

Wedding Belles

by Alan Bailey
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A SAMUEL FRENCH ACTING EDITION



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WEDDING BELLES was given its premiere in October, 2008 by One Thirty Productions in association with the City of Dallas' Office of Cultural Affairs and the Bath House Cultural Center. The production was directed by Larry Randolph. The cast was as follows:

BOBRITA TOLLIVER Sandra Looney
GLENDINE SLOCUMB Marty Van Kleeck
VIOLET MONTGOMERY Gene Raye Price
LAURA LEE MCINERNY Pam Myers-Morgan
IMA JEAN TATUM Leslie Patrick

Larry Randolph designed the set, Marty Van Kleeck designed the costumes, Jason Moody designed the lighting, and M. Graeme Bice designed the sound.

CHARACTERS

LAURA LEE MCINERNY - 60

BOBRITA TOLLIVER - 60

VIOLET MONTGOMERY - 60

GLENDINE SLOCUMB - 60

IMA JEAN TATUM - 18

SETTING

The veranda and back garden of a large white house in Eufala Springs, an East Texas county seat with a population of three thousand. June, 1942.

ACT ONE

Scene 1

(The curtain rises. A hot June afternoon in Eufala Springs, Texas.)

(The back yard of a white two-story house with a wrap-around veranda. Overgrown planters and beds of flowers fill the yard. The home and grounds, once beautifully kept, are in disarray.)

(A screen door U.C. leads from the house onto the porch. Two large double windows flank the door. The L. window lets us see and hear the action inside the kitchen. In front of the R. window stands a desk and chintz-covered chair, the bottom falling out of it, a cushion on the seat to make it serviceable. Untidy stacks of magazines and newspapers tied with string fill the L. side of the porch.)

(Wide steps lead from the porch to the yard. A gate U.R. leads to the side yard. A trellis L. is covered with rambling roses. A white wicker table and chairs occupy a downstage corner.)

BOBRITA. *(calling from inside)* Laura Lee? – Hello? – Laura Lee? – Are you upstairs? –

(BOBRITA comes out onto the porch. Early 60s, she is broad-shouldered and stout all over. A good old girl.)

– Laura Lee? – Where are you? –

(She stops in her tracks when she sees the state of the yard.)

Oh, no – oh, no –

(GLENDINE and VIOLET enter from the garden gate.)

(**GLENDINE**, a petite firecracker, wears a playsuit consisting of a cap-sleeved top and shorts with a skirt over them, unbuttoned down the front. Her ensemble is completed by espadrilles with ribbons tied around the ankles.)

(**VIOLET** is a little dumpling, roundish. She is frail, at least in her own mind.)

GLENDINE. Laura Lee? –

VIOLET. – We're here! –

(*They, too, stop dead when they see the garden.*)

GLENDINE. Oh, no –

VIOLET. Oh, no –

(*They see BOBRITA on the porch.*)

GLENDINE. Where's Laura Lee?

BOBRITA. Not here.

(*The three women make their way from planter to planter, surveying the tangle.*)

GLENDINE. What in the world has she let happen to this garden?

BOBRITA. I wish you'd look. She's let her love-on-the-walk go completely to seed.

VIOLET. Poor things, these Sweet William are choking for water.

GLENDINE. You ought to see these hypatia.

(**BOBRITA** and **VIOLET**'s paths cross.)

BOBRITA. (*stiffly*) How are you getting along?

VIOLET. (*equally stiffly*) You needn't worry about me. I'm doing fine. I'm just living at the foot of the cross. It's level there.

BOBRITA. Well.

VIOLET. And I'm so much happier living in town instead of stranded out in the country. But I do miss the twins. How are they?

BOBRITA. Still frantic to enlist, but I'm fighting to keep them in school until they graduate.

GLENDINE. (*up on the porch*) Girls, you won't believe! This porch is a rat's nest.

VIOLET. What is all this junk stacked up?

BOBRITA. Looks like tin foil and scrap for the war effort.

GLENDINE. And all these papers.

VIOLET. Why hasn't she turned this in? They need these things.

GLENDINE. Where do you think she is?

BOBRITA. Any number of places. I talked to her this morning. She'd baked up a batch of cookies, took them down to the bus station for when the soldiers come through.

VIOLET. Was she set to do a Historical Home tour?

BOBRITA. Who knows? Her latest project she's taken on is to redo the Dewey Decimal system down at the library.

GLENDINE. You don't mean it.

VIOLET. Just keeping herself distracted, I guess.

GLENDINE. Poor thing.

BOBRITA. Too bad she's not tending to her own backyard.

GLENDINE. And she thinks she's going to host a Gala in a month's time?

BOBRITA. She'll never give up the Gala.

