

ACT I

SCENE 1 *The curtain rises on TRUVY's beauty salon. There are the sounds of gunshots and a dog barking. ANNELLE is spraying TRUVY's hair with more hair spray than neces-*

sary.

START

ANNELLE: Oops! I see a hole.

TRUVY: I was hoping you would catch that.

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

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

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

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

ANNELLE: Oh, thank you, Miss Truvy!

TRUVY: No time! This morning we're going to be as busy as a one-armed paperhanger. Now, you know where the coffee stuff is. Everything else is on a tray next to the stove. (TRUVY removes her smock.)

ANNELLE: Here, let me help you. (*Dusts her off*) You've got tiny hairs and fuzzies all over you.

Annelle x
Truvy

TRUVY: Honey, there's so much static electricity in here, I pick up everything except boys and money. (*Points ANNELLE toward the kitchen.*) Be a treasure. (*ANNELLE exits into the kitchen. TRUVY immediately starts redoing her hairdo.*) Annelle? This is the most successful shop in town. Wanna know why?

ANNELLE: (*Offstage*) Why?

TRUVY: Because I have a strict philosophy that I have stuck to for fifteen years . . . "There is no such thing as natural beauty." That's why I've never lost a client to the Kut and Kurl or the Beauty Box. And remember! My ladies get only the best. Do not scrimp on anything. Feel free to use as much hair spray as you want.

(*ANNELLE returns with the tray. The sound of a gunshot makes her jump, but she recovers.*)

Just shove that stuff to one side—it goes right there. (*Pointing out the room*) Manicure station here . . .

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

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

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

TRUVY: I restrict myself to the ladies of the neighborhood on Saturday mornings. Normally that would be just three, but today we've got Shelby Eatenton. She's not a regular, she's the daughter of a regular. I have to do something special with her hair. She's getting married

this afternoon. Now. How long have you been here in town?

ANNELLE: A few weeks . . .

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

ANNELLE: It's a little scary.

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

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

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

ANNELLE: My car's—I don't have a car. I've been staying across the river at Robeline's Boardinghouse.

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

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

M'Lynn, Truvy, Annelle, Shelby, Claire

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(M'LYNN enters carrying a large tote bag.)

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

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

M'LYNN: Is this a riddle?

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

START

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. Un-usual. 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. Eatenton? These girls have mountains to move today.

M'LYNN: Ain't that the truth.

TRUVY: Her coiffure card is on the desk.

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 yesterday 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.

M'LYNN: She does sweat profusely.

Shelby: Thank you, Mama.

END

Annelie, Claire, Truvy, Ouiser, M'Lynn

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STEEL MAGNOLIAS

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.

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.

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.

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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.

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 till elevenish.

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. *(To ANNELLE)* You must be the new girl.

ANNELLE: Hi.

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

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

OUISER: It's not your 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! (ANSELLE enters with glass of water) Be that as it may . . . it would not be too much to ask for me to have one blossom to brighten my home. I am all alone except for my dog.

CLAIREE: You need something in your life besides that dumb animal . . .

OUISER: Put a lid on it, Clairee. 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 pees 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.

CLAIREE: Which vet?

OUISER: Whitey Black.

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

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

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

CLAIREE: (*Holding up the recipe box*) I've got a lot of good recipes here.

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

ANSELLE: His color's good. His skin is real pink.

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

Stop

M'Lynn & Shelby

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STEEL MAGNOLIAS

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

START
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 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.

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

M'LYNN: I see.

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

M'LYNN: Has he really? There's a first time for every-thing.

SHELBY: Don't start on Jackson.

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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.

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

SHELBY: Okay. 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.

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.

(The lights come up. The radio is blaring.)

Please don't tell anybody yet. I want to tell Daddy first.

M'LYNN: I never tell anyone anything. *(Calls)* They're on, Truvy!

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)* 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.

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

ANNELLE: Hi there!

SHELBY: *(Pointing to the tree and the decorations)* Annel, you did all this?

ANNELLE: Guilty. Truvy just turned over the decoration responsibility to me. I like themes. 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 Annel can have a workshop for her handicrafts. That little garage apartment is so cramped.

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 Annel. *(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.

End

ANNELLE: (*Modestly*) Well . . . yeah. I am enjoying the city more. And I am so excited about the Christmas festival today. I've wanted to come to it all my life. And now I live here!

TRUVY: Tell her who you have a date with.

