Shelby’s diabetic episode. The kitchen is just too far away to get the juice on stage in a reasonable amount of time.

We also, by recommendation of the costume faculty, made a slight change to the script. We changed the picture that Shelby carries from Princess Grace to Julia Roberts and the hairstyle that M’Lynn wants Shelby to have from Jacqueline Smith to Princess Grace. We did this for a couple of reasons. One, we needed Shelby’s hair to be down instead of up for the wedding

because she was wearing a wig. Secondly, we are doing this play in the present so the references will make more sense.

11/02/05 Blocking Act I

Since blocking is complete for Act I and Clairee has a previous conflict for tonight, rehearsal was canceled for this evening.

11/03/05 Run/Work Act I

Today the plan was to run and work Act I. It was understood that my Truvy and Shelby would be around thirty minutes late due to a Chorvettes performance which is the SOSU Show Choir. The problem is they arrived an hour and a half late. I had the actors that were there run lines for a while, which they wanted to do, and then called the evening done. This is frustrating because in two days I have gone from being ahead of schedule to behind. I have already arranged for my designers and crew to see the first run of the show on this coming Wednesday so I can't afford to fall behind. I spoke with Dell McLain and he assured me that if needed I can schedule a double rehearsal on Sunday to catch up. I am hoping that a double rehearsal will not be necessary because I know as an actor it wears me out to rehearse for six hours in one day. If Act II blocking goes as smoothly as Act I, we should be all right.

11/06/05 Run/Work Act I

Today I wanted to run Act I for the first time and fix any of the major issues with it. I wanted to focus on some key moments for now because I feel if I can get the actors on the same page with me on these moments that the others will begin to fall into place. I spent most of my

time today working moments that helped define the characters. For example, Truvy is playing things too safe right now, she is afraid of making strong choices. I am really going to have to push her. I need her and Clairee to make more of the gossip about Annelle and Ruth Robeline. The actors are purposely not going very far with enjoying the gossip because, I feel, they want to be liked. They are afraid of the characters looking mean or shallow. I am pushing the idea that they don't know what they think of Annelle yet. That in life when we meet someone new we grasp at the small pieces of information we have to make some form of judgment. The fact that Annelle is living with Ruth Robeline and is there alone are two important clues. They turn out to be misleading but they do not know that yet. They are playing the later relationship with Annelle and not the beginning. We need to see how this group, who all are extremely close, handle a new person intruding. Yes she is eventually accepted into this circle, but it takes time and the playwright gives us clues to this gradual acceptance. It's not mean, it is just life.

I need Shelby to really paint a picture more about her vision of the wedding. Right now she is more or less simply stating the way the wedding is going to look. If she is not passionate and driven by the perfection that it is going to be than there is no reason for all the conflict when M'Lynn fights for her visions of the perfect wedding. We need to see two very similar people here, both strong willed, butting heads. This sets up the relationship that unfolds throughout the script. Overall, I feel that these earlier, seemingly simple, moments are going to be the larger challenge in this production. The highly dramatic moments seem to be heading in the right direction already. They are almost easier because they are more clearly defined. It is finding the truth and points behind some of the banter between these friends that will be the struggle because it must be just as important.

11/07/05 Blocking Act II

We blocked Act II today. I felt confident we could get through all of it and we did. I am relieved because this puts me back on schedule. The ending is going to be a problem, or at least I haven't figured it out yet. The final moments are so crucial to the journey of this group and I am not sure I am doing as good of a job telling the story visually as I am through the actors. I know that I can get Dell in here to help me but I want to tackle this on my own. If we get close to opening and I still haven't figured out a solution I will be more than willing to seek his advice. I wanted to make sure that M'Lynn had freedom to move as she pleases and take stage for her breakdown. I need to make sure that the positioning of the other actors will help her journey rather than hinder it. I have them spaced out enough so she can choose who she wants to direct certain points to, especially when she is searching desperately for an answer. Her acting choices are right on so the issue more lies in my blocking. I also want to make sure there is enough space for her to take some to herself or up to God if needed. I am simply trying to make sure that she feels comfortable getting into the moment and letting loose. The only time I have specific blocking for her is at the end of the breakdown when the other characters begin making their own contributions. There are a lot of private moments shared between M'Lynn and the other characters so the blocking needs to support that. Trying to get the positioning right so these intimate moments can be shared is an obstacle I have to overcome. It will get there, I am confident in that. I am probably over thinking it right now.

11/08/05 Run/Work Act II

Today we worked through Act II. I find it interesting that the actors are more easily invested in this section than Act I. This act is going to almost work itself out. The only one that

seems to be having some investment issues is Shelby. I am struggling getting her to realize how huge a deal it is to have the child and a family. She is treating things a little too nonchalant for my taste. If her objective is to have a family or to have as close to a normal existence as possible then it is necessary for her to have succeeded in this aspect of it. It is a large step at least.

On a more technical note, the nail station is too far downstage right. I need to come up with a solution mainly because of sight lines. Any audience sitting close to the stage on the house right side will not be able to see them over the hair stations. I need to think on this one. Is the nail station a necessity? It is such a small part of the show that I don't think it needs to be such a prominent part of the set, or even a permanent one. Maybe we will simply use a tray with the supplies on it and bring it up to either the settee or one of the stations. Then all we will need are a tray and an extra stool. Also this would give me space to place another seat in that spot. I'll talk to the set designer and see what he thinks. Overall, Act II seems to be progressing rather quickly so I don't have many acting issues with it, there are just some technical issues to handle.

11/09/05 Run Show w/ notes

Today is the first run of the show. I expected it to be rough, it usually is. Surprisingly though, it was pretty decent. I think the actors were excited to get to feel it out as a whole for the first time. The first scene in Act I is still a little flat. I need to find a way to kick some energy into it without rushing it. It needs to have a somewhat relaxing feel because this is where these women go to escape life but it can't get so relaxed that it is not interesting to watch. This delicate balance is going to be hard to find. I didn't take too many notes today because I mainly wanted to give the actors freedom to explore and keep making choices on their own.

11/10/05 Run/Work Show

Today we get to be on the set. This is always an exciting day for me as an actor so I figured that my actors would get a boost out of it as well. Today was scheduled as a run and work day and we spent it mostly adjusting blocking to the new space. The set is wider and flatter than the taped out area we have been working on. I also have been told that the outside walls will be pushed even farther out than they are now for sight line reasons. This worries me because I was already having some depth issues and now this flattens out the space even more. I now need to find more ways to get my actors on the upper levels. We have spent most of our time focusing on the connection between the characters that the actors struggle when they are not able to look at each other directly in the eye. I am pushing the idea that you can still listen and be in the moment just as easily without constant eye contact. That in life, we don't always look at the person you are talking to. I can carry a conversation with someone behind me without ever turning around to look directly at them. Now that they have a feel for the moments and what is happening between them, we can start opening things up so that we include the audience in with us. One thing that helps with opening to the audience is the imaginary mirrors on the 4th wall. The actors can use those to look at each other instead of looking upstage. I am slowly adjusting the focal points so that it is believable that they are seeing each other in the imaginary mirrors on each station.