VIOLET. Not even after – ?

(*She trails off.*)

GLENDINE. – Oh! I had an idea last night, woke me up out of a deep sleep. I think what we could do for the Gala is put on a talent show. Plenty of people would buy tickets to that.

BOBRITA. But we don't have any talent.

GLENDINE. (*digging in*) I knew you'd shoot it down the very first thing –

BOBRITA. Not everybody likes to show off as much as you do, Glendine –

VIOLET. Wait, wait, don't say anything more! You can't do any Garden Club business until I get my minutes from the last meeting.

BOBRITA. (*impatiently*) Sister –

VIOLET. It won't take a second –

(**VIOLET** hurries out the back gate to the car. As soon as she's off –)

GLENDINE. (*desperately*) Bobrita, you've got to take her back. My marriage is at stake.

BOBRITA. When have you had a marriage that's not at stake?

GLENDINE. It's going on three weeks and she's driving Coach crazy.

BOBRITA. Tell me about it. Beaumont and I have had her underfoot for forty years.

GLENDINE. But she's your sister –

BOBRITA. She moved out on her own accord. We built her that perfectly nice little house. She refused to stay in it for even one night.

GLENDINE. Well, my nerves are raw. I don't think I can take another evening of sitting on the front porch 'til midnight playing Guess the Bible Verse –

(**VIOLET** reappears with her notebook. **GLENDINE** quickly changes her tone.)

(*covering, brightly*) – and Coach was so cute when he guessed that verse from Ruth: “Thy people shall be my people.”

VIOLET. Wasn't that sweet? Just like I was family.

GLENDINE. (*weakly*) Just like you were family.

(**BOBRITA**, then **GLENDINE**, start using this time to pull some weeds and straighten up the garden. **VIOLET** perches, not quite as eager to get to work.)

VIOLET. (*to BOBRITA*) Speaking of family, I'm so worried about the dogs. How are they?

BOBRITA. Fine. Both mamas whelped a couple of nights ago.

VIOLET. What? You didn't call me??

BOBRITA. (*explaining, to GLENDINE*) Bathsheba and Jezebel. Both litters by the same daddy. So they're half-brothers and sisters. And double cousins.

VIOLET. (*terribly concerned*) Are they all right?

BOBRITA. If we can pull the runt through, we'll get good money off all of them.

VIOLET. Oh! A runt!!

BOBRITA. Twelve pups in each litter.

VIOLET. Twelve! Then I'm naming them for the twelve disciples and the twelve Houses of Israel! We'll cover the Old AND the New Testaments.

(**LAURA LEE** comes out. *She is tall and handsome. She carries herself with dignity and an easy sense of authority.*)

LAURA LEE. Ladies! Ladies! What in the world is going on here? What are you girls up to?

GLENDINE. We thought we'd help you get a jump on this garden.

LAURA LEE. That's very kind of you, but I'm perfectly capable of handling things on my own.

BOBRITA. We didn't have anything to do waiting for you.

LAURA LEE. Well, I stopped by the old folks home and read them some *Saturday Evening Post*. Then I ran down to the courthouse – I'm working on a genealogy report for Flora Massengale, so I had to wade through all the old birth and death certificates. Then I mailed a letter to Oveta Hobby congratulating her on going from Houston to Washington to take charge of the Women's Army Auxiliary. They'll be doing a lot more than peeling potatoes and folding parachutes – that Oveta Hobby'll have those WAACs whipped into shape!

BOBRITA. The point is you're late.

LAURA LEE. Yes, but you're not going to believe what really delayed me.

VIOLET. What??

LAURA LEE. (*mysteriously*) It happened down at the bus station.

GLENDINE. Did Laverne lock herself in the ticket cage overnight again?

LAURA LEE. No. It's something I found!

VIOLET. You found?

GLENDINE. What is it?

LAURA LEE. Hold on. Close your eyes. I'll go get it.

(LAURA LEE goes inside.)

BOBRITA. *(her eyes still open)* What is it?

LAURA LEE. *(from inside)* Are your eyes closed?!

(BOBRITA gives in and closes her eyes.)

(LAURA LEE comes out with IMA JEAN, straightening IMA JEAN's clothes as they walk onto the porch.)

(IMA JEAN is a little waif of a thing. Eighteen years old, pale and freckled.)

LAURA LEE *(cont.) (to the women)* Now! Open your eyes.

(complete silence)

BOBRITA. I repeat – what is it?

LAURA LEE. This is Miss Ima Jean Tatum.

(IMA JEAN acknowledges them with an awkward curtsy.)

I found Ima Jean waiting at the bus station. She was so sweet, jumped right up to help me.

BOBRITA. Did she have a destination tag or do you get to keep her?