ANNELLE: Truvy, will you hush?

TRUVY: Tell her, missy. Shelby is pretty much totally responsible for this.

ANNELLE: Sammy DeSoto.

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

SHELBY: How am I responsible?

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

TRUVY: Romance. This is what I live for.

TRUVY: Can we do anything for you today, Shelby?

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: Knock, knock! (*Presenting a tin of cookies*) My annual pecan tassies!

TRUVY: There's my girl. I guess you're the happy one this morning.

CLAIREE: Yes, I am. First state championship in eight years!

~~TRUVY~~ TRUVY: 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 overslept. We didn't get back into town until one o'clock. It was a dazzling victory over Dry Prong.

ANNELLE: 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!

(SHELBY gives CLAIREE the tea.)

TRUVY: Shelby? How do you like Clairee's new short and sassy look?

SHELBY: I love it.

TRUVY: Just wait till I jack it up.

SHELBY: It makes you look younger, Miss Clairee.

CLAIREE: My hair looks younger. My face looks just as old. Oh, this tea is a little bit of heaven right here on earth; thanks.

ANNELLE: 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 position 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.

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

M'LYNN: That's not necessarily true.

TRUVY: Oh?

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

TRUVY: Oh.

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

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

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

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

SHELBY: Mama hated those fire batons.

M'LYNN: I have never hated anything, Shelby. I supported you, but I just couldn't watch you. Your father,

on the other hand, had a field day. He got so much pleasure out of standing in the backyard for hours watching you practice, holding the garden hose so he could put you out when you caught fire.

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

M'LYNN: But we were proud of her.

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

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

CLAIREE: (*mock sincerity*) Here. Let me hold you.

OUISER: I hate out-of-town tourists.

SHELBY: Hello!

OUISER: Shelby! What are you doing here?

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.

ANNELLE: Miss Ouiser. I think you need a healthy dose of 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. (*Pulls out poinsettia earrings.*) You made them, didn't you?

ANNELLE: With my own two hands.

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

END

Clairee, Shelby, Truvy

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STEEL MAGNOLIAS

SHELBY: Still, somebody knocking on my bedroom window after dark would scare the daylight out of me.

CLAIREE: Not me. Hope springs eternal, I suppose. I was so disappointed when I realized it was only my nephew.

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.

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: Okay, I'm ready. (*TRUVY turns SHELBY to the mirror.*) Oh, gosh . . . it's so weird . . .

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

Act II

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

TRUVY: Well, this is what we Cosmo girls call a "*rite du passage*." (*SHELBY is visibly upset.*)

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

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

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

SHELBY: (*Rallying*) Enough! I love my hair!

TRUVY: Whew! My artistic nature is so relieved.

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

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

SHELBY: Mama's going to freak out. She just thinks I'm getting a trim. I wasn't up to a big debate with her this morning. Now! Truvy! Let's do my nails!

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

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

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

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

SHELBY: We're always up to something—you know that. (*Changing subject*) But I want to get back to this Drew and Belle nonsense. I hope they reconcile with Marshall. Speaking as a parent, they better get their act together. I do not approve of friction between parents and children.

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

TRUVY: What did he do?

CLAIREE: He marched in unexpected from Los Angeles and Drew and Belle were preparing for the annual Marmillion 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?

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

SHELBY: How do you feel about Marshall?

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

TRUVY: He could always turn a phrase.

(TRUVY is about to use a bottle of something for SHELBY's manicure, but she realizes the bottle is empty. She turns to ask ANNELLE for some, but ANNELLE is in silent prayer.)

Shelby, Truvy, Claire, Oulser

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STEEL MAGNOLIAS

Uncomfortable, TRUVY waits for ANNELLE to finish. The others also notice ANNELLE.)

ANNELLE: Amen.

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

ANNELLE: Is it still next to . . . ?

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

ANNELLE: Okay. *(ANNELLE exits)*

SHELBY: Was she praying?

TRUVY: Yes.

SHELBY: Why?

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

SHELBY: How long has she been this way?

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

SHELBY: What does her boyfriend say?

Act II

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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 trouble with the Father, the Son, and the Holy Ghost.

SHELBY: Well, I'm pretty religious, but that stuff makes me feel kind of creepy.

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

(ANNELLE enters, smacks the radio to make it play. CLAIREE changes subject.)

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

TRUVY: It's a bug.

CLAIREE: It's fine jewelry. Its 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 to-

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day? 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.