I spoke with the designer and he was happy that we are getting rid of the nail/makeup station. I think having one less thing to build is part of it. We are going to use a tray and stool and bring that section into the space more by using Truvy's station. I like this adjustment better than our other options. The set is extremely tall so I have begun really talking to the props designers about ideas for filling up the large voids on the walls. I am really pushing the feel of a

home. We have started finding different solutions like a cork board with flyers on it, a set of hair style pictures, a quilt, calendar, etc. Anything that can fill up the space is needed because I want to eliminate all voids. I need years of Truvy adding stuff on top of stuff on top of stuff. Also I need a display case of products because this is not only a home but also a functioning salon. Truvy would surely have products for sale. I am fairly content with the set so far and have full confidence in the designer's willingness to adjust things to fit.

11/11/05 Run/Work Show

Today is another run and work day. We are starting to get more props and even some of the costume pieces to work with. The costume designer built personal smocks for each of the regular customers so I wanted them as quickly as possible because they, depending on how hard they are to put on and take off, will adjust the timing of getting to work on everyone's hair. Also it will affect some exits as well. We spent some time figuring out how much we needed to adjust to make them work. Also, I am really pushing the set and props designers for the functioning sink and dryer. I need these urgently. In the first act we need to take M'Lynn through a complete styling. She must get shampooed, dried, and styled all on stage and in a minimal amount of time. This sequence is one of the few worries I have. To assist in this we have a local hairstylist coming in to rehearsal in a few days to show Truvy and Annelle the process. This is key because even with the audience's suspension of disbelief, this needs to be a rather believable process and on top of that, Truvy and Annelle must be good at what they do because Shelby states that Truvy is the best and Annelle was top of her class in beauty school.

Another section that I am struggling with is Shelby's diabetic scene. We have spoken with a few people who have experienced this first hand and the actual occurrences are almost too

small to be seen or noticed by the audience. I have to make the episode slightly larger than life without making it unbelievable. I think the key is more in the other actors onstage rather than in Shelby herself. It is how important they make it that will clue the audience into the danger at hand. This is another delicate balance that we must feel out in the rest of the process. It can't be too extreme because M'Lynn and the others know what to do with impressive precision and surprisingly calm, focused actions. On the other hand, there must be danger, because Annelle is quite alarmed by the experience. This will be another interesting challenge that I am going to sit back on for a little while and see what the actors make of it.

11/14/05 Run w/notes

From here on out we are simply running the show with notes except for one last scheduled day to really work it next Sunday. The actors are very close to off book and I have no doubt that they all will be solid on their lines in a couple days when I have required the scripts to be put away.

The first scene in Act I is still lacking energy so I am pushing my actors to pick up their cues faster. It needs to be a more conversational section and they have permission to overlap some of the lines as needed. I really want them to listen for the word in the others line that causes them to speak instead of waiting patiently for their turn. Even if overlapping is too much, I want to get the reason for their line across, the reason they speak, because there is always a reason. Act II is coming along nicely. They all have a strong feel for the important moments and the stakes are where they need to be. I place most of this credit on M'Lynn because she gives such a powerful speech at the end that it is almost impossible for the others not to be in tears after she finishes. Also the beautiful timing of Clairee offering up Ouiser to be hit to break

the tension is so wonderfully written that I don't need to adjust much there. The only problem is that Ouiser is taking this moment almost too seriously. Yes, she must be offended by it but at the same time cannot be so hurt by the experience that making up with Clairee a few lines later makes no sense.

Tonight the stylist came in and showed the actors how to do M'Lynn's hair quickly and efficiently. She does not seem concerned with the short amount of time and believes it can be done. Annelle just has to practice with the rollers to get that section done in time to get M'Lynn into the dryer fast enough to complete the styling.

It is beginning to look like a show and I need to keep pushing the actors to keep making discoveries. I have a fear that we will get complacent and not peak at the right time. I hope this fear is unfounded.

11/15/05 Run w/notes

Today was a good run. The actors seemed very focused and were taking some of my notes from previous rehearsals and putting them into action. There are still some small moments that concern me. Shelby's admission to M'Lynn that she is pregnant is still coming out too neutral. This must be a huge moment for her. She is a step closer to her objective. As of right now, I feel that she is playing M'Lynn's reaction to the pregnancy instead of her sheer excitement about it. It is a good thing for her and the moment when M'Lynn does not return the excitement is more interesting if Shelby anticipates a joyful moment with her mother. She even says that she expected something "along the lines of congratulations." This is a very small moment but if Shelby is not excited about it, how can she expect anyone else to be?

The set is coming along nicely although I still do not have a functioning sink and dryer. That is starting to concern me. I have had a chance to meet some more with the costume designer and view all of the clothing. I am very happy about all of her designs; she seems to know these characters as well as we do. Also the sound designer and I have met. Sound should not be an issue as I am satisfied with the pre-show and scene change music that he has presented to me. We talked to Dell and he agreed to record as the D.J. of the local radio station so that should be a fun cameo for him. Things seem to keep on progressing nicely. At least there is nothing that is freaking me out too badly.

11/16/05 Run w/notes

Today we were completely off book without too many line issues. This is always one of my favorite days in the rehearsal process because it forces the actors to get rid of that crutch we call the script. This brought some much needed new energy to the rehearsal and some new choices. Of course some of them were a little off the mark but I was just excited to see everyone playing around and trying some new things. I didn't take notes today because I felt the actors would have enough pressure trying to do the whole show off book for the first time. We did receive some exciting news today. Our M'Lynn had recently found out that she was pregnant. This was also very useful news. I immediately turned to Shelby and asked her if she saw what it was like for someone who wants it to say it for the first time. She did and said she thought about it the instant it came out of our M'Lynn's mouth. So I found that useful and so did she.

11/17/05 Run w/notes

The run today was fine. I am getting a little frustrated because I am having to repeat several notes. I am trying to find other ways of explaining the moments so that I don't have to end up just showing them what I want. One of the moments is when Truvy is trying to calm Clairee about flying. She says that flying is safer than riding in a car but then follows that up with, "Just sit in the rear, it's the best way to survive the crash." I need her to soothe Clairee on the safe part and then truly warn her on the, "sit in the rear". I think the comedy comes out of the fact that one, she is unsuccessfully calming her and two, she truly believes that sitting in the rear is going to save her life. I have tried giving her the actions that I want and that didn't work. Then I tried explaining that she is trying to save her friend's life and that didn't work. I try my best to not give line readings but I have a feeling that I may have to go with that last resort. The blocking at the end of the show is still bothering me and I have not been able to come up with a solution yet. Dell will be watching the run tomorrow so, hopefully, he will have some advice for me because he always has some ideas up his sleeves.

11/18/05 Run w/notes

Dell came to watch the run tonight so I didn't take as many notes and spent more time discussing problematic moments with him during the run. I was happy to hear that we have mostly the same concerns. He pointed out some sight line issues that he noticed and I agree with him and will adjust some things tomorrow. Since tomorrow we have a double header to work each act separately I did not give the actors our notes after rehearsal. We will have time to work these moments and fix most of the problems before getting into tech rehearsals when my focus will shift towards other things. We finally have a functioning sink and dryer so we were able to

try to style M'Lynn's hair. It is taking too long to get her into the dryer at the moment but I am not worried because it was the first time we had everything to work with. If needed we can spend more time with it when we work the acts tomorrow.