LAURA LEE. Bobrita!

GLENDINE. Precious, what were you doing there?

IMA JEAN. I've been waiting all morning for the four o'clock bus.

BOBRITA. No wonder you look so played out. All the heat for Hell's warmed up in that bus station.

LAURA LEE. Which is why I brought her to the house to wait. Ima Jean, this is Mrs. Tolliver. Her sister, Miss Montgomery. And Mrs. Slocumb.

VIOLET. She's looking a little peaked, Laura Lee.

LAURA LEE. Sweetheart, I'm going to run in and get you a little snack and some lemonade. Do you like it with more lemon or sugar?

IMA JEAN. Sugar, please, ma'am.

(LAURA LEE goes inside.)

GLENDINE. Where you coming from, precious?

IMA JEAN. I picked up the bus in Gillette.

BOBRITA. That's way up on the Oklahoma line.

IMA JEAN. Yes, ma'am, I've been riding all night.

VIOLET. Did you get any sleep?

IMA JEAN. Not a lick. The bus kept stopping and stopping. I don't know who all those people were, getting on the bus in the middle of the night. It was spooky. Scared me.

GLENDINE. You need to sit down, precious. You're looking white as the sheeted dead.

IMA JEAN. Oh – I'm fine – really, I am –

(IMA JEAN faints. The women run to her.)

BOBRITA. (calling inside) Laura Lee! Your surprise has fainted on us!

LAURA LEE. (from inside) What??

(LAURA LEE rushes out with a glass of lemonade and a plate of cold fried chicken.)

Oh, no! Bobrita, grab that bucket. Glendine, snatch up some washrags from the linen closet –

(LAURA LEE sits in a chair next to IMA JEAN. She puts IMA JEAN's head on her lap.)

Violet, get the smelling salts out of the powder room cabinet –

VIOLET. (running off) Powder room cabinet – powder room cabinet –

(BOBRITA is back with the bucket.)

LAURA LEE. Here, plunge her feet down in it. Ima Jean!
Ima Jean, sweetheart!

(GLENDINE runs back with the washrags. She wets one in the bucket, and LAURA LEE puts it on IMA JEAN's head.)

BOBRITA. Throw cold water on her.

GLENDINE. She's not a dog, Bobrita.

LAURA LEE. Breathe for us, darling. Breathe for us.

(IMA JEAN revives.)

IMA JEAN. Ooh – I feel kind of woozy –

BOBRITA. You're too young to be off by yourself.

GLENDINE. Do your folks know where you are, precious?

LAURA LEE. Have you run off?

IMA JEAN. I don't have any folks. I'm orphaned.

LAURA LEE. *(giving her the chicken)* Which do you like better?
White or dark? I gave you the pulley bone and a couple of legs.

IMA JEAN. Either one's fine.

(IMA JEAN falls on the food.)

LAURA LEE. Now, sweetheart, if you don't have any mama or daddy, who do you live with?

IMA JEAN. I live at the Masonic Home.

LAURA LEE. Over in Gillette?

IMA JEAN. Yes, ma'am.

(VIOLET runs back on from inside.)

VIOLET. Here they are! Here they are! I've got the smelling salts!

(She puts the smelling salts under IMA JEAN's nose, gagging her. GLENDINE and BOBRITA pull VIOLET away.)

GLENDINE. Violet! Violet!

BOBRITA. She's revived!

VIOLET. Oh.

(VIOLET takes a hit off the smelling salts herself.)

LAURA LEE. When did you eat last, sweetheart?

IMA JEAN. I fried me up a baloney sandwich last night for the trip, but I made myself only eat half of it. And I had a Mason jar of lemonade to wash it down. But the bus driver swerved – I think he was purposely trying to hit a big ol’ armadillo in the road – and that lemonade sloshed all over me and the sack I had my sandwich in. When I fished it out, it wasn’t too drowned, so I wrapped it up in my handkerchief and set it on the seat beside me. I nodded off and I reckon it was about three-thirty or four when I woke up and I was kindly famished. So I turned to get my sandwich – and now, you won’t believe this part – there was a big ol’ fat man sitting where my sandwich used to be. Just a teensy bit of my handkerchief peeking out from under them great big rolls of fat. And I thought, “Oh Lordy, what am I going to do?” He was gone to the world. But you know, hunger does funny things to a person. I had to accept the fact that if I wanted that sandwich, I was going to have to fight for it. Never in my wildest dreams did I imagine I would ever touch that man’s fat, but I eased my hand up under there – first one roll – then another – then another – and I lifted. Now you won’t believe this part – my sandwich had fallen into the space between the two seats! It was wedged in there tighter than a tick. It was safe! So with one hand, I kept that fat lifted up and with the other, I ever so gently eased my sandwich out. And just as I got it, the bus pulls into a station and the fat man wakes up with a big snort. Starts flailing his arms around. Knocked the sandwich right out of my hand. But then the driver opens the door and the floor lights come on. And I seen it. There it was, away up front. And now, you won’t believe this part – my handkerchief was nowhere to be seen. My sandwich was laying there nekkid on the bus floor. And just as I’m creeping up there for it, here comes a blind man with a big ol’ dog, scarfed it right down. So yes, ma’am, I’m a mite hungry.

