

THE LADIES OF THE SACRED SOUTH
by

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NARRATOR (V.O.)
(importantly)
This is a story about the past.

FADE IN

EXT. A SAVANNAH. DAY. THE PAST.

Flickering and fleeting silent movie of CAVEMEN fighting dinosaurs.

NARRATOR (V.O.)
No. Not quite that past ---

INT. LIBRARY. DAY.

An impressive and stuffy array of shelf after shelf of weighty tomes.

NARRATOR (V.O.)
--- and not the past of history
books ---

INT. KITCHEN. DAY. THE PAST.

Moving in on a FAMILY at table.

NARRATOR (V.O.)
--- or of yesterday morning's
breakfast.

EXT. CREEK. DUSK. THE PAST.

An ambling creek with muddy banks enclosed by a tall, still forest. A light rain falls.

TITLE: "GEORGIA, APRIL 1863"

NARRATOR (V.O.)
That's better.
(starting over)
This is a story about the past.

A small contingent of CONFEDERATE CALVARY patrol the bank of the creek with no particular urgency.

NARRATOR (V.O.)
How this one particular moment and
one obscure Captain of Calvary
reverberated through the years.

The patrol is led by a young CAPTAIN SWAIN. His face and posture betray the ravages of a long campaign. Not a handsome man, he wears a goatee and mustache. He is short

and somewhat rotund.

His ADJUTANT rides up.

ADJUTANT

Captain swain! Here's the map, sir.

The Captain brushes it aside.

CAPTAIN SWAIN

My family owns this land. The
ford's over there.

Unseen by the patrol are YANKEES hiding across the creek.

Captain Swain pulls a ragged stump of a cigar from his pocket, clenching it between his yellowed teeth. He motions for his men to spread out and proceed, guns drawn and ready.

The Captain draws his saber, brilliant despite the gloom.

A dull thud in the distance. A shell explodes in the air over the creek. Captain Swain's horse rears, throwing him into the creek.

Cigar still clenched between his teeth, he rallies his men, who unleash a withering fire, met by an equally vicious fire from the opposite woods.

A general retreat.

It is still and silent. The smoke hangs then dissipates. There have been no casualties. Silence.

EXT. DEEP WOODS. DUSK. THE PAST.

The patrol slowly re-forms.

ADJUTANT

A brilliant victory, Captain Swain!

Captain Swain smiles wearily.

INSERT: A photograph from the 1950's in the "Style" section of the "Gazette" under the heading "Civil War Battle Commemorated" depicting the usual array of small-town dignitaries at the dedication of a historical roadside marker. Prominent are three middle-aged ladies wielding shovels we will later know as Rosabelle Periwinkle, Olivia Wysteria, and Mildred Pierce.

NARRATOR (V.O.)

This is also the past. A little out of focus and perhaps a tad too ambitious, marking the spot, or not very far from it, where occurred "The Battle of Consanguinity Creek".

EXT. FM ROAD 2341. DAY. THE PRESENT.

The photograph dissolves into the current state of the road and marker. A ditch aside the road has caused the marker to lean precariously. The words are faded and buck-shot aerated but a small area at the base has been cleared where a single flower rests.

A battered red pick-up clatters by. We follow it for a moment until it passes an equally faded and battered sign: "Welcome To [too faded to read] POP 12,345"

EXT. JEFF DAVIS BLVD. DAY.

An historic neighborhood lined with over-arching live oaks.

EXT. HENRY CLAY STREET. DAY.

A neighborhood of well-kept wood houses.

On the lawn of one, a middle-aged BLACK MAN paints his white lawn jockey black. On the lawn of the house opposite, a middle-aged WHITE MAN paints his black lawn jockey white.

They pause to admire their work and acknowledge each other with tips of the brush.

The red pick-up shudders past.

EXT. ROBERT E. LEE AVENUE. DAY.

Two sets of feet treading a cracked and uneven sidewalk, one set advancing with the help of a metal-tipped cane. The feet stop.

NARRATOR (V.O.)

This --- is what is known around here as "the present". Let's call it "today" and, I might add, a day on the cusp of spring.

We see ROSABELLE PERIWINKLE, tiny and frail, yet vigorous, and OLIVIA WYSTERIA, wearing lavender. They carry casseroles. They have stopped to admire a tree in the wild

and overgrown yard of a decaying wooden house.

PERIWINKLE

It must surely be spring! Palmer
Motley's redbud is blooming.

WYSTERIA

Miss Periwinkle, this tree has
bloomed at Christmas. And there
Palmer Motley would be, planting
his precious tomatoes.

