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Dramatic Publishing



ALABAMA RAIN

by

HEATHER MCCUTCHEN



Dramatic Publishing

Woodstock, Illinois • London, England • Melbourne, Australia

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(ALABAMA RAIN)

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ALABAMA RAIN

A Play in Two Acts
For Five Women

CHARACTERS

the LaDean sisters—from youngest to eldest

DALLAS
RACHEL CATHERINE ANNE
MONTY LOUISE
LAURIE LAURIE
JOSEPHINE (PHEENIE)

SETTING:
The LaDean Boarding House,
way outside of Culman, Alabama.

TIME:
The present.

ALABAMA RAIN was originally produced by CitiArts Theatre of Concord, California, March 1, 1993. The original cast was as follows:

Dallas *Andrea Chamberlain*
Rachel Catherine Anne *Kimberly Squires*
Monty Louise *Mary Kivala*
Laurie Laurie *Marie Shell*
Josephine (Pheenie) *Neva Hutchinson*

The original production was directed by *Richard Elliott*

Scenic design *Kate Boyd*
Lighting Design *Chris Guptill*
Production Stage Manager *Sue Mayo*
Producing Artistic Director *Richard Elliott*

ALABAMA RAIN was developed at the University of Iowa's Playwrights Workshop; New Dramatists; and the Denver Center Theatre.

The playwright wishes to acknowledge the following people:

Thomas Kannam, Rachel Hean, Bruce Sevy,
Richard Elliott, Peregrine Whittlesey, Elana Greenfield
and the staff at New Dramatists

ALABAMA RAIN is dedicated to my family.

ACT ONE

AT RISE: *PHEENIE stands on the steps of the LaDean boarding house. The house and sign are both in need of paint. PHEENIE wears a heavy winter coat and carries an old-fashioned suitcase. She addresses the audience directly in a plain, hot sort of way.*

PHEENIE. It hadn't rained in thirty or forty years.

It hadn't rained in so long that it stopped making a difference, ten years here or there. Nothing made a difference. Things that had grown in the past thirty or forty years, those were things to talk about. Or they *would* be, if there was such a thing. Things that had just been *around* for thirty or forty years, those were things that had long roots. Nothing like that was likely to change. And there was something almost—awful—in that. I was the oldest, I forget how old I was. I looked after all my sisters when Mother died. They carried on like they needed me so much.

Laurie Laurie was a bird. She had brittle bones that were always breaking. You could make her cry by just looking at her. Delicate, and spiritual. Laurie Laurie was named for both of our two grandmothers. I think the weight of that tradition was heavy on her fine porcelain head. She swore that she had inherited the soul of Grandmother's second

cousin Walker Jane Casey LaDean, the psychic. She believed that everything had meaning, and so it usually did.

LAURIE LAURIE (*visible behind her*). Pheenie? Josephine, come help me! I spilled the salt again! You know what *that* means...

PHEENIE. Monty Louise was named after our rich great-uncle Monty. He made his money buying up people's timberland down around Monroe after the crash and then striking oil on it. Mother always said that Monty Louise took after him, except for his luck. Monty Lou had not had much luck, and she knew it and she resented it.

MONTY (*visible behind her*). Pheenie? Pheenie, is there any more diet Coke left? Everybody drinks it all and I never get any! It's not fair...

PHEENIE. Rachel was my sweet sister. My dear child. I named her when she was born. Mother said I was old enough, and besides, she'd run out of her favorite names. So I took her to the dusty riverbed myself and had her baptized Rachel Catherine Ann LaDean. I tried to make her practical, but Laurie Laurie was always spoon-feeding the younger ones her spiritualism.

RACHEL (*visible behind her*). Pheenie? Pheenie, make Monty Lou stop staring at me! She's making me nervous...

PHEENIE. The baby got the biggest helping of that. It was so hot the day Dallas was born that Mother expired right there—died during the delivery. Nobody remembered to have the poor little girl baptized, we were so busy with Mother's funeral and all. In the end, Mother's spirit had to appear to her sister in Texas and she came all the way from Dallas to make sure we did right by the baby. So she baptized her after Mother, Danny S. LaDean, but we always called her Dallas. Little Dallas was a beautiful baby. She had bright red hair and such sweet-smelling skin. Her

wide eyes glowed at night, even I had to admit it. Like I said, Laurie Laurie raised her on Ouija boards and reincarnations.

DALLAS (*visible behind her*). Pheenie? Pheenie, Laurie Laurie says I have Mother's eyes. Do I, Pheenie? What did Mother's eyes look like...