(Stunned silence greets the tale. Finally –)

BOBRITA. Well, I don't begrudge the dog.

LAURA LEE. Ima Jean, sweetheart, you must be exhausted.

IMA JEAN. Yes, ma'am, I'm pretty much wore out.

LAURA LEE. We're about to have a meeting, sweetheart.

Why don't you run upstairs, lie down, get out of this heat. First bedroom at the top of the stairs. The chenille bedspread with the peacock pattern.

IMA JEAN. Oh. Thank you, ma'am. I'll be as silent as the Sphinx.

(IMA JEAN takes her plate and goes inside.)

LAURA LEE. *(leading the way into the yard)* Ladies, shall we? –

(The women assemble at a wicker table.)

GLENDINE. Isn't she a funny little thing?

BOBRITA. Pitiful.

VIOLET. A little waif loose in the world.

LAURA LEE. She broke my heart when I saw her all by herself at the bus station. I couldn't just leave her there. I call this meeting of the Eufala Springs Garden Club to order.

(GLENDINE runs to get a bag she brought in with her. She scoots back to her chair with the bag in her lap.)

The first order of business is the reading of the minutes.

(VIOLET stands. Meanwhile, GLENDINE starts taking sewing supplies out of her bag. She takes out a big piece of blue satin and shakes it out during the reading of the minutes.)

VIOLET. "March 2, 1942. At the home of Mrs. Bobrita Montgomery. Meeting of the Eufala –"

BOBRITA. We were all there.

VIOLET. Out of order.

LAURA LEE. Bobrita.

VIOLET. "March 2, 1942. At the home of –"

BOBRITA. I move we approve the minutes.

GLENDINE. (*quickly*) Second the motion.

LAURA LEE. So moved.

VIOLET. (*wilting in her chair*) But –

LAURA LEE. The next order of business before the assembly is the fund-raising Gala.

(**GLENDINE** *snips the piece of satin, then rips it loudly.*)

Glendine, could you hold off on that?

GLENDINE. Oh, don't mind me.

LAURA LEE. Suggestions from members-at-large accepted.

BOBRITA. The first order of business is getting this yard in order.

VIOLET. (*pulling out a copy of Robert's Rules of Order*) You have to make a motion to introduce an item to the chair –

LAURA LEE. This yard? I know things are a bit disheveled, but I'm called upon to notarize so many things and I'm helping with the first grade diphtheria shots –

BOBRITA. You've taken that on, too?

GLENDINE. (*to BOBRITA*) Couldn't those big strapping twins of yours help us?

BOBRITA. No, Travis and Crockett are off rodeoing up in Claremore, Oklahoma. Laura Lee, this garden is nowhere near ready. Look at that latticework, look at the porch, look at –

LAURA LEE. Bobrita, I don't need any free advice from you.

BOBRITA. The Gala's only a month away.

GLENDINE. We're all willing to help. Of course, I'm under the gun to get these pep squad costumes finished. I haven't even commenced sewing on all the bluebonnets.

LAURA LEE. When I get time, I know just how I want everything.

BOBRITA. There are other places we can have it, Laura Lee. Like out at my ranch.

LAURA LEE. We're not breaking with tradition. I've always managed before.

GLENDINE. But you had R.L. to help you.

LAURA LEE. (*bristling*) Ladies! I'm not dependent on you or anyone. Meeting adjourned.

VIOLET. But – but – out of order – out of order –

(*The telephone rings. LAURA LEE strides up to the porch as the others continue to protest.*)

BOBRITA. Laura Lee!

GLENDINE. We're not finished!

BOBRITA. Some decisions need to be made here!

(*LAURA LEE reaches inside the window and pulls out a candlestick telephone.*)

LAURA LEE. Hello...Oh yes, Mildred Ann, I've got your chart right here.

(*to the women*)

Excuse me, ladies. This is one of my clients.

(*on the telephone*)

The happy news is the impending lunar eclipse means increasing luck in your love life. Mercury in retrograde will make the blood rise. Romance will ensue!... No, honey, he's just tired. Send the children to your mother's and fix him a chicken-fried steak. That'll build him up.... Let me hear from you.