PERIWINKLE

Palmer Motley has faith in this
tree, Miss Wysteria, and when it
correctly heralds spring, his
tomatoes are the most splendid---
and the first!

Coincidental deep breaths and they resume their journey.

And who should appear behind the screen door of the house
but PALMER MOTLEY. He steps onto the porch, a shabby and
wild-looking man in a dark suit with a green vest with
gleaming brass buttons.

He holds a flat of tomato plants. With his free hand he
whips out a shining trowel. A curious smile comes over his
stubbled face as he heads with determination down the
street.

A tall, gangly youth of 12 or so, PALMER MOTLEY, JUNIOR,
appears, skateboard in hand, surveys, then dashes off.

The battered red pick-up pulls up. A vigorously handsome and
disheveled man in his 20's drives.

NARRATOR (V.O.)

In case you've been wondering about
the body that goes with this
magnificent voice ---

The man, JACK, bursts out of the truck.

JACK

Here it is!

Jack leaps into the back of the truck.

JACK

In my mind I'm a mighty oak in a vast field of ragweed. To the people of Pop, Georgia, I'm a big purple thistle in the middle of a perfect lawn.

EXT. MAGNOLIA WAY. DAY.

Periwinkle and Wysteria pause at a peeling white picket fence through which azaleas have grown. Periwinkle is drawn to a lone branch with blossoms.

PERIWINKLE

I think this same branch bloomed first last year.

Giving Wysteria her casserole, she removes a piece of ribbon from her hat, tying it to the branch.

PERIWINKLE (CONT'D)

Next year I will be certain of it.

As they step through the rickety gate, Palmer, Junior clackety-clacks by on his skateboard.

They quickly step in and shut the gate.

A SIGN, faded, made with stick-on letters peers through some azaleas: "The Magnolias Plantation Museum/ Owned & Operated by The Offspring of The Ladies of The Sacred South/ Open Some Weekends & Every Other Thursday".

On the other side of the azaleas, is a different world: lowering branches of ancient oaks, dripping moss framing a once-grand white-columned mansion, now decaying, ivy-covered, evocative.

Periwinkle and Wysteria approach the house on a gravel path.

NARRATOR (V.O.)

The Magnolias has existed for 83,220 days.

EXT. THE MAGNOLIAS. PARKING AREA. DAY.

A large maroon Continental screeches to a dusty stop. The door swings open. It is MRS. LAURENCE WORTHINGTON-BROWN III, a well-preserved 55, with a natural air of authority, in a high state of excitement.

BROWN III

This is the most important day in
the long history of The Magnolias!

Despite the gravity and excitement of her pronouncement, she is distracted by a stray cigarette butt on the ground.

EXT. WOODS. NIGHT. THE PAST.

A smoldering fire sputters in the rain. The men of the patrol eat, sleep, lounge.

Captain Swain leans against a tree, the pitiful stump of a cigar also smolders. He removes and opens a locket from his coat.

INSERT:

Inside the locket is a finely detailed MINIATURE of a beautiful YOUNG LADY.

INT. THE MAGNOLIAS. UPPER BEDCHAMBER. DAY.

We see, hanging above the mantel, the full painting of the portrait in the locket. The dress lays on the bed.

NARRATOR (V.O.)

In case you haven't gotten it, this
is the lady in the locket, Miss
Hominy Ann Hampton. Confused? Just
be patient. Remember. In the south
the past is always present.

The pendulum of the clock on the mantel is still. Through the wavy window glass we glimpse Brown III striding toward the house.

INT. THE MAGNOLIAS. PARLOR. DAY.

BUCK, a gentle black man of indeterminate age, sings a Cole Porter tune while setting out a tea service.

Periwinkle and Wysteria are seated on folding wooden chairs, casseroles on their laps. Five or six more unoccupied chairs face a small wooden table.

As with all rooms in the house, the Parlor is crammed with at least ten generations of STUFF, from the sublime to the garish, the esoteric to the practical, the worthless to the priceless.

NARRATOR (V.O.)

Another reason the past is always present in the south: no one's ever thrown anything away.

Above the hearth is a PORTRAIT of a SCOWLING WOMAN IN BLACK.

NARRATOR (CONT'D)

This is Rachel Hampton, Mistress of The Magnolias and mother of Miss Hominy Ann. Still keeping an eye on the help.

And indeed, Buck does seem to peek over his shoulder now and then.

Brown III breezes in. Pauses to catch her breath.

BROWN III

Buck! Get me a drink. Buck --- a drink.

BUCK

(under his breath)

Yes ma'am.

BROWN III

Oh Buck! There's a cigarette butt in the parking lot.

Buck exits. Brown III takes her place at the table, pulls a gavel from her purse and raps.