PHEENIE. It hadn't rained in thirty or forty years, but we were never *aware* of being thirsty, there were other things to drink. Once upon a time the old county Well had been full to running over with cool water. Some said there still was water way at the bottom. Some said not. None ever dared to go that far down. The bottom seemed awfully far away. Hours and hours and days away. It was the unknown. (*She sighs. They all sigh.*) The idea of it always tempted me. More and more as I got older. I had never seen a pond, a river or a puddle. I had never been swimming. (*Pause.*) Words like that made me giddy. Mother used to tell a story about a cousin way back when who had drowned! I couldn't think of anything more wonderful...

I thought about it and thought about it to distraction. I found myself waking up in the middle of the night, thinking somebody was calling me. I felt something pulling at my sleeve all day long. I thought about leaving. Going to the gulf, it wasn't too far, I didn't think. And if I followed it around the right way, I would reach the Atlantic Ocean. They said that it was always cold. And always windy. And in the summertime it rained every single afternoon. And then I left. Like a mouse. Past Culman. Past Birmingham. Just for a little while, to see what it was like, to see how different things could be. However long that was. And while I was gone on my journey, my sisters had quite a journey of their own.

SCENE TWO

(RACHEL and DALLAS sit on the porch. DALLAS is cutting out paper snowflakes. RACHEL is writing on slips of paper. They are barefoot and wear light, summer clothes.)

RACHEL. "There's no place like home"? How is that supposed to work, Dallas? That's shhtupid. They don't want it to speak to the people who already live here. It's supposed to attract new people.

DALLAS. Well how about "Come Home Again"? To bring back people who've left.

RACHEL. Like who? Who's ever left?

DALLAS *(thinks for a while)*. Didn't Miss Bitsy's sister leave?

RACHEL. No, she didn't leave, she died.

DALLAS. Read me the rules again.

RACHEL. There aren't rules, Dallas. I win a hundred dollars for the best slogan. Simple fact.

DALLAS. Just seems too good to be true.

RACHEL. Ever hear of tourism? Tourists are the number one source of income for the entire state of Florida.

DALLAS. How about "This is the Best County in Alabama"?

RACHEL. Here, I'll give you an example: "Our County, Where it Never Rains on Your Parade." *(PHEENIE prepares for going, tying her shoes, fixing her hair up, etc.)*

DALLAS. My ideas are just as good as yours. Nobody's coming to this dried-up old county anyhow. Nobody but us.

RACHEL. What're you doing, Pheenie? That's Mother's coat.

PHEENIE *(takes a second and looks at them in a sad kind of way, as if she wants to be sure and remember them)*. Come kiss me. *(DALLAS does so without thinking twice.)* Behave

for Laurie Laurie, now. And mind Monty Louise. You can rent out my room. I'll hang a new sign down at the corner.

DALLAS. What the heck are you talking about?

RACHEL. You'll start to smell wearing that big old coat.

PHEENIE. You think?

DALLAS. Where are you going?!

RACHEL. In this heat? It reeks already of moth crystals. You should've hung it on the line.

PHEENIE. Never mind, I'll put on perfume. Kiss me, Rachel Catherine Anne, I want to get going.

RACHEL. Oh, you aren't going anywhere. Nobody ever goes anywhere.

PHEENIE. Kiss me, stubborn child.

RACHEL (*shrugs*). Well, I don't know why I'm kissing you, but I'll kiss you.

DALLAS. But, Phenie, no, you can't go!

PHEENIE (*waving as she leaves*). I'll write! I'll think of you every day! Bye now, don't forget me!

RACHEL (*pause*). Dallas, did I know she was going somewhere?

DALLAS (*waving*). Phenie! (*Quietly and sadly.*) Don't go, Phenie, away...(*She begins to cry hard.*) Oh, Rachel! What will we do?!

RACHEL. Look at her in Mother's coat. She looks ridiculous. In this heat! She's gonna stink before she even gets to the bus. Don't worry, she'll have to come back and change out of it.

(*MONTY LOUISE enters, visibly very pregnant. She looks at all the paper DALLAS has been cutting up and snorts.*)

MONTY. Well, I'm not cleaning that up.

RACHEL. Nobody asked you to, Monty Lou.

MONTY. Monty. Mon-Tee.

RACHEL. Mon-TeeLoo-Eeez.

MONTY. Who told you you could make such a mess?

RACHEL. Stop breathing on me, Monty Lou.

MONTY. What's wrong with Dallas? Blow your nose. That's disgusting. Say, did Pheenie go to town for my magazine?

RACHEL. Is that where she went?

DALLAS (*sobbing*). Pheenie left!

MONTY. How long ago'd she leave?

RACHEL. Why'd she need Mama's coat just to go to town?

DALLAS. She wasn't going to town. She just left us...Left us all!

MONTY. What about my magazine?

RACHEL. Can you believe she wouldn't think of your magazine first?