(*LAURA LEE addresses the women from the porch.*)

Now if you'll excuse me, I've got a big bowl of potato salad to make for poor ol' Polly. She stumbled over one of her cats.

BOBRITA. Laura Lee! You've got all you can say grace over now. We've got to get back to the business at hand – this Gala. And this yard –

LAURA LEE. (*firmly*) I'm getting to it.

GLENDINE. We're under a deadline, Laura Lee.

LAURA LEE. I believe I've been giving the Garden Club Gala in this yard for the last thirty-five years.

(*IMA JEAN has stepped out onto the porch.*)

IMA JEAN. Excuse me –

LAURA LEE. Oh! Did you get a little rest, sweetheart?

IMA JEAN. I expect I'd better be heading to the bus station.

LAURA LEE. Sweetheart, there's not another bus until four o'clock. That's a long wait.

GLENDINE. Where are you headed?

IMA JEAN. Oh, I'm not going anywhere. I'm waiting on somebody. And I'm afraid I'll miss him if –

GLENDINE. Him?

VIOLET. You're meeting a man?

GLENDINE. Ooh, tell us who.

IMA JEAN. My beloved. Jesse.

GLENDINE. Your beloved! Adorable!

(to the others)

She calls him her beloved!

VIOLET. Right out of the Song of Solomon: "My beloved is mine and I am his!"

GLENDINE. *(to IMA JEAN)* How come you're meeting him here in Eufala Springs, precious?

IMA JEAN. We're heading to Galveston. He lives on the other side of the state and this was the easiest place to meet up.

VIOLET. What's in Galveston?

IMA JEAN. Jesse's an infantryman. He's shipping off tomorrow morning, so we're getting married here at the courthouse this afternoon.

GLENDINE. Married?!

LAURA LEE. Oh, sweetheart!

GLENDINE. Were you going to change your clothes at the bus station?

IMA JEAN. No, ma'am.

VIOLET. You were going to wait and change at the courthouse?

IMA JEAN. No, ma'am.

BOBRITA. Well, where?

IMA JEAN. I was just fixing to wear what I've got on.

GLENDINE. Oh.

VIOLET. I haven't been to a wedding since last spring when Floy Kate Williams married that Yankee she met on that archeological bone-hunt out in Big Bend.

GLENDINE. Precious, can I be your witness?

BOBRITA. Now that may not be the most auspicious beginning.

(to IMA JEAN, about GLENDINE)

She's on number six or seven.

GLENDINE. It just means I have the most experience. And please remember that I was widowed once.

BOBRITA. Which one was that? The rodeo announcer or the Smooth-as-Silk stocking salesman?

GLENDINE. Don't start on him. He kept you all in silk stockings the whole year I was married to him.

VIOLET. Can I be your witness AND sing? You're going to need me to sing.

LAURA LEE. Ladies, ladies! The first order of business is to get a minister over to the courthouse.

VIOLET. Bobrita can call St. Andrews and get Reverend Witherspoon.

BOBRITA. I doubt an Episcopal priest would marry somebody outside the church.

GLENDINE. I'll call Preacher Jackson down at Brush Arbor.

VIOLET. Didn't Brush Arbor just break off?

BOBRITA. You know Baptists – get mad at each other, walk across the street, start a new church.

LAURA LEE. I'll call Pastor Abbott over at Wesleyan.

VIOLET. Maybe that's not a good idea.

LAURA LEE. What's wrong with the Methodists?

VIOLET. Oh, not a thing. But his wife was married before.

(quickly, to GLENDINE)

Not that that makes her a bad person.

LAURA LEE. (*to IMA JEAN*) What denomination are you, sweetheart?

IMA JEAN. Oh, I'm not afflicted with any denomination. But Jesse's a Seventh-Day Advantage.

LAURA LEE. We'll just get Judge Hamilton to marry them.

VIOLET. I don't believe we can all fit in that little registry office.

LAURA LEE. You can get married in the courtroom. I was the Mayor's wife for thirty-five years – I can certainly get us the courtroom.

BOBRITA. My Martha Washingtons are putting on a show. I could bring those to spruce the place up.

GLENDINE. And my stephanotis is in bloom. Should we have candles? Will it be dark enough? I can bring my crystal candlesticks.

BOBRITA. No, I'll bring my sterling candelabra –

LAURA LEE. I'll start a list –

(*writing*)

– Martha Washingtons – stephanotis –

VIOLET. How are we going to get everything down to the courthouse?

GLENDINE. There's no reason we can't have candlesticks
AND your candelabra.

BOBRITA. We don't need both. It's a civil ceremony.

LAURA LEE. (*writing*) – candelabra – candlesticks –

GLENDINE. What about the cake?