BROWN III

(CONT'D)

I call the bi-monthly dessert meeting of The Offspring of The Ladies of The Sacred South to order...

WYSTERIA

Dessert meeting? Isn't this the covered-dish meeting?

PERIWINKLE

Yes, isn't this Second Wednesday?

BROWN III

No, it's First Tuesday.

Buck returns with a small glass of Port, insinuating himself into the affair in his kindly and easy way.

BUCK

Oh no ma'am. Today is the Third
Thursday. Of a five Sunday month.
In an odd year.

This casts a considerable doubt over the proceedings.

BROWN III

And what is that?

WYSTERIA & PERIWINKLE

(remembering)

Hard Tack and Chicory Coffee!

PERIWINKLE

In honor of Miss Rachel's
"Mortification at the hands of the
Yankee invaders".

The Ladies rise, making obeisance to the glowering Portrait.

BROWN III

God bless Miss Rachel...

WYSTERIA

---and her daughter, Hominy Ann
Hampton.

PERIWINKLE

Damn the Yankees!

BUCK

(carried away)

Glory Hallelujah! So to speak.

BROWN III

(bangs gavel)

Ladies!

PERIWINKLE

Must you bang that thing?

BROWN III

I was not banging. I was rapping.

Brown's courage dwindles upon seeing the empty chairs.

BROWN III (CONT'D)

Buck --- take away those chairs.
We're not a meeting. We're not even
a committee. What we are is a
seance.

Seeing Periwinkle staring to nod off reinforces the observation but Brown III rallies and raps again.

BROWN III (CONT'D)

Nevertheless --- today we are to be visited by a man from the Georgia Preservation Federation!

EXT. MAIN STREET. DAY.

Outside the BOLL WEEVIL CAFE, a QUARTET OF MEN are waist-deep in the engine of a mud-splattered pick-up. A hand emerges now and then for one of the four stout mugs atop the cab.

A waitress, MISTY, as the Bulldog red embroidery near her ample cleavage declares, emerges to warm the coffee in the mugs, now eagerly in all hands.

A sandwich sign on the sidewalk proclaims "Todays Special" as the "2 + 2 + 2".

A dark sedan pulls up. Its occupants are HENRY BAXTER, a middle-aged mid-level bureaucrat, who dons his jacket, loosens his tie, and rolls up his sleeves, and CAROLINE HUGHES, his protege, mid-20's, lovely but weighty.

Baxter immediately peels off the magnetic sign, "Georgia History Federation", tossing it into the back seat.

NARRATOR (V.O.)

Too late, my friend! You can be sure word's already gotten around that two strangers are in town -- but -- there's something about a big gal in black who thinks she's a 98-pound super model.

A long gleaming BUS lumbers down the Main Street. Sparkling letters identify that it belongs to "El Dorado Tours".

BAXTER

When the azaleas bloom, can the tourists be far behind?

INT. BOLL WEEVIL CAFE. DAY.

In a booth, Hughes consults papers. Misty brings water.

MISTY

(not asking)
Coffee ---

BAXTER

Black.

MISS HUGHES

---tea.

Misty departs.

MISS HUGHES (CONT'D)

(not excited)

How exciting. The Federation's first "Pilgrimage". Bus loads of tourists seeking "moonlight and magnolias".

BAXTER

And our mission, Miss Hughes, is to find the most romantic moonlight and the sweetest magnolias.

Misty returns with coffee for Baxter and a great big glass of iced tea for Miss Hughes.

MISS HUGHES

I meant hot tea.

MISTY

You want me to take the ice out, honey?

Miss Hughes is open-mouthed.

BAXTER

Another coffee----

Misty departs.

BAXTER

(CONT'D)

Haven't been out of Atlanta for a while, have you?

Miss Hughes pushes the tea aside.

MISS HUGHES

I was once in a "Pilgrimage". Mother volunteered me to be a "Suthern Belle" at a sort of historical coming-out party. When I first heard "Pilgrimage" I thought: people in bathrobes and beards, possibly involving a crucifixion.

BAXTER

Not far from the truth. Its almost a religious experience out here. Like going to church. Or coming home. I grew up in a town like this.

Misty returns with coffee.

MISTY

Ya'll ready to order?

MISS HUGHES

What's the "2 + 2 + 2"?

MISTY

Why six honey. You want one?

INT. THE MAGNOLIAS. PARLOR. DAY.

Brown III raps the gavel.

BROWN III

Three-fifths of us are here. That's a quorum. Now---

WYSTERIA

But what's happened to them?

BROWN III

Knowing Roberta Lee and Mildred it could be anything.

