Steel Magnolias

Robert Harling

The Fireside Theatre
Garden City, N.Y.

PLACE: Chinquapin, Louisiana
Act I: Scene 1: April
Scene 2: December
Act II: Scene 1: June, eighteen months later
Scene 2: November

CAST OF CHARACTERS

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

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

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

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

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

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

ANNELLE: I don't have anything to say.

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

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

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

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

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

SHELBY: Nine.

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.

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

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

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

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

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

SHELBY: Blush and bashful.

M'LYNN: Her colors are pink and pink.

SHELBY: Blush and bashful.

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

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

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

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

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

SHELBY: I like pink.

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

SHELBY: No way. Pink is my signature color.

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

M'LYNN: Peach and cream.

TRUVY: Clairee?

CLAIREE: Beige lace to the knee.

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

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

M'LYNN: It did not. It was on sale.

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)*

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

M'LYNN: Shelby and I agree on one thing.

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

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 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 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.

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)* Annelle! We have a special mystery guest! *(To* SHELBY) You're just in time. You can have the honor of lighting the tree of beauty.

SHELBY: How precious. What a novel idea to trim it with hair things.

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

ANNELLE: Hi there!

SHELBY: *(Pointing to the tree and the decorations)* Annelle, 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 Annelle 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 Annelle. *(Offers* SHELBY *the plug for the lights.)* Do the honors, missy. And hope it doesn't blow up again. (SHELBY *lights the tree. Applause all around)*

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