LAURA LEE. I'll make a coconut cake.

VIOLET. It'll have to be a sheet cake. They cook quicker.

GLENDINE. But shouldn't it be round – for eternal love?

BOBRITA. Hot as it is, moving it over there, all that icing –

GLENDINE. What about punch?

LAURA LEE. (*writing*) Oh, dear – punch –

GLENDINE. How are we going to keep it cold?

BOBRITA. This is getting to be awfully involved.

VIOLET. Who's going to bring the punch bowl?

LAURA LEE. – a punch bowl –

BOBRITA. Sister, that can be your responsibility.

VIOLET. I can't carry Grandma Bertha's crystal punch bowl
and eleven cups up the courthouse steps. That'll throw
my back right out.

BOBRITA. Would you rather bring the forks? That should
be manageable.

LAURA LEE. (*writing like mad*) – silverware –

BOBRITA. We've got to have dessert plates. And napkins.

LAURA LEE. – plates – linens –

GLENDINE. Mine aren't ironed.

BOBRITA. We're going to use up all our gas coupons getting things over there.

LAURA LEE. Ladies! Ladies! Wait just a minute! – Just a minute! – I've got it!

GLENDINE. Got what?

LAURA LEE. The perfect solution!

BOBRITA. What now?

LAURA LEE. This is a stroke of genius, ladies. I can't believe
I didn't think of it earlier.

(*A beat. They all look at her expectantly.*)

We'll have the wedding right here!

(**GLENDINE** squeals, **BOBRITA** groans, and **VIOLET**
slips into a chair, fanning herself.)

(**CURTAIN**)

Scene 2

(At rise, IMA JEAN is sitting in a chair in the garden. GLENDINE is putting her hair in rag rolls. LAURA LEE is on the telephone on the porch. The women all wear aprons.)

(From inside, VIOLET sings "O Promise Me.")

LAURA LEE. I'm telling you, Evelyn, your ecliptic is looking mighty ragged. You tell Horace to stay home with you and call off that trip to Port Aransas to go deep-sea fishing –

(From inside, a dissonant chord on the piano.)

(calling into the house) Put the cover down on the keys! Be careful turning that tight corner!

(on the telephone)

– Tell Horace to go next month when Pisces is rising. That's the fish sign –

(calling inside)

– Don't try and squeeze it through the breakfast room door! –

(on the telephone)

– And one more thing – if you're going on a diet, don't start it until the solar eclipse –

BOBRITA. *(calling out)* Has this piano been tuned?

LAURA LEE. Yes, Bobrita, and the toilets work.

(on the telephone)

– But then again, if you've got that much weight to lose, you might need to get the jump on it.

(LAURA LEE hangs up as BOBRITA and VIOLET appear, rolling the piano onto the porch. BOBRITA pushes from behind while VIOLET steers from the front.)

Swing that end around! Careful! Don't hit the railing! Let me do it.

(VIOLET keeps singing "O Promise Me.")

BOBRITA. Sister! Tone that down until we get this thing in place.

LAURA LEE. (*working on her list*) We're going to need a big bouquet on top of the piano. And another on the refreshment table. And another on this table.

(VIOLET sinks onto one of the stacks of papers on the porch, winded from the piano-moving.)

BOBRITA. I can put my glads on the serving table.

GLENDINE. I've got loads of bridal's wreath. And baskets of bleeding hearts.

LAURA LEE. We can make Ima Jean's nosegay out of my lily-of-the-valley and surround it with Queen Anne's lace –

BOBRITA. Queen Anne's lace wilts.

LAURA LEE. We'll use my baby's breath. And my rambling roses.

BOBRITA. Your roses have rambled too far.

(BOBRITA picks up the telephone and dials.)

VIOLET. Ima Jean, honey, what kind of flowers do you like?

IMA JEAN. At the Home, we had zinnias and nasturtiums and geraniums –

BOBRITA. Surely we can do better than that.

(on the telephone)

Ascensia, tell Pepe to cut me a big bucket of Martha Washingtons and glads and –

VIOLET. Are you sure you want Martha Washingtons? They're just a crown of thorns. There are some red ramblers on the south side –

BOBRITA. Tell him to bring some red ramblers –

VIOLET. The magnolia leaves –

BOBRITA. Some magnolia leaves –

VIOLET. Snapdragons –

BOBRITA. Snapdragons. Just whatever's blooming.

VIOLET. Then go over to Glendine's –

BOBRITA. Then over by Mrs. Slocumb's back door, bring us her stephanotis, lily-of-the-valley – oh, just bring everything she's got. Jump right on it. Oh, and Ascencia! Did you find those registry papers for the dogs? I'm going to need them to sell the pups.