INT. HOSPITAL. DAY.

Frantic fingers punching in a number on a cellphone.

The fingers belong to ROBERTA LEE TOWNSEND, a somewhat weighty and extravagant 65, in a wheelchair, in a semi-private room. A small travel-bag sits in her lap. She wears a hat.

ROBERTA LEE

Dr. Donaldson this is... Confound those answering machines!

(clears throat)

This is Roberta Lee Townsend. I have just checked myself into the hospital. Come take out my gallbladder!

(MORE)

ROBERTA LEE (cont'd)
 (ends call)
 There!
 (dials another)
 Buck---?

INT. THE MAGNOLIAS. PARLOR. DAY.

Brown III enters from the Hall.

BROWN III
 Roberta Lee thinks she's having her
 gallbladder removed.

WYSTERIA
 Didn't she have it out last year?

BROWN III
 Of course she did.

PERIWINKLE
 Why is she having it out again?

BROWN III
 Because Roberta Lee should have
 retired from the school system at
 her first chance. Now she's quite
 mad!

WYSTERIA
 What about Mildred?

BROWN III
 She's at Bitsy Farmer's funeral.
 They're having a canasta wake.

WYSTERIA
 Bitsy? I thought she died years
 ago.

BROWN III
 Apparently not.

PERIWINKLE
 Can they grow back?

BROWN III
 What?

PERIWINKLE
 Gallbladders----

EXT. THE MAGNOLIAS. PARKING LOT. DAY.

A car carrying a family on vacation has pulled up. The FATHER consults brochures. The MOTHER remains in the car brushing her hair. A SEVEN YEAR OLD GIRL wanders.

INT. THE MAGNOLIAS. PARLOR. DAY.

Buck offers up a tray of "hard tack" to Periwinkle, who is reluctant.

BUCK

It's not really hard tack and chicory coffee. It's tea cakes and spice tea.

BROWN III

Now, this man from Atlanta is coming to determine our suitability for a Pilgrimage of historical homes.

WYSTERIA

Lucille, you know who always get chosen for these things: Pinehill.

BROWN III

What does Pinehill have that we haven't?

WYSTERIA

Youth, hundreds of volunteers, a roof that doesn't leak, a billboard, and a four-color brochure.

BROWN III

We, however, are authentic.

PERIWINKLE

You mean old.

BROWN III

I mean, Miss Periwinkle, that if we impress this man...

PERIWINKLE

What you mean is: Let's hope I keep my mouth shut and don't fall asleep.

Periwinkle strikes her cane upon the floor.

BROWN III
Must you bang---?

PERIWINKLE
(deliberately rolling her
"r's)
I was rapping, gently tapping at
our chamber floor.

Pleased with this, Periwinkle sips her tea audaciously.

EXT. THE MAGNOLIAS. PORCH. DAY.

The Seven Year Old Girl has discovered the front steps of
the house.

SEVEN YEAR OLD GIRL
I found it!

INT. THE MAGNOLIAS. PARLOR. DAY.

Brown III rallies herself against all odds.

BROWN III
Whether there are three of us
present or five makes no
difference. Mere quantity will not
impress this man from Atlanta.

WYSTERIA
Don't we need the Pilgrimage so
more people will see The Magnolias?

BROWN III
But they must be the right sort of
people. Not like Pinehill. They get
thousands upon thousands of, well,
you know: families: Still dripping
from the beach: people wearing
sandals.

PERIWINKLE
(pause)
Jesus wore sandals.

BROWN III
What?

PERIWINKLE
You mean I couldn't give Jesus a
tour because he wears sandals?

BROWN III
Miss Periwinkle, Jesus is not
coming here.

PERIWINKLE
He's going to Pinehill?

BROWN III
Jesus is not going anywhere!

PERIWINKLE
Then why's it called a Pilgrimage?

INT. THE MAGNOLIAS. ENTRANCE HALL. DAY.

The family stand at the desk. A piano with various sheet
music. A staircase with landing. A huge portrait of a tall,
full-bearded Confederate Officer.

The Father dings a bell on the desk.

In no particular hurry, Periwinkle enters from the Parlor,
and slowly settles behind the desk. Then with great ceremony
leans over to carefully inspect the feet of the Family.

PERIWINKLE
Good. No sandals.

The Father gives brief thought to grabbing his family and
running but relents.

FATHER
Two adults please.

Periwinkle takes his money, carefully eyeing the Girl.

PERIWINKLE
What a dear. How old are you?

The girl hesitates then turns to her Father.

SEVEN YEAR OLD GIRL
Daddy, I forgot what you told me to
say---

The Father hands over several more dollars.