MONTY. Shut up, because now you have to go get it, Rachel. You know I can't be seen in town in this condition. Go on.

RACHEL. Who do you think you're going to surprise after all these years?

MONTY. You sure Pheenie didn't get it? She said she would.

DALLAS. She left. Listen to me. I know it. I saw it. And I can feel it.

MONTY. Don't be silly. She can't of just left, she didn't say a word about it to me. She would certainly have said good-bye to me.

RACHEL. She said good-bye to us.

DALLAS. She's gone.

RACHEL. Oh, Dallas, now—(*Looking into DALLAS's earnest face, RACHEL suddenly believes.*) Really gone? (*DALLAS nods.*) Gone gone? (*DALLAS boo-hoos, nodding.*)

RACHEL. Oh, my...

MONTY. She'll be right back with my magazine and a diet Coke. I know she will.

LAURIE LAURIE (*from inside*). Pheenie! Come here, honey!

MONTY. See there? Here Laurie Laurie call her? I told you she didn't go anywhere. That proves my point.

DALLAS. But she did. With a suitcase. I saw her go...

MONTY. Don't be ridiculous. She couldn't go off anywhere without telling Laurie Laurie first. She just walked to town.

RACHEL. I think Dallas is right. I think she's gone...

LAURIE LAURIE (*inside*). Josephine?!

DALLAS. She's gone. (*Squints into the distance.*) She's already gone.

RACHEL. But Pheenie knows how sensitive Laurie Laurie is—she couldn't have gone without breaking it to her gently.

LAURIE LAURIE (*inside*). PHEENIE? Pheenie, sweetie, I need you! (*The following overlaps and goes very fast.*)

DALLAS (*gasping*). Oh, my goodness. She did. That's what she did.

MONTY. She can't of.

RACHEL. It'll kill her. It will kill her. Laurie Laurie is about to die.

DALLAS. Don't say that! Quick, Rachel, you spit on the ground this minute!

RACHEL (*spitting*). It won't be my fault! It'll kill her. Laurie Laurie loves Pheenie like—

DALLAS. RACHEL!

MONTY. I don't feel well. Oh oh, I'm sick.

RACHEL. Laurie Laurie loves Pheenie more than anybody should love anybody.

LAURIE LAURIE (*inside*). Pheenie?! Where are you?

DALLAS. Don't say that don't say that don't even say that.

MONTY. I'm gonna faint.

RACHEL. Shut up, Monty Lou. This will kill our sweet Laurie Laurie right before our eyes, don't you dare faint.

DALLAS. Stop it!

RACHEL (*spitting*). It will.

LAURIE LAURIE (*inside*). Pheenie?

(LAURIE LAURIE enters smiling at them and looking for PHEENIE. She sees the look on their faces and stops, aware that something is wrong.)

LAURIE LAURIE. Where's Pheenie? What? (*Pause.*) What is it?

MONTY. Oh, my Lord. It's true.

LAURIE LAURIE. What the matter? (*MONTY faints.*)

RACHEL. OWW! Darn you, Monty Lou! (*RACHEL clutches her head in sudden pain. LAURIE LAURIE rushes to her.*)

DALLAS. It's okay, Laurie Laurie!

RACHEL. Ohh, my head! Oh, my spirit! (*She slumps to the ground and looks around dazed.*) Give it back! Give my spirit back, you old COW! (*She kicks at MONTY's feet.*)

LAURIE LAURIE. RACHEL! STOP IT! She's got a fever! What's happened? What's wrong? Where's Pheenie? Go get her! (*A long pause as DALLAS tries to speak but mostly she just makes grunting noises.*) Go on...go get her...stop fooling, tell her I need her to help me with Monty...

DALLAS. It'll be okay, Laurie Laurie—Pheenie—um—Pheenie—

RACHEL (*holding her aching head*). Pheenie left us—

DALLAS. SHUSH, RACHEL!

LAURIE LAURIE. What has happened to Josephine?

DALLAS (*looking nervously into the distance*). Oh, she'll be back—

LAURIE LAURIE. What do you mean? Where did she go?

RACHEL. She just left—With a suitcase—Oh, but she'll be back! Don't—umm, don't—panic or anything.

LAURIE LAURIE. S-she's gone...? But, no, no—she didn't tell me—

DALLAS. It'll be okay—Please don't die! Please, Laurie Laurie!

LAURIE LAURIE. She couldn't—she wouldn't—Oh, oh—
(She begins to hyperventilate.) No...no...(She gasps, becomes very pale and collapses on top of MONTY and dies. There is much commotion.)

DALLAS. DON'T DIE, DON'T DIE, LAURIE LAURIE!

RACHEL. She did. She died. She's dead. *(There is more commotion.)*