11/20/05 2-5pm Run/Work Act I & 7-10pm Run/Work Act II

Today was our last chance to really work the problematic sections. I focused on trying to get the first scene in Act I up to par. It has been lacking in energy and quite frankly has become flat. The actors have begun playing the end of the play instead of having fun with the preparations for the wedding. We played around with it for a while but I felt I needed to move on because it was starting to drain the actors and I could feel some frustration mounting on all our parts. I simply need to get the fun back into the show. We have spent so much time focusing on the serious moments that we have forgotten how much comedy is in the show, much needed comedy. Once Ouiser enters the space everything livens up. I need to get across to the actors that we need that energy before she arrives. Most of the pressure is on Truvy as she is in the drivers seat for the first part.

Act II is still in fairly good shape. I played around with the blocking at the end and it seems to be working better, although I am certainly not completely satisfied. The timing after M'Lynn's breakdown to Clairee's, "Here, hit this!" is slightly off. So we played with different durations of the beat in between. It is a crucial moment of silence because we need to give the audience time to let things sink in and not so much time that they start to come out of the moment. The joke should be the break. Hopefully, if the set up is right, the audience will be desperate for that laugh. It should be the biggest one in the show. Truvy's, "Laughter through tears is my favorite emotion.", should say it all.

11/21/05 Run w/notes

We need an audience badly. The actors need something to help kick things into gear. They are forgetting things are funny and they have a good show. Next week is Thanksgiving break and then we come back straight into techs. The actors have gotten together and want to have a couple of rehearsals before techs. I am hesitant about this because I think they need the break. I am excited to see that they care this much for our production as to shorten their break. I agreed to a line-thru before we leave town and then we will come back a day early for a run. I think that I will come up with something special for the next run. I need something to force the actors to stop thinking, just be confident in themselves, and simply have some fun. I'll come up with something over the break.

11/23/05 Cast Line-Thru

Today the cast met to run lines. I showed up at the beginning of it in case they had any questions for me. My ASM was there to watch the script for them.

11/26/05 Run Show w/game

Today is a run of the show but with a twist. I am giving each of the actors a more extreme objective that they cannot share with the others. Also I am giving the other actors a secret about each other. The only one who does not know the secret is the one that the secret is about. The objective's of each character is as follows:

Truvy: Must be the center of attention at all times. Think Robin Williams on crack.

Annelle: Must keep everything about your past a secret. When do you lie? When do you slip up? You killed your husband and chose to hideout in this town.

Shelby: Everything must be perfect. You must be in control of all around you. You are perfect and you expect that from everyone else.

Clairee: Must make everyone around you laugh at all times. You are the funniest person on the planet.

M'Lynn: Everything must be perfect. You must be in control of all around you. You are perfect and you expect that from everyone else.

Ouiser: You must be loved. You need people to hold you and make contact with you to survive.

I gave Shelby and M'Lynn the same items because they are very similar and it should force them to butt heads some more. Truvy's should help her take over and drive the show. Annelle's is to remind her that she does have some skeletons in her closet. Clairee's is simply to get her looking for the humor again. Ouiser's is to find the softer side underneath. Now here are the secrets about each:

Truvy: Clairee found a plastic bag with some powder in it and suspects Truvy of having a drug problem. Clairee must pass this information to the rest of the cast during the run.

Annelle: M'Lynn is coming from the post office. When she meets Annelle she realizes that she looks extremely similar to a wanted poster she just saw. She must pass this information to the rest of the cast during the run.

Shelby: She is the ugliest girl any of them has ever seen

Clairee: Is not funny. Ever. Nothing is even remotely funny.

M'Lynn: Does not work for the mental institution, she is actually a patient.

Ouiser: She smells. Bad. Think urine covered with perfume covered with more urine.

This was a very interesting game and not only did the cast begin to have some fun again, but they found some new moments we could use in the final product. I can't take all the credit on this one because Jim Winter, a friend and fellow director, used this game when he was directing a show I was in. I added the secrets to the game to add some more fun to it and also to give the cast some reasons to team up. The cast really responded to this exercise because they quit thinking about lines, notes, and blocking and began just focusing on what they want and what is happening around them. It also improved the listening between them because they were all being surprised by new choices. Overall this was an extremely successful exercise, which I will definitely use again in the future.

11/27/05 2-5pm Cue-to-Cue & 7-10pm Tech I

Now I have to switch my focus to the technical aspects of the show. The cue-to-cue took longer than I expected since there are not many cues in the show. The lights were giving us some problems, I say the lights because I am not sure if it was problems with the board or the person running the board. We would get the transitions set and then the next one would be different. For some reason we could not get the same looks consistently. Lighting in Act I scene 2 is also being a bit of a battle. The scene starts with a fuse having been blown so it must be dark. The trouble is trying to find the right level of light to use. This is a very important scene between Shelby and M'Lynn so it must be bright enough to see my actor's faces yet dark enough to show a jarring difference when the fuse is replaced.

Transitions are always a picky point with me. I believe that as lights fade out the music should swell and when lights fade up the music should fade out. Together. I am having trouble because the Stage Manager is trying to call the cues separately when I need him to call them both

and let my sound operator go off of the lights. We ran these sections several times and finally achieved the proper sequence. Also there is some light escaping from the backstage quick-change areas that need addressing.

The scene changes are going to be an issue. They are uncoordinated and just take too long. We expected to have to wait on the costume changes and the playwright gives some help with the radio D.J. I spoke with my stage manager and told him that he needed to get together with his crew and organize the exact order in which everything needed to be moved and rehearse it separately. We just don't have time to take up technical rehearsals with the scene changes so I asked them to work them during the shop hours.

11/28/05 Dress I

My costumer got on me about the call times today. It was a misunderstanding because I actually was never told that today was a dress rehearsal, I thought it was another tech. We were able to call all the cast and bump up the calls by an hour. I am very satisfied with the costumes and the actors were really enjoying using them. It always helps. I only had a couple of issues. Annelle, later in the show, has this great shirt that says, "Jesus" on it written with small birds and flowers. The problem is that under the lights you cannot make out the shapes so I asked them to outline the letters so that we can read it. The other was the Red Devils hat that Clairee wears when returning from the state championship game. I wanted to take it even further and put some red devil horns on it. I know this is a cheap laugh but it is only on her head for a couple of minutes and it is just fun to see a character who is so classy, former mayor's wife, wearing something extremely tacky. I am sure it will get a laugh.

The transitions are getting tighter and the scene changes improved but they still are not tight enough for me. M'Lynn has to change her costume over a head full of rollers so I knew

that would take more time than desired, but she was ready to go well before the scene change was complete. I need the scene change to happen fast enough that by the time she is ready we can go. I have not been happy with Shelby's wig, it just does not look natural at all. The costume professor says she has some ideas but I get the feeling that I will never be happy as long as that thing is on her head. I will probably just have to bite the bullet on this one. The starter pistol for the gun shots has been misfiring. The technical director said he has ordered a new one so it should not be an issue. Also the explosion has been lacking power, it sounds like someone is banging on a trashcan. The T.D. told me that he is getting some 12-gauge blanks, the kind they use to train hunting dogs, and that it should be loud enough. Everything is coming together and hopefully everything will be functioning properly by preview night.