VIOLET. Tell her to look in my hope chest. Which you hauled out to that little cabin in the wilderness you banished me to.

BOBRITA. (*on the telephone*) Look in the little house in Miss Violet's hope chest.

LAURA LEE. Tell her to send over your sugar. I've just about used up my ration.

BOBRITA. Bring my sugar from the pantry – all of it. And look under Miss Violet's bed and bring that little sack of sugar she keeps squirreled away.

(*She hangs up.*)

VIOLET. But, Sister –

BOBRITA. Don't Sister me, Sister. Laura Lee, we can't leave these papers and junk here this afternoon.

LAURA LEE. (*on a step-stool, pruning*) Don't touch any of it. I'm in the middle of sorting it.

VIOLET. The war effort needs it now, Laura Lee.

LAURA LEE. I'm getting to it. Throw a quilt over it if you can't stand it. There's some quilts upstairs in Mother's trunk.

BOBRITA. Sister! Rouse yourself and come help me.

VIOLET. Now, Sister, I can't carry anything too heavy.

(*With BOBRITA and VIOLET gone, GLENDINE ambushes LAURA LEE.*)

GLENDINE. Laura Lee, what can I say to Violet to get her to leave? If we spend one more evening doing jigsaw puzzles and hearing about her plantar's wart, Coach is going to throw a wall-eyed fit.

(*to IMA JEAN*)

Am I pulling too hard, precious?

IMA JEAN. No, ma'am, I'm real hard-headed.

GLENDINE. Life with Coach was a pink cloud until she moved in. Now we never get a minute to ourselves. Poor Bobrita.

LAURA LEE. Poor Bobrita!?

GLENDINE. Now I know why she's so short-tempered.

(to IMA JEAN)

Precious, whatever you do, don't live with Jesse's people. I've been down that road when I married Mario. My second husband. Laid claim to being a count. Of course, every Italian barber claims to be a count. Whisked me off to Sicily to live with his mother and four unmarried sisters. He was the only one in the family without a moustache. I got over there and found out he was no 'count – literally.

(BOBRITA and VIOLET return, loaded down with quilts.

VIOLET sinks onto a stack of newspapers and fans herself as GLENDINE continues her tale.)

The only good thing I got out of that marriage was my wedding dress. Lace made by the nuns. Real seed pearls and a long illusion veil.

BOBRITA. Sister, toss that one with the wedding ring pattern over the newspapers. At least it'll fit the occasion. Now, Laura Lee, throwing quilts around may serve us for today, but not for the Gala.

IMA JEAN. What's a Gala?

GLENDINE. Oh, it's a big soiree!

(IMA JEAN is even more puzzled.)

LAURA LEE. It's a big elegant party. We use it to raise money for noble causes.

BOBRITA. I think we might have sent a contribution up to Gillette one year.

VIOLET. We've been having it here at Laura Lee's house for thirty-five years. Every year she and her husband R.L. would –

(She trails off. An awkward pause.)

LAURA LEE. Glendine, get on the other end of this serving table and help me move it down into the yard.

IMA JEAN. I can do it.

LAURA LEE. No, no, sweetheart, we wouldn't dream of letting you do it. You're the bride.

IMA JEAN. I'm used to hard work at the Masonic Home.

VIOLET. How long were you there, honey?

IMA JEAN. Since I was six.

GLENDINE. Oh, precious. How'd you come to be there?

IMA JEAN. On account of the Dust Bowl. My folks dropped me there 'cause they needed to travel light. They was going to send for me when they got settled. After a couple of years, I quit waiting for them.

VIOLET. *(her arms around IMA JEAN)* Oh, honey, you're so alone –

BOBRITA. Hold on, Laura Lee, I'll move the ladder for you.

LAURA LEE. I've got it.

IMA JEAN. *(to VIOLET)* No, ma'am. I'm not alone no more. I got Jesse.

GLENDINE. *(teasing her)* Ooh, Jesse. I'd be wary of a boy named Jesse.

IMA JEAN. No, ma'am. He's true blue.

LAURA LEE. Where'd you meet him, sweetheart?

IMA JEAN. At the state fair last September. He was at the FFA barn. He'd brung his goats. He had five – Annette, Cecile, Emelie, Marie, and Yvonne – named after the Dionne Quints. He'd harness them to a cart, they'd pull little kids around. I was in charge of the littler ones from the Home. And do you know Jesse got every one of them kids a cotton candy? Just so generous and kind. And let them play with the baby goats. Him and me visited all evening long. Then a few days later – now you're not going to believe this part – he stopped by to see me at the Home. He was hauling his goats back, so he couldn't stay too long – you know goats stink.