PERIWINKLE
Thank you. The tour will start at
the front of the house.

Periwinkle unhurriedly busies herself with the money.

FATHER
 (checking his watch)
 When will it start?

PERIWINKLE
 Has it stopped?

FATHER
 What?

MOTHER
 No. The tour. When will---?

PERIWINKLE
 (offhandedly)
 Oh, in just a little while.
 (sharply)
 Go on. Go out and enjoy the
 garden.

Periwinkle escorts/herds the family out of the door. She closes it tight, leaning back against it, listening.

She is drawn to the piano where she replaces the sheet music for "Goober Peas" with "I Wish I was In Dixie's Land".

She listens again. She is drawn to the upper floor and begins to climb the stairway.

INT. THE MAGNOLIAS. PARLOR. DAY.

Brown II closes the door to the Hall. She takes a seat very close to Wysteria.

BROWN III
 Miss Wysteria, the Fire Marshall
 and the Building Inspector have
 been here... again.

WYSTERIA
 Oh them! This place has always been
 falling apart. That's its charm.

BROWN III
 Time has caught up with The
 Magnolias. And we're falling apart.
 Unfortunately, there is no charm in
 that.

WYSTERIA
 Well, what did they say? How much
 money do we need to fix it?

BROWN III
The family jewels.

WYSTERIA
But there aren't any.

INT. THE MAGNOLIAS. UPPER BEDCHAMBER. DAY.

Into the empty room, Periwinkle enters, quietly closing the door. She takes note of the portrait of Hominy and the dress on the bed.

INT. THE MAGNOLIAS. PARLOR. DAY.

Brown III stands resolutely.

BROWN III
So we simply must convince this man
to chose us for the Pilgrimage or
we will be forced to close.

WYSTERIA
Close? The Magnolias has stood
since 1769---

INT. THE MAGNOLIAS. UPPER BEDCHAMBER. DAY.

Periwinkle is the picture of perfect contentment sitting still and silent near the window.

WYSTERIA (V.O.)
---it has withstood the British,
the blight, the British again, the
Yankees, carpetbaggers, the
boll-weevil, Miss Rachel's idiot
son, the railroad, the
super-market...

INT. THE MAGNOLIAS. PARLOR. DAY.

Now Wysteria stands resolute beneath Rachel's portrait.

WYSTERIA
...the interstate, and every mayor
and city council of this town!

BROWN III
But what will happen to us?

WYSTERIA
Is the issue us? Or The Magnolias?

BROWN III
We ARE The Magnolias.

A pause between the issue and them.

WYSTERIA
This place was here long before us.
And it is our goal to assure it
remains long after we have gone.

EXT. THE MAGNOLIAS. FRONT LAWN. DAY.

Having explored all they can, the family lounge on and around the Front Porch.

Periwinkle comes out the house, past them, and out onto the middle of the front lawn. They follow dutifully and when assembled, Periwinkle retrieves her breath, directing herself directly to the Girl.

PERIWINKLE
Do you know what history is?

Transfixed and frightened, the Girl can only shake her head "no".

And Periwinkle turns this captivity against her.

PERIWINKLE (CONT'D)
Then you are doomed to repeat it!

The overture done, the Girl safely behind her Mother, Periwinkle launches into her tour.

PERIWINKLE (CONT'D)
My name is Rosabelle Periwinkle and
I am 83 years old. I will be your
guide today.

EXT. THE MAGNOLIAS. PARKING LOT. DAY.

Baxter and Hughes arrive.

INT. THE MAGNOLIAS. PARLOR. DAY.

Brown III and Wysteria enjoy their "hard tack and chicory".
Brown III checks the time.

BROWN III
The plan is for me to take the next
tour. The last thing we want is for
(MORE)

BROWN III (cont'd)
 this man from Atlanta to learn
 about The Magnolias from Miss
 Periwinkle.

EXT. THE MAGNOLIAS. SIDE YARD. DAY.

Periwinkle points out the house in a grand manner using her
 cane.

PERIWINKLE
 The Magnolias was built in 1773..

She interrupts herself at the appearance of Baxter and
 Hughes.

BAXTER
 Mrs. Brown---?

PERIWINKLE
 No. She's inside. Just go...

BAXTER
 May we join the tour?

PERIWINKLE
 Oh, certainly.
 (fixing upon Hughes)
 Do you know what history is?

As Miss Hughes is framing her answer/retort, she is
 restrained by Baxter, which is not the last time this will
 happen.

EXT. MAGNOLIA WAY. DAY.

Jack clatters by in his pick-up singing "I Could Have Danced
 All Night" accompanied by his tape player.