11/29/05 Dress II

Today was our last run without an audience. I can feel most of the cast getting excited but, Ouiser is beginning to get really nervous because she has not performed in a show for twenty years which is understandable. I will see how she handles the preview audience and go from there. The technical aspects are really starting to come together now. The lights and sound are working together now, the scene changes are getting slightly quicker, the gunshots worked, the explosion was loud enough to make everyone jump, and when Clairee walked out with her new Devils hat everyone laughed so hard that she had to hold for several moments. I laughed through most of the next few lines. I am now reaching back and patting myself on the back. Overall, I feel that I am ready to hand the show over to my Stage Manager, cast, and crew. I have trust in them and it is time for me to sit back and try my best to view it as an audience

member and try to see what it would look like through the eyes of someone seeing it for the first time.

11/30/05 Final Dress/Preview Audience

We finally had an audience tonight, thank God. Granted, it was an audience of mostly high school students who were there to take part in the Imagination (a day of theatre related workshops) but they were an audience nonetheless. I thought this would be an interesting test because if we could hold a group of high schooler's attention then we are in pretty good shape. I spent most of my time observing the audiences reactions. I like to see it from their point of view. I saw most of them laugh, many cried, and laughed again. I'm not going to use the cliché 'Roller coaster of emotions' but I think we got to them. Even some of the 'cooler' guys who sat in the back of the house were intensely watching the show. I think this will play very well now, especially with older audience members.

12/01/05 Opening Night

Well, today was opening night. I brought gifts for the cast and crew and it took me so long to wrap them that I did not have time to get nervous. I spoke with the cast and received some very touching letters from several of them. It feels good to know that I have been a positive influence on them. I think they learned a lot in this process and so did I. We circled up and I gave some words of encouragement. I tried to pump up all of them except one. Ouiser I tried to calm. She was so nervous. I told her that she was cast in this show for a reason and that she should be confident that I chose her because she was good. I took a seat in the audience and watched the show truly for the first time. The audience seemed to enjoy it immensely. I even

saw the President of the University shed some tears. I spoke with many of the audience members after the show and they all had amazing things to say. Overall, I am very satisfied with the way things turned out and I am confident that the run will be quite successful. That, and I am just happy that I don't have to write in this log anymore.

PROJECT EVALUATION:

It is without hesitation that I will declare this project a success. Every person that I spoke to; Dell McLain, the actors, the audience, crew, stage management, designers, etc., and myself all were quite pleased with the resulting production. I believe that we put up a solid piece of theatre while creating a very educational process for everyone involved.

I will start with the production itself and then move to the process. The show was solid and I think we came along way from where we started. The audiences seemed to truly love the piece and we played to sold-out crowds the entire run. The set, lights, sound, and properties designs pleased me immensely. I spent some time after opening night, in the rest of the run, watching the audience. I wanted to try to experience the show from their eyes. I saw them all be drawn in and invest in the story. I even saw the University President trying to hide his tears after M'Lynn's breakdown. Now there were problems and mistakes but I was quite pleased with the final product. I feel that we told Robert Harling's story. Enough said.

Now to move on to the process. First off, the actors were all very vocal about the new techniques that they will now include in their own processes and preparation. The table work that we used at the beginning of the process was very popular. Even the more experienced actors approached me with some aspects they had not looked at before. The relationship discussions proved themselves to be quite useful from the first day that we got on our feet and began blocking. It was something that I had never used as a director but will certainly use again in the future. The response was just too strong. The actors were not trying to figure out their relationships through the rehearsal process, it was decided, agreed upon, and out of the way so

that we could immediately dive in and focus on the moments without having to stop and discuss why. We already had.

Also the fact that we plugged through the entire script pointing out the important turning points for each character and the given circumstances given by Harling kept us from spending time on those as well. It worked out better than I could have hoped because all were in agreement and we could really spend our time focusing on the moments. I feel that this really made the process much more productive.

The extremely detailed moment-to-moment work was also something that was a new experience for most of the actors. SOSU is a program that puts up close to fourteen shows a season and most of which have very large casts. This forces the directors to work on the larger issues rather than allowing the opportunity to focus on smaller moments. In working scenes with my actors I found myself stopping and repeatedly working the same moments before I allowed us to move on. This was very tedious in the beginning of the process but, I found, as we moved on, that the actors began looking for those moments rather than waiting for me to point them out. It seemed that the tougher and more grueling the experience was at the beginning the easier and more explorative the rehearsals were later in the process.

Another technique, that I try to use in my acting classes, is to ask a lot of questions. I tried to avoid giving any semblance of a line reading through the process. It was only after trying numerous ways to get the actors to play an appropriate action that I would, as a last resort, give an example. I instead try to ask leading questions so that they will come up with the choices themselves. The most common question being, “Why?” I would ask this several times in a row in response to their answers and most of the time the actors would end up with a strong action worth playing themselves. I use this approach because, as an actor myself, I hate being flat out

told what to do. It gives me no ownership of the role and can push things towards a false performance. If the actor can come up with the answer then they already have it worked into their thought process. Now was I completely successful in sticking with these techniques? No, but I gave a concerted effort to stick to them as much as possible.

This leads me to, what I think is, one of the biggest successes of the project, the education of myself. I found that forcing myself to stick to these techniques in turn forced me to search harder for ways to reach the actors. This process, in one month, expanded my grasp of a solid acting vocabulary. I truly believe that this learning experience taught me more than any other person involved. Which, looking back on it, was it's purpose. My thesis was not just a chance for me to illustrate the process that I have developed in my time at the University of New Orleans, but more importantly, a chance to expand it. Dell told me, in a conversation, that this process was something that he needed not only his students to witness and experience, but just as importantly, his faculty. He forgot to add me to that list; I needed this more than anyone and will take the experiences with me for the rest of my career.

SCANNED SCRIPT:

The following pages contain a scanned copy of my directing script. When I direct I tend to write down anything that pops into my mind as I work through the script. I write actions only when I believe that there are no other options besides that action or if there is a major moment that I already have in mind. This way I walk in with an open mind to many of the choices that the actors bring and it helps to make discoveries along with them in the rehearsal process. I like to write down questions to ask the actors through the process that will force a decision one way or another so that they are not choosing actions that are in the middle of the road or neutral. I also have a tendency to write down subtext as it occurs to me and mark important information and operatives.

Harkins - Director's Script.

STEEL MAGNOLIAS

ACT ONE

SCENE I

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

ANNELE. Oops! I see a hole.

TRUVY. I was hoping you'd catch that. - *Test*

ANNELE. 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.

ANNELE. 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. -

ANNELE. (*Overcome.*) Oh!

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

ANNELE. 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.*)

ANNELE. 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

DP
Hairspray

Apologize

Like

Something's going on

DP

Guide

She's good
Tease

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

ANNELE. (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 Curl 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. (Annette 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 . . .

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

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

ANNELE. 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?

ANNELE. 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.

ANNELE. It's a little scary. —

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

ANNELE. 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.

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ANNELE. My car's at the river. 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.

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

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

ANNELE. 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.

CLAIRE. (Entering.) Knock, knock!

TRUVY. Morning, Claire!

CLAIRE. Morning, Truvy.

TRUVY. I tried to call you and tell you I was running late.

No answer.

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

TRUVY. Annette, I want you to meet the former first lady of Chiquapi, Mrs. Belcher. Claire, this is Annette. She's taking Judy's place. Did you like Judy?

ANNELE. Pleased to meet you.

CLAIRE. 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.

