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❖ Steel Magnolias

.....ROBERT HARLING

CHARACTERS: M'LYNN (50's), SHELBY (25)

SETTING: *A beauty shop in the South.*

SHELBY *is the prettiest girl in town and recently married. M'LYNN is SHELBY's mother and socially a prominent career woman. It is the Saturday before Christmas, and M'LYNN is sitting under a hairdryer as SHELBY enters the shop. SHELBY tells her mother that she is going to have a baby, despite the fact that she's a diabetic.*

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 light 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 parents' 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.

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- M'LYNN: And how are you, honey?
- SHELBY: I'm so good, Mama. Just great.
- M'LYNN: You're looking well. Is Jackson at the house?
- SHELBY: No. You know how twitchy he gets. I sent him to look for stocking stuffers.
- M'LYNN: Good thinking.
- SHELBY: Uh. Jackson and I have something to tell you. We wanted to tell you when you and Daddy were together, but you're never together, so it's every man for himself. I'm pregnant.
- M'LYNN: Shelby?!
- SHELBY: I'm going to have a baby.
- M'LYNN: I realize that.
- SHELBY: Well . . . is that it? Is that all you're going to say?
- M'LYNN: I . . . what do you expect me to say?
- SHELBY: Something along the lines of congratulations.
- M'LYNN: . . . Congratulations.
- SHELBY: Would it be too much to ask for a little excitement? Not too much, I wouldn't want you to break a sweat or anything.
- M'LYNN: I'm in a state of shock! I didn't think . . .
- SHELBY: In June. Oh, Mama. You have to help me plan. We're going to get a new house. Jackson and I are going house hunting next week. Jackson loves to hunt for anything.
- M'LYNN: What does Jackson say about this?
- SHELBY: Oh. He's very excited. He says he doesn't care whether it's a boy or girl . . . but I know he really wants a son so bad he can taste it. He's so cute about the whole thing. It's all he can talk about . . . Jackson Latcherie Junior.
- M'LYNN: But does he ever listen? I mean when doctors and specialists give you advice. I know you never listen, but does he? I guess since he doesn't have to carry the baby, it doesn't really concern him.
- SHELBY: Mama. Don't be mad. I couldn't bear it if you were. It's Christmas.
- M'LYNN: I'm not mad, Shelby. This is just . . . hard. I thought that . . . I don't know.
- SHELBY: Mama. I want a child.
- M'LYNN: But what about the adoption proceedings? You have filed so many applications.
- SHELBY: Mama. It didn't take us long to see the handwriting 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: 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.

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.