EXT. THE MAGNOLIAS. SIDE YARD. DAY.

As Periwinkle speaks, Baxter glances at his watch. Taps it.
 It has stopped. Though perturbed then perplexed, he shrugs
 it off, refocusing on the tour.

PERIWINKLE
 This house was built in the year
 1773 and is constructed of sundry
 and various materials. Among them:
 Wood... Now let us go into the
 house.

Miss Hughes is frothing to utter something in response.

BAXTER

Ah-ah, Miss Hughes. Tact and
patience.

MISS HUGHES

But---

BAXTER

Yes, I realize the place may
crumble to dust before our eyes...

MISS HUGHES

You're not seriously going to
consider this for the Pilgrimage.

BAXTER

(smiles)

I have taught you too well.

MISS HUGHES

"The Magnolias" shouldn't be on a
Pilgrimage. It ought to be on a
safari.

Even Baxter cannot help but snicker.

Cane at the ready, Periwinkle impatiently waits for Baxter
and Miss Hughes to catch up with the tour.

They swallow their smiles. Baxter cannot help a last
comment.

BAXTER

Lead on, great White Lady of The
Sacred South----

INT. PINEHILL. BEDCHAMBER. NIGHT. THE PAST.

In a Spartan room, Captain Swain, in uniform, is sprawled on
the bed. Wine bottles and a glass on the nightstand. His
sleep is fitful. He wakes with a start.

CAPTAIN SWAIN

Hominy Ann!

Silver moonlight floods the room.

The Captain's saber hangs on the bedpost.

He goes to the washstand, splashing water from the bowl on his face, examining his reflection in the mirror then at the portrait in the ever-present locket.

CAPTAIN SWAIN (CONT'D)

Hominy, tomorrow we wed. But if
this war takes me---! If we lose
this war--- How will you survive?

EXT. THE MAGNOLIAS. CABIN. DAY.

In a corner of the back yard is a detached brick Cabin being used for storage. Buck leisurely rakes leaves, humming a Cole Porter song, as Jack drives up.

JACK

Buck my man---!

Jack jumps out of the cab, retrieves boxes from the bed.

JACK (CONT'D)

Gotta delivery for the Ladies of
the SS.

Buck motions for Jack to put the boxes in the Cabin. He notices a playbook sticking out of Jack's back pocket. He pulls it out as Jack passes.

BUCK

Shakespeare? Jack, you in another
play?

JACK

No way. The town still hasn't
forgiven me for "The Sound of
Music".

BUCK

Producer? Director? Star? It wuz
too much, my man.

JACK

Well, maybe this town just wasn't
ready for my Maria. Anyway, sign
here.

Buck refuses the clipboard.

BUCK

"Neither a signer nor a signee be."

Buck offers Jack a cigar.

JACK

Me smoke? With my allergies? But I
tell you what. I'll take it.

(strikes a pose)

Makes a great prop, eh?

Buck settles into a comfortable mode, chewing on his cigar.

BUCK

Jack, why you ever left California?

Jack is always ready for an opportunity to perform.

JACK

I was on a bus. Broadway bound!
When it stopped here I stepped out
for some coffee -- a cup 'o joe --
a mug of java -- and when I found
it -- it was so deep, so rich,
so... satisfying, that I became
lost in it and, becoming lost,
found myself. Here.

EXT. THE MAGNOLIAS. UPPER GALLERY. DAY.

Periwinkle's Tour balances itself on the narrow and rickety
Upper Gallery which, nevertheless, has a grand view of the
front yard.

She summons up a grand image with a dangerous sweep of her
cane ---

PERIWINKLE

And so ---

EXT. THE MAGNOLIAS. FRONT YARD. DAY. THE SEPIA PAST.

We see a tinted view of the front yard which slowly resolves
itself into a swarming battlefield.

JACK (V.O.)

This is not the past we have
already seen and will see again.
No. This is the collective
consciousness of the Past as
created by books, movies, lectures,
beliefs, and hopes, and dreams.
This is the Past as it exists in
"The Mind of Miss Rosabelle
Periwinkle".

Yankee soldiers battle, loot, rampage, pillage---

JACK (V.O.) (CONT'D)
 Yes, you're right. These are scenes
 from D.W. Griffith's monumental
 silent classic---

PERIWINKLE (O.S.)
 ...Yankee troops, brutal degrading
 Yankee soldiers, had invaded the
 state, overrun the county, and were
 rampaging the town, deflowering the
 pride of all Southern Womanhood...

EXT. THE MAGNOLIAS. UPPER GALLERY. DAY.

The Girl clutches her Father's pants leg. Miss Hughes is open-mouthed. Baxter's hand covers his mouth.