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

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

ANNELE. Oh! My married name's Dupuy.

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

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ANNELLE. I just moved here. I'm originally from Zwolle.
 CLAIRE. That explains it. Truvy? I thought I brought you those recipes. *(She fumbles with her apron that has no pockets.)*
 TRUVY. Claire. The reason I called is, do you mind if I do Shelby first? *(Sound of ringing.)*
 CLAIRE. 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. Annelles? We're going to need more towels. They're stacked up next to the washing machine. *(Annelles exits.)*
 CLAIRE. 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. *(Annelles enters.)*
 CLAIRE. What makes you say that?
 TRUVY. For starters. She's married. . . but she lives at Ruth Robeline's. *(Claire reacts.)* Alone.
 CLAIRE. 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.
 CLAIRE. 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.
 CLAIRE. *(Annelles enters, carrying towels. Claire tips her coffee and grimaces.)* Yuck! *(Truvy, concerned, takes a sip.)*
 TRUVY. Annelles? 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. *(Doesn't get it yet.)*
 TRUVY. Make some more, please.
 ANNELLE. I'm so sorry. *(Now you get it.)*
 CLAIRE. Don't worry. I love a good hot dog. Just not with cream and sugar. *(Annelles exits.)*

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TRUVY. She's probably not an international spy. But if she works out, I may let her rent the garage apartment.
 CLAIRE. I thought the twins were going to live there while they go to the college.
 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.
 CLAIRE. 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.
 CLAIRE. *(Finding the recipe in her pocket.)* Here they are! I'm so fat I couldn't feel them. *(Truvy takes the recipe cards and pores over them. Claire reads over her shoulder.)*
 TRUVY. The recipes? Let me see. . . *(Truvy takes the recipe cards and pores over them. Claire reads over her shoulder.)*
 CLAIRE. 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?
 CLAIRE. Milk.
 TRUVY. Is the Karo syrup light or dark?
 CLAIRE. Matter of taste.
 TRUVY. Where's that other one you were telling me about. . . Cuppa, cuppa, cuppa?
 CLAIRE. 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. *(Sound of a sizzling pan.)*
 CLAIRE. It is. So I serve it over ice cream to cut the sweetness. Give me some paper, I'll copy them down for you.
 TRUVY. *(Calling.)* Annelles? Get Miss Claire some paper. I believe there's some stuck on the Frigidaire under the crawfish. *(To Claire.)* Oh . . . and here's that article on Princess

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

CLAIRE. 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 Claire! 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. (Annette enters with fresh coffee.) Hi! I'm Shelby Eatenton . . . soon to be Latcherie.

ANNELE. Hi, I'm Annette. I'm new.

TRUVY. Today's Annette's first day.

SHELBY. Well, Annette. 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.

CLAIRE. 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, Annette?

ANNELE. (Changing subject.) Oh, I hope that coffee's better.

CLAIRE. It smells right.

ANNELE. (Looking at the picture Shelby brought.) How pretty . . .

SHELBY. Princess Grace . . . Julia Roberts

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 Claire's shoes.) Miss Claire! What cute shoes!

CLAIRE. 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.

CLAIRE. 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.

CLAIRE. They're eight and a half.

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

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

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

M'Lynn. Is this a riddle?

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To buy to deal with this

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.)

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

M'Lynn. Ain't that the truth.

TRUVY. Her coiffure card is right on top.

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

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.

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. *ouch.*

SHELBY. Thank you, Mama.

TRUVY. Heat never bothers me. I love it. But spicy foods make me sweat. Especially on the top of my head. My hair gets wet. (The phone rings.)

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. *to whom*

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. *To protect*

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

M'Lynn. Sweep it up? *Don't*

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

M'Lynn. Did you bring Truvy the picture of Jacklyn Smith?

SHELBY. No. I brought the picture of Princess Grace. I destroyed the picture of Jacklyn Smith. *P.G. Subliminals*

M'Lynn. But I thought I had made you understand the advantages of the Jacklyn 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.

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?

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,

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Not exactly glowing review.

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.

CLAIRE. 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?

CLAIRE. 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 Claire. There are still good times to be had.

CLAIRE. Oh sure. 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.

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

TRUVY. Let's just face it, Claire. 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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CLAIRE. 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.) Annelie? 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.

ANNELIE. I don't have anything to say.

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

ANNELIE. 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? M'LYNN reaction is key. SHELBY. You can't screw up her hair. You just tease it and make it look like a blond football helmet. a shot

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, Annelie. 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.

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TRUVY. Good Lord!
 SHELBY. Exactly.
 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. Like her?
 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 Quiser. *reluctantly*
 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. *so kidding*
 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. *of course*
 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. It was on sale. *You don't say that in public!*
 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 Annette.) Janice is the current mayor's wife. (Sweetly.) We hate her. *why?*
 TRUVY. Now Shelby... fill me in on the reception. Don't get her started. There'll be magnolias in the pool.
 M'LYNN. I just hope your father doesn't get any magnolias from Quiser'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.
 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.
 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. *defend*

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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. *is it?*

Truvy. Did you all do anything especially romantic?

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

M'Lynn. Shelby, really.

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.

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 . . . in the arms of the man you love.

Shelby. Actually we fought most of the time. *Admission*

Truvy. What?

Shelby. Because I told him I couldn't marry him. *(Shook all around.)*

M'Lynn. What? *Sent a lot of money*

Clairee. Why would you go and do a thing like that?

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. *(Painting 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 1992. He enclosed this carport so I could support him! Very

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

M'Lynn. I try. *strange comment*

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.)*

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.

Truvy. Should I get her a cookie?

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.

Shelby. *(Pushing away the juice, spilling it.)* Not

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 nonsense and running around.

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

Truvy. No, no.

Clairee. Shelby's a diabetic

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Clean controlled reactions. They know what they are doing. Calm but firm.

except Annette.

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*

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

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

CLAIRE. 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.

CLAIRE. 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.

CLAIRE. Talk to us, Shelby.

SHELBY. No.

CLAIRE. That's good enough.

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. *NO SHIT!*

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.

ANNELE. Can I do something? Should I . . .

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 . . .

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."

CLAIRE. Jackson sounds like good people to me. *NOT exactly Romantic*

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. *Can she talk?*

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

TRUVY. Shelby, it's Tommy. He wants to know where your car is. *Really trying out of it.*

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. *Oh lord!*

SHELBY. *(To M'LYNN.)* Thank you, Mama. *(M'LYNN returns to Annette 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. *Favorite*

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. *FREE DUVN!*

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

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.

CLAIRE. 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. *ouch!* *she died.*

SHELBY. Did you hear what I said?

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SHELBY. Mama, I know all about adoption. And I also know the limitations of this body of mine. I would never do anything stupid. *it's not to you.*

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. *Stuck out of it!*

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. *manage your family*

SHELBY. Oh! Did you tell them, Mama?

CLAIRE. Tell us what?

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

CLAIRE. Wonderful! That Guidance Center does such good work for the disturbed. *P.C.?*

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. *Sad.*

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. *Clare's description*

CLAIRE. 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? *That's rude*

ANNELLE. Elle . . .

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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. *73.5.*

M'LYNN. Where do you live?

ANNELLE. On the corner of Jefferson and Second.

M'LYNN. Which corner? *Uh oh.*

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?

ANNELLE. What's the matter with her?