OUISER: (*Enters carrying a sack*) Morning. What's so funny?

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

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

CLAIREE: Since when do you have track lighting?

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

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

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

SHELBY: Well, I'm here.

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

SHELBY: Thank you, Miss Ouiser. Jack Junior loves tomatoes—he smears them on the café 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, 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 Junior loved it, though.

OUISER: Clairee, how many tomatoes do you want? Tomatoes have no calories and are full of—(*she throws away a 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?

OUISER: Do you or do you not want tomatoes?

CLAIREE: Don't give me all of them.

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

ANNELLE: Then why do you grow them?

OUISER: I am an old Southern woman. We're supposed to put on funny-looking hats and ugly old dresses and grow vegetables in the dirt. Don't ask me why. I don't make the rules.

CLAIREE: You should get some gloves. Your hands look like a couple of T-bone steaks.

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

END

OUISER: And. While I have everyone's attention . . . this morning I went to my mailbox and found that someone . . . (*directed at ANNELLE*) has put me on the mailing list for the Riverview Baptist Church. Lucky me. I am now receiving chain letters for Christ.

ANNELE: They aren't chain letters. They're part of my 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.

CLAIRE: "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?

CLAIRE: 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.

CLAIRE: 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?

CLAIRE: 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.

CLAIRE: Anyway. Sis and I liked it so much, we're planning a theater trip to New York.

TRUVY: New York?! Oh, Claire. 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.

CLAIRE: We're just talking. I'm scared to death of getting on a plane.

TRUVY: It's a piece of cake. You're safer flying than you are in a car. Just sit in the rear. That's the best place to survive the crash.

SHELBY: Miss Ouiser. Why don't you go to Monroe with Miss Clairee?

OUISER: I am not exposing myself to anything.

CLAIRE: You should broaden your horizons.

OUISER: You broaden your horizons your way. I'll broaden my horizons mine. I have plans next Friday. I'm going to Shreveport to have my colors done.

CLAIREE: Your what?

OUISER: I'm going to get my colors done. I'm going to find out if I'm a summer or spring or fall or winter. It's a present from Owen.

CLAIREE: What are you talking about?

OUISER: Every person has a particular coloring—summer, spring, so on. You determine what season you are, then you know what colors look best on you. Then you're given samples of the colors that are in your palette. It's most helpful when you shop for clothes. It gives you fashion courage.

CLAIREE: That is the stupidest thing I have ever heard of.

OUISER: It's all the rage.

SHELBY: A lot of my friends in Monroe have had it done.

TRUVY: There's a quiz on that very topic in that *Family Circle* right over there. I am the epitome of winter.

OUISER: Why don't you have it done, Shelby? You're so fashion-conscious.

SHELBY: No. I'm scared to. I might find out that pink is not in my palette and I'm not sure I could live with that.

CLAIREE: I have heard it all. Well. I am going to the theater. I am going to support the arts in our area.

OUISER: I'll write a check. I will support art. I just don't want to see it.

CLAIREE: It wouldn't harelip you, you know.

OUISER: Let's get one thing straight. I don't see plays because I can nap at home for free. I don't see movies because they're all trash and full of naked people. And I don't read books because if they're any good, they'll be made into a mini-series.

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 all right. I enjoy his company—on occasion.

CLAIREE: I can report that the Sherwood Florist delivery truck stops by her house at least twice a week.

OUISER: He knows I like fresh flowers.

CLAIREE: And I can report that a strange car is parked in her garage at least once a week.

OUISER: There. My secret's out. I'm having an affair with a Mercedes Benz.

TRUVY: Ouiser. Forgive me. I have been dying to ask this. Are you and Owen . . . you know?

CLAIREE: Wait, wait wait! I have to get a mental picture of this.

END

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 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'LYNN's hair)* Well, I don't know how your insides are doing. But your hair is holding up beautifully. All it needs is a lick and a promise. Did you have it done in Shreveport?

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 . . . Inter-ested?

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.

TRUVY: *(handing M'LYNN a mirror)* Check the back.

M'LYNN: Perfect . . . as always. *(M'LYNN continues to gaze into the mirror.)* You know . . . Shelby . . . Shelby was right. It . . . it does kind of look like a blond football helmet. *(M'LYNN starts to break.)* Poor Shelby . . . *(M'LYNN disintegrates.)*

TRUVY: Honey, sit right back down. Can I get you something? Do you feel all right?