PERIWINKLE
 ---and yet life went on ---

EXT. THE MAGNOLIAS. FRONT YARD. DAY. SEPIA/TECHNICOLOR PAST.

The present view of the front yard dissolves into that of an idyllic landscape. The trees are mainly Magnolias, with the present-day oaks mere saplings.

We are swept Cinemascopically from the Gallery down to the yard accompanied by an equally sweeping musical score.

The scene is magically peopled with FINE SOUTHERN GENTLEMEN, both civilian and MILITARY, with their SOUTHERN BELLES, their hoops so outlandishly full they require the help of several men to get through the front door.

Sheep and cows graze peacefully. Carriages arrive and discharge their VISITORS.

SLAVES, in natty attire serve and set up, others perform music, still others wander about in choirs singing.

A decorated ARBOR for a ceremony under the Magnolias.

PERIWINKLE (O.S.)
 Miss Hominy Ann Hampton is to wed
 this day the handsome and dashing
 Captain Roger Swain.

INT. PINEHILL. BEDCHAMBER. DAY. SEPIA PAST.

Candlelight. A bed surrounded by mosquito netting. Lying in bed, tossing and turning in a fever, is Captain Swain, only this one resembles the handsome man in the portrait.

PERIWINKLE (O.S.)

Little did Hominy Ann know that her beloved Captain Swain lay writhing in mortal agony in a pool of his own perspiration. The victim of a sudden fever from wounds received in the Battle of Chancelorsville.

Captain Swain screams in mortal agony.

CAPTAIN SWAIN

Oh ---! The mortal agony!

INT. THE MAGNOLIAS. UPPER HALL. DAY.

Periwinkle's tour now stand in the Hall at the top of the stairs.

As she speaks, she and the Group become immersed in and a part of THE SEPIA PAST of her mind. The Hall and Landing become covered with a gaudy wallpaper and a huge Confederate Battle Flag hangs in the Landing.

HOMINY ANN HAMPTON steps out of the Bedchamber into the Hall. She is exactly as she appears in the portrait and locket.

PERIWINKLE

Hominy Ann Hampton stepped out of her bedchamber resplendent in her splendid bridal gown, the very same one you just saw on her bed.

INT. PINEHILL. HALL/STAIRS. DAY. SEPIA PAST.

The Hall is empty. We hear a thud. The door to the bedchamber is thrown open and Captain Swain, now splendidly dressed and seemingly completely cured, steps out.

PERIWINKLE (O.S.)

As Hominy Ann slowly descended the stairs, Captain Roger Swain dragged himself out of bed and into his splendid uniform.

Captain Swain strides to the stairs.

PERIWINKLE (O.S.) (CONT'D)

Suddenly he felt a lightness in his head. He gripped the banister! But to no avail! He tumbled, tumbled,
(MORE)

PERIWINKLE (O.S.) (CONT'D) (cont'd)
 tumbled down to the foot of the
 stairs.

As this is a splendid spiral staircase, Captain Swain's tumbling is quite spectacular and in slow motion, Periwinkle's "tumbled, tumbled, tumbled" echoing slowly with Captain Swain's downfall.

INT. THE MAGNOLIAS. STAIRS. DAY. SEPIA PAST.

Periwinkle and the tour remain in the scene. Hominy slowly descends the stairs.

PERIWINKLE
 Roger Swain was undeterred. He
 staggered to the stable, saddled
 his horse, and set off towards The
 Magnolias. When Hominy Ann reached
 the precise spot wherein I am now
 standing...

Periwinkle seems to become one with the image of Hominy.

PERIWINKLE (CONT'D)
 The front door opened!

There is Captain Roger Swain, standing on the threshold, as fine a specimen of Southern manhood as ever existed. He glows. Is that a halo?

PERIWINKLE (CONT'D)
 There was a pause.

She pauses. And pauses.

INT. THE MAGNOLIAS. ENTRANCE HALL. DAY. SEPIA PAST.

Periwinkle and group now out of scene. Captain Swain stands in the doorway. Hominy on the landing. A pause.

A gunshot!

CAPTAIN SWAIN
 HOMINY!

He collapses face down, as vivid and bloody movie version of a gunshot wound as the Rating allows:

PERIWINKLE (O.S.)
 He collapsed insensible. Lifeless.
 Blood spurting out like a fountain
 from a dastardly Yankee bullet in
 Captain Roger Swain's brave
 Southern back.

EXT. THE MAGNOLIAS. FRONT YARD. DAY. SEPIA PAST.

On a stone bench beneath two Magnolia Trees, Hominy, in full morning, sits quietly, erect, proud.