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. *at M'LYNN*

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. *he he he*

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

TRUVY. How sweet!

CLAIRE. What did I just hear? Oh, yes. The Anilly-family is selling KPPD. I wonder how much radio stations sell for? *Set up for later.*

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

SHELBY. Miss Claire. You should buy KPPD. You got plenty of money. *Clarine*

CLAIRE. What would I do with a radio station? Business never interested me at all. Lloyd took care of all that stuff. *Objective? why not you?*

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

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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 . . . crunch 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.
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 . . . 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. *And if you're gonna use it, you should aim it at her.*
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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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!
TRUVY. 'Morning, Ouiser. *SUGAR COAT*
OUISER. Don't try to get on my good side. I no longer have one.
TRUVY. You're a little early. You're not expected 'til elevenish. *Come back then.*
OUISER. That's precisely why I'm here. I have to cancel. (The phone rings. Ouiser picks it up and hangs up on the caller.) 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. (Clairee) You must be the new girl.
ANNELLE. Hi. *From St. Louis.*
OUISER. May I have a glass of water? I have been screaming this morning. (Exit Annette.) *Stare down M'lynn*
M'LYNN. I'm sorry this whole thing has gotten out of hand, Ouiser . . .
OUISER. It's not your 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.
OUISER. It's mine! (Enter Annette with glass of water.) Be that

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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.

CLAIRE. You need something in your life besides that dumb animal . . .

OUISER. Put a lid on it, Claire. I was standing there looking at my . . . 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?

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

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

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.

CLAIRE. Which vet?

OUISER. Whitey Black.

CLAIRE. 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.

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?

CLAIRE. (Holding up the recipe box.) I've got a lot of good recipes here. *Radum dum?*

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

ANNELE. His color's good. His skin is real pink. *Laugh from someone's side*

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

28 *That's relaxing*

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

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

ANNELE. Annelie.

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

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

OUISER. With your family?

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

OUISER. With your husband?

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

OUISER. You don't know?

ANNELE. I'm not sure.

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

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

CLAIRE & TRUVY. Of course you can.

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

OUISER. Honey. Men are the most horrible creatures.

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

CLAIRE. No idea where he went?

ANNELE. 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?

ANNELE. 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?*

TRUVY. You should've said something.

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

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Pay her off on the new girl.

All must listen to this.

Is this why Truvy sent her with Annelie.

Know Ouiser will get the dirt.

Bad Past?

Dick

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.

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

OUISER. Of course they can. *niche help*

SHELBY. You are so brave.

TRUVY. You must be made of courage. *encouragement*

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

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. *to Ouiser?*

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.

ANNELE. 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.

ANNELE. You're all so nice.

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

ANNELE. 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.

ANNELE. *(Overcome.)* Oh.

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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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.

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

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

ANNELE. *(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!

TRUVY. Ouiser! Call your dog! He'll listen to you!

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.)*

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

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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. Shelby!
SHELBY. Mama? Where is everybody?
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.
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?
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.
SHELBY. Some things never change.
M'LYNN. And how are you, honey?
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? Didn't hear that.
SHELBY. I'm going to have a baby.
M'LYNN. I realize that. No shit!
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. Not truth.
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.

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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. *Not realistic*

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. 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? There's a first time for everything. SHELBY. Don't start on Jackson.)

M'LYNN. Shelby. 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.

SHELBY. Mama . . . 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.

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. *Rush to her. Good argument.*

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

going to have a baby—I wish you would be happy, too.

M'LYNN. I wish I . . . I don't know what I wish. *Give up? or in?*

SHELBY. Mama. I don't know why you have to make everything so difficult. I look at having this baby as the opportunity 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 lifetime of nothing special. *Final plan* (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. *reference to 'Brick Wall'* (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!

TRUVY. Ho, ho, ho. (Calling through the door.) Annel! We have a special mystery guest! (To Shelby.) You're just in time. You can have the honor of lighting the tree of beauty.

SHELBY. How precious! What a novel idea to trim it with hair things. *is it?*

TRUVY. (Annel enters.) It's all Annel's idea. She has quite an eye for the unusual!

ANNELLE. Hi there! (Hugs Shelby.)

SHELBY. (The tree and the decorations.) Annel, you did all this?

ANNELLE. Guilty. Truvy just turned over the decoration responsibility to me. I like them. And I despise the commercialization 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.

TRUVY. My husband has redone Poot's old room so An-

nelle can have a workshop for her handicrafts. That little garage apartment is so cramped. (Truvy places grotesque handmade trestle 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 Annette. (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 Chiquapin Parish." It's going to be spectacular. And guess who the grand marshal of the parade is? Wayne Newton!

SHELBY. I wouldn't miss a Christmas festival for the world. (Truvy and Annette 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. ^{She'll be in earlier.}

SHELBY. They're bite sized. Like this.

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

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

Annette. 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.) Annette?

Annette. 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

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acceptance

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... "Praise the Lord" for my taste.

Annette. (With an edge.) Some of them do get a little carried away. But there's nothing wrong with that. ^{is there?}

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 Annette is settling down and finding her way. She's had a few rough months, haven't you, honey?

Annette. Oh. After they finally threw Bunkie Dupuy behind bars and I was rid of him, I went wild. I was drinking, running around, smoking... ^{ride model, mother?}

TRUVY. Jezebel!

Annette. 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... ^{not decorating.}

TRUVY. Our little Annette has become one of the hottest tickets in town. ^{well, not.}

Annette. 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.

Annette. Truvy, will you hush!

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

Annette. Sammy DeSoto. ^{Secret man alive.}

TRUVY. He has a body that doesn't stop anywhere. ^{Sarcastic n good?}

SHELBY. How am I responsible?

Annette. 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?

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SHELBY. I'm beyond help. Last week I discovered the early stages of crow's feet.
 TRUVY. Oh, honey/Time marches on/And eventually you realize it's marching across your face/How are you feeling?
 SHELBY. Never better. (Clairee enters. She has on a Devil's cap. She is hoarse.)
 CLAIREE. (Presenting a tin of cookies.) My annual pecan tassed
 TRUVY. There's my girl. I guess you're the happy one this morning.
 CLAIREE. Yes, I am. First state championship in eight years!
 SHELBY. You sound awful, Miss Clairee!
 CLAIREE. Hello, darling!
 SHELBY. Can I get you some tea?
 CLAIREE. Yes, that would be nice. I'm sorry I'm late. I was a dazzling victory over Dry-Prong.
 ANNELE. I heard you on the radio last night. You were wonderful.
 SHELBY. What were you doing on the radio?
 CLAIREE. They let me be the color announcer for the Devils. I was fabulous. I was too colorful for words.
 SHELBY. That was nice of them to let you talk on the radio.
 CLAIREE. Nice nothing. I own the radio station.
 SHELBY. Oh! You bought it?
 CLAIREE. Yes! KPPD. The station of choice in Chinquapin Parish! Commercial.
 TRUVY. Shelby? How do you like Clairee's new short and sassy look?
 SHELBY. I love it.
 TRUVY. Just wait til I jack it up.
 SHELBY. It makes you look younger, Miss Clairee.
 CLAIREE. My hair looks younger. My face looks just as old.
 ANNELE. There is so much going on! The state championship last night, the Christmas festival today, the Messiah sing-along tomorrow...
 TRUVY. Life in the big city will spoil you.
 SHELBY. Who's Miss Merry Christmas this year?
 CLAIREE. My niece, Nancy Beth, of course.
 TRUVY. She was here at seven this morning. I had to posi-

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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. 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. Sad but true.
 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. Slip up? or purposeful.
 TRUVY. Oh? *groom*
 M'LYNN. That's all I'm saying. —
 TRUVY. Oh. *Damn!!*
 SHELBY. I should've won Miss Merry Christmas the year I ran/My talent was very showy. *You don't even say good.*
 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. *really about baby.*
 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. But implies opposite.*
 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.