BOBRITA. I can certainly understand how you'd fall for a boy like that.

IMA JEAN. But he was already promised to a girl back in his hometown. Jimmie Sue. Her folks and his are real good friends. Her daddy's rich – cattle and oil. I hear tell she's real pretty when she's not broke out with the infantigo.

VIOLET. When did you see him next?

IMA JEAN. Christmastime. The Masonic Home puts on a great big pageant, and lo and behold if he didn't bring his goats and lambs clear across the state for the shepherds in the field keeping watch over their flock by night. He put his hand over mine on the hymnal, pretending like he was helping me hold it. I just kept singing, "Field and fountain, moor and mountain, following yonder star."

GLENDINE. Then what?

IMA JEAN. Then last month, he escorted me to my Senior Dance. He'd just graduated and was about to enlist. We were dancing to "I'll Hold You in My Heart 'til I Can Hold You in My Arms" when he leaned over and whispered that he'd broke up with Jimmie Sue. That's when he asked me to marry him. And that's why I'm not alone no more.

LAURA LEE. Well, what a romance. I've never heard anything quite like it.

BOBRITA. Who has?

GLENDINE. Laura Lee, tell about how R.L. proposed to you!

(A silence.)

(Then a knock at the gate.)

LAURA LEE. *(rushing to the gate)* I bet that's Pepe with the flowers.

(The women go to the gate, leaving IMA JEAN alone.)

(at the gate) Pour some of that water off. It's sloshing everywhere.

GLENDINE. I want to keep these roses immersed up to their necks.

VIOLET. Pepe, are the babies all right? Don't let the other pups push out the runt. I'm worried sick about him.

(They return with buckets of flowers and sacks of sugar.)

(to BOBRITA) If they push him out, promise me you'll feed him every two hours with a doll bottle.

BOBRITA. A doll bottle! Then he'd think I was his mama.

VIOLET. Oh, I love it when they think I'm their mama.

(to IMA JEAN)

Like our old bloodhound Samson. I brushed his teeth, painted his nails – dew claws included – and put Old Spice behind his ears every morning. I gave that dog everything but eternal life.

LAURA LEE. *(to GLENDINE)* Set those here.

(They set the buckets of flowers on the steps and start inside.)

IMA JEAN. *(to BOBRITA)* What kind of dogs?

BOBRITA. Blue tick, redbones, blue heelers, coon dogs – all kind of hounds.

LAURA LEE. *(gesturing the women into the house)* Ladies, we've got to get on the refreshments.

IMA JEAN. What can I do?

LAURA LEE. Oh. Well – you can put these flowers in vases.

(IMA JEAN is once again left alone. Inside the kitchen window, the women start making preparations.)

Violet, reach up there and get me my mixing bowls down. Glendine, start separating those eggs.

BOBRITA. Save the yolks for me. I'll give them to the mama-dogs.

LAURA LEE. Oh, no, you don't. I'm not giving up my yolks to a bunch of dogs. I'll use them in the custard for the ice cream. Violet, pull open that drawer and get us some measuring spoons. Bobrita, put me on a pot to boil so we can skin the peaches.

GLENDINE. What do you think of lemon cake? Or spice cake?

VIOLET. That's just blasphemous for a wedding cake. Why don't we serve Scripture Cake? Sift three cups of Exodus 29:2, then cream a stick of Judges 5:25 with three cups of –

BOBRITA. Sister, that's Hell to cook.

VIOLET. How would you know? I don't know how poor Beaumont's gotten along the last three weeks. Cooking's never been your stronghold.

BOBRITA. Sister, go outside and practice your singing.

VIOLET. Well. I'll just do that.

(VIOLET comes out and sees IMA JEAN working on the bouquets. She gasps.)

Oh, no! Girls, some assistance is needed out here –

(The other women run out.)

BOBRITA. What is it now?

LAURA LEE. *(gently, to IMA JEAN)* Oh, dear. Sweetheart, these have to be mixed. We're going to have mixed bouquets.

IMA JEAN. I'm sorry.

LAURA LEE. That's all right, sweetheart. Glendine, see if you can't help her.

(GLENDINE sets to arranging the flowers as LAURA LEE and BOBRITA head back to the kitchen. VIOLET starts practicing "O Promise Me.")

BOBRITA. *(at the door)* Violet, you're sharp!

VIOLET. I am not.

BOBRITA. *(to LAURA LEE as they head inside)* She's always sharp. Flat's bad enough, but sharp will clear a room.

GLENDINE. *(to IMA JEAN)* Oh, precious, how I envy you. You're entering the most romantic time of your life. The first few months are when I enjoy my marriages most. When I married the cruise ship captain, it was nothing but tender moments – standing by the railing