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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.
 OUISER. (Entering in a huff.) I could just spit. *another good entrance*
 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. *stop her hand away*
 OUISER. I hate out of town tourists.
 SHELBY. Hello?
 OUISER. Shelby? What are you doing here?
 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.
 SHELBY. I like it. *you are gross.*
 ANNELLE. Miss Ouiser. I think you need a healthy dose of a Christmas spirit. (Annelle interrupts conditioning Clairee to get a present from the tree.)
 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. *she bellows it - earrings.* You made them, didn't you? *(Pulls out poinsettia)*
 ANNELLE. With my own two hands.
 OUISER. Your present is . . . uh . . . back at the house. I haven't wrapped it yet.
 SHELBY. How's Rhet?
 OUISER. He's getting along. / As a matter of fact, he's the

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poster dog for the Christmas festival. (Ouiser points to a poster on the wall with a picture on it.)
 TRUVY. That is Rhet. / I didn't recognize him.
 CLAIREE. It's nice to see Rhet 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. *spark?*
 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. *early on.*
 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. *RED TOO RISKY. Scared of getting hurt.*
 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

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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.

CLAIRE. Do I detect a negativity in your tone? *NO way.*

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. *make wise.*

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.

CLAIRE. Please, I haven't even washed the dishes from Thanksgiving. *one uppen.*

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. — *crazy around. Except for M'Lynn.*

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

SHELBY. I'm going to have a baby. *Whoops and joy all around.*

TRUVY. Congratulations! No wonder you haven't said much this morning.

Aren't you excited? Smile! It increases your face value!

SHELBY. June 21. *Not happy about it. Has not yet.*

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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Kiss and run!!!

Ouiser. I can't believe she did that! Owen? After all these years? I'm not sure I can be gracious under pressure. *What am I gonna wear?*

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...

CLAIRE. 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. *Owen already changing Owen?*

M'Lynn. Diabetics have healthy babies all the time. *Good friend support.*

ANNELLE. It will all be fine.

CLAIRE. 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 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.

false exit, get best word.

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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 a 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

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 Annette. Shelby's radio plays, but fades in and out. Truvy and Annette 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. / It was so disappointed when I realized it was only my nephew.

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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.

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. *Change. Cut look.*

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 . . . — *Kick in the gut.*

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 Como 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 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 Annette 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.

ANNELE. 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

45 *Enjoy that!*

why?

*just tears ~ ?
tears for hair.*

*Change to 'Terms of Endearment'
Baby: here!!!*

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.

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

SHELBY. We're always up to something. What's going on? and Belle nonsense. But I want to get back to this Drew.

Speaking as a parent, they better get their act together. I do not approve of friction between parents and children.

CLAIRE. Oh, I think it'll all blow over. I have to admit. I do did go about it the wrong way.
TRUVY. What did he do?

CLAIRE. 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?

CLAIRE. 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?

CLAIRE. 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.

Cul Truvy it's 90's 16 time.

CLAIRE. They were both high. They'd been smoking ev-
erything 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?

CLAIRE. 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 Annette for some, but Annette is in silent prayer. Uncomfortable, Truvy waits for Annette to finish. The others also notice Annette.)

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

ANNELE. Is it still next to . . .

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

ANNELE. O.K. (Annette exits.)

SHELBY. Was she praying?

TRUVY. Yes. *is it good?*

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 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. *down and gloom*

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

ain't it great!

*Finishing each other's sentences
Relationships
strengthened*

overboard

that'll make you all seek Angeline

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 peo-
ple . . . but they sometimes seem to have a peace about
things that I've never had. Maybe I'm just jealous. (Annette
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
smack.) 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.)
OUISE. (Enters carrying a sack.) Morning.
TRUVY. Morning, Ouiser!

OUISE. What's so funny?

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

OUISE. I love mine! It highlights my new artwork.

CLAIREE. Since when do you have track lighting?

OUISE. 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?

OUISE. 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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OUISE. Take some tomatoes back home with you. There's
plenty. Boy! Your hair's short. Looks good! Does it?
SHELBY. Thank you, Miss Ouiser. Jack Jr. loves toma-
toes . . . 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. Proud mama.

OUISE. Clairee. How many tomatoes do you want? Toma-
toes have no calories and are full of . . . (She throws away a
stinky 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?

OUISE. Do you or do you not want tomatoes?

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

OUISE. 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?

OUISE. 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. must be clean enough to see.

SHELBY. Health is the most important thing, Miss Ouiser.
(Trust me on this.)

OUISE. And. While I have everyone's attention. This
morning I went to my mailbox and found that some-
one . . . (Directed at Annette.) has put me on the mailing list
for the Riverview Baptist Church. Lucky me! I am now re-
ceiving chain letters for Christ.

ANNELLE. They aren't chain letters. They're part of my
defence.

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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 Bloomingdale's and come back and tell me everything. Woman's Day says it's impossible to walk through there and not get made up.

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Back to work

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. *encourage warm life!*

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. *Trying to improve appearance. Ouiser?*

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 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. *Challenging Ouiser*

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

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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 - *more than that* - 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?*

CLAIREE. Wait, wait! I have to get a mental picture of this. *Good picture?*

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. *yes.*

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!

OUISER. I can't help it if men find me desirable.

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!

TRUVY. Has he gained any weight?

SHELBY. He's about fifteen pounds now. *(Proudly showing pictures.)*

OUISER. God! He is a tiny thing.

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.

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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. *He did!*

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. *don't do it.*

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 . . . *cause of the name? or color?* 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! Annelie is taking a well deserved vacation.

CLAIREE. That's nice! Are you taking a trip?

ANNELIE. Yes, I am.

CLAIREE. Aren't you going to tell us where you're going?

ANNELIE. *(Directed to Ouiser.)* No.

OUISER. Please Annelie! I don't know how I'll get through the week without this information.

ANNELIE. You'll just make fun.

OUISER. Annelie. 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 . . .

ANNELIE. It's in the middle of Arkansas. It's a Christian

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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.

CLAUDE. Are there waterbeds?

CLAUDE. Ouiser, leave her alone.

CLAUDE. I'm just trying to find out more about Camp Ouiser. I might want to go.

CLAUDE. That's a laugh. You've never done a religious thing in your life.

CLAUDE. That's not true. When I was in school, a bunch of my friends and I would dress up like nuns and go barhopping.

CLAUDE. Is your boyfriend going with you? (laughs)

ANNE. No! He said he'd rather eat dirt.

CLAUDE. 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.

ANNE. I have to say this, Miss Ouiser! And I don't mean to hurt you. But . . . I worry about your faith sometimes.

CLAUDE. My faith is fine . . . (Affecting a lisp.) Ith my hair that needth the motht work.

CLAUDE. Ouiser! One of these days somebody's going to cut the feet out of your stockings.

TRUVY. Ouiser, have you no shame?

ANNE. 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.) Beginning

M'Lynn. Morning everybody! (Shelby's haircut hits her like a ton of bricks.) Shelby . . . !

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.

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.

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.

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something's up.

SHELBY. It's not too perky, is it?

M'Lynn. It looks great. How're you doing?

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.)

CLAUDE. 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.

CLAUDE. 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.

ANNE. Ooo! That's a big one! What is the thirtieth anniversary?

M'Lynn. How do you mean?

ANNE. You know . . . first anniversary is paper. Twentieth is china. Twenty-fifth is silver. Thirtieth must be . . . 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.

CLAUDE. 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

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others getting suspicious yet?

Now we know something's up.

why?

romantic made me and my brothers sick to our stomachs, but it's actually very sweet. It's been a lovely week. *fine moments*

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.

CLAIRE: That's too deep for me! I have to go get my tires rotated. *refer to bad back. Doesn't leave.*

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? (Claire takes off smock, tips Annelle, leaves money on counter.)

CLAIRE: 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.

CLAIRE: (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?

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SHELBY: Dialysis. It's when . . .

ANNELLE: I know what it is.

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.

CLAIRE: Mary Lynn Eaton! I am without words! Why haven't I been told?

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.

ANNELLE: We could have done something.

CLAIRE: I can't believe you didn't say anything. This is selfish. This is very selfish of you.

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? *True concern.*

TRUVY: You look beautiful, but . . .

CLAIRE: Well. Maybe you'll let us in on what's going to happen?

OUISER: Do you do this dialysis forever?

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?

CLAIRE: I saw something about it on the news. It's so dramatic. These medical teams fly all over the place taking

piece of cake

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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!/Not /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?

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.

CLAIREE. I'm going to yank you bald-headed, smarty.

OUISER. We are very upset here.

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TRUVY. I passed upset a long time ago. I think it's very funny.

SHELBY. I'm sorry. That's Tommy's joke.

TRUVY. No wonder your whole family's in town.

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?

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.

TRUVY. They have to saw you in half?

M'Lynn. They do it on Circus of the Stars all the time.

CLAIREE. This is no laughing matter. Of all people.

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.

SHELBY. Miss Ouisee. Forget it.

OUISER. Well, uh . . . I'm a terrible person.

CLAIREE. No you're not, Ouisee. You'd give your dog a kidney if he needed one.

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.

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ANNELE. 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.

M'LYNN. That's sweet of you . . . but don't change your plans.

OUISER. We'll make sure Drum has enough food.

CLAIRE. 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.

ANNELE. 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.)

SHELBY. (Carefully holding up pink bed jacket, taking in her appearance.) Ladies? Do I look fabulous, or what?

ANNELE. 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!

CLAIRE. 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.

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M'LYNN. Good. (To the room.) Drum's not taking this very well. He gets so emotional over the least little thing. *ugh.*

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. *reassure*

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 Claire? Would you do something for me?

CLAIRE. Of course.

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.

CLAIRE. I'll tell them today.

SHELBY. Truvy? Why isn't my radio playing? (Shelby taps the radio. It plays. Shelby's fingernails are still wet. Shelby exits.)

CURTAIN.

Sets up ending

look at me and I'm happy.

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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 DJ.

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 Chingquapin 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 Ouizer are in the chairs. Annette is doing Ouizer's hair in silence. Annette is visibly pregnant. Clairee is halfheartedly reading Reader's Digest.)

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. Annette is listening to the weather report.)

ANNELLE. Thirty nine-degrees! You were right, Truvy.

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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.

CLAIREE. Anna Boleyn had six fingers.

OUISER. Who's Anne Boleyn?

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. It smells.

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. (Ouizer has pulled her scarf out from under her smock. It is a wild print. As Ouizer examines it.) And I love Ouizer's,

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too. I may want to borrow that sometime.
OUISER. You're welcome to it.
CLAIRE. You don't like it, do you?
OUISER. It's perfect for me. A print this busy'll never show dog hair.

ANNELE. My feet are like two blocks of ice.
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.

ANNELE. (After a beat.) Have any of you seen her this morning?

CLAIRE. I haven't. I went directly to the house when I got in. Only the boys were there.

ANNELE. 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.

CLAIRE. I'm glad you decided to stay open today.

OUISER. How are the boys?

CLAIRE. As well as can be expected.

TRUVY. My husband and I are taking some barbecue over there later.

CLAIRE. I have never seen so much food.

ANNELE. 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.

ANNELE. 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.

CLAIRE. When are you moving, Annelle?

ANNELE. 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.

ANNELE. It's just down the street, Truvy. A hop, skip, and a jump. That apartment is so squashed Sammy and I

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.

CLAIRE. 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?

CLAIRE. 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.

CLAIRE. 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.

CLAIRE. 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.

CLAIRE. 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.

CLAIRE. M'Lynn. I'm beside myself. Wasn't Shelby fine when I left? Can you talk about it?

He does care.

warm

reactin
from M'Lynn

to what?
wondering if
satisfying it
I feel good

What
they want
beating
avoiding

NO
mention
of which
M'Lynn
or
Shelby

Plot?

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 . . .

ANNELE. 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.

ANNELE. 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.

ANNELE. Miss M'Lynd. 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.

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.

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

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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.

TRUVY. (Putting the finishing flourishes on M'Lynd'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?

M'LYNN. No. I did it myself . . .

TRUVY. Hold it, Missy. I don't want to hear that kind of talk.

M'LYNN. Doing my own hair was so odd. I had no idea about the back . . .

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?

TRUVY. No.

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. (Beat.)

TRUVY. (Handing M'Lynd a mirror.) Check the back. M'LYNN. Perfect . . . as always. (M'Lynd continues to gaze into the mirror.) You know . . . Shelby . . . Shelby was

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right. It . . . it does kind of look like a blond football helmet. (M'Lynn disintegrates.) *laugh to tears*

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!

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!

ANNELE. 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?

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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 serious there for a moment. I'm sorry M'Lynn. We are all entitled to our sorrow.

M'LYNN. That was very funny, Clairee.

ANNELE. I have to admit I laughed . . . even though that wasn't a very Christian thing to do, Miss Clairee.

CLAIREE. Annelie, honey. You're going to have to lighten up.

ANNELE. 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.

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 . . .

M'LYNN. Shelby was always crazy about Lloyd.

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.

OUISER. You are too twisted for color TV.

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.)

ANNELE. 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 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.

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VITA:

Born on September 28, 1976 in Fort Worth, Texas, Michael grew up in Dallas, Texas. He graduated from Warren Travis White High School in 1995. Michael received his Bachelors of Science with a double-major in Occupational Safety and Health and Theatre: Acting/Directing in 2003 from Southeastern Oklahoma State University in Durant, OK. There he was a member of Alpha Psi Omega, Delta Tau Delta, and the American Society of Safety Engineers. Upon graduation, Michael moved to New Orleans, Louisiana where he began graduate studies to earn a Master of Fine Arts degree in performance with a specialization in acting from the University of New Orleans. In 2006 Michael was selected as one of sixteen National Finalists in the KC/ACTF Irene Ryan Acting Competition. Michael plans to pursue a career as a professional actor, playwright, director, and teacher.