PERIWINKLE (O.S.)
 Miss Hominy Ann Hampton. A widow
 before she was ever a bride. And
 from that day, until they were cut
 down in 1941...

EXT. THE MAGNOLIAS. FRONT YARD. DAY.

Periwinkle and the group stand at two rotting and decayed stumps.

PERIWINKLE
 ...those two splendid Magnolia
 Trees never --- bloomed --- again.

A pause. The Girl, recovered from the blood and violence, and captured by the romance, bursts into applause and cheering.

Baxter has seen this before and delights watching Miss Hughes.

Miss Hughes wonders what planet they are on.

INT. THE MAGNOLIAS. PARLOR. DAY.

Brown III signs for the delivery. Wysteria partakes of the tea and cake.

JACK
 Thanks, Mrs. B. Ah, spice tea and
 cakes?
 (salutes the portrait)
 Happy Mummification Day, Miss
 Rachel!

BROWN III
 It's mortification.

WYSTERIA

Thank goodness you aren't giving
tours here anymore, Jack.

JACK

Gotta work for a livin'.

He salutes the Ladies and goes into the---

INT. THE MAGNOLIAS. ENTRANCE HALL. DAY.

---where Periwinkle's tour has concluded with the group corralled into an area adjacent to the well of the stairs which, through the facility of a Murphy-bed-like closet, Periwinkle instantly transforms into a gift shop with an array of plastic alligators, coffee mugs, dancing wooden dolls, and Confederate Flags, to the delight of the Girl and the Mother.

Jack fondly recalls his days in such a role and manages to get an eyeful of Miss Hughes as he leaves.

BAXTER

(over the ruckus)
Mrs. Brown---?

PERIWINKLE

(indicating)
In the Parlor.

Baxter and Miss Hughes go into the Parlor.

INT. THE MAGNOLIAS. PARLOR. DAY.

Upon entering the calm of the Parlor, Miss Hughes casts her calculating eye with disdain at the room, filled to overflowing with generations of stuff.

MISS HUGHES

(whispering)
I'll see if there's anything here
remotely appropriate.

She begins with the larger pieces of furniture.

Baxter's attention is drawn to the Portrait of the Scowling Woman (Miss Rachel) and then to Brown III and Wysteria, seated calmly upon the ornate Victorian Sofa.

The room transforms itself from Baxter's POV into a canvas-like quality: a painting: but only briefly.

Brown suddenly realizes who Baxter might be. She rises.

BROWN III
(flustered)
Oh my! Are you---?

BAXTER
Indeed I am.

Yet Brown III deftly recovers, extending her hand.

BROWN III
Mrs. Laurence Worthington-Brown,
the Third. President of The
Offspring, and Chairman of the
Select Committee for the
Procurement of the Pilgrimage.

BAXTER
Henry Baxter, and...

Miss Hughes removes her head from inside a cabinet.

MISS HUGHES
(curtseying)
Caroline Hughes. The First.

Baxter casts not his last understanding but disapproving eye at Miss Hughes. He gentlemanly approaches Wysteria, who has remained seated. He accepts her proffered hand.

WYSTERIA
Are you any kin to the Atlanta
Baxters?

BAXTER
Oh, no ma'am. I'm from a small town
in Kentucky. Miss Hughes works with
me at the...
(lowering his voice)
Federation.

MISS HUGHES
I couldn't help but notice that
there are no Magnolia trees. Here.
At "The" Magnolias.

BROWN III
No. Not a single one.

Ice forms around this pause.

WYSTERIA
Coffee? Or perhaps tea---?

MISS HUGHES
---coffee!

BAXTER
Yes, coffee.

BROWN III
Oh, Buck!

Buck appears. Or was he there all along?

BROWN III (CONT'D)
Coffee.

Buck acknowledges with a short bow.

WYSTERIA
Buck was born here.

BUCK
Well, practically so, sir.

He goes into the Kitchen.

BROWN III
His mother worked for Miss Hominy
Ann Hampton. Hominy Ann lived here
until her death in 1940 at age 95.

WYSTERIA
She never married. Never recovered
from the Captain's... untimely
demise.

Periwinkle enters triumphant and tired.

PERIWINKLE
What a splendid family! Bought
twenty-six dollars' worth.

Buck enters with coffee. Everyone settles down except Miss
Hughes, who continues to roam in her examination, taking
time with the Sideboard and the silver eating utensils.

MISS HUGHES
What a "splendid" service.

PERIWINKLE

Family tradition maintains it was originally made for the King of England.

MISS HUGHES

Indeed? Which one?

PERIWINKLE

Why, there's only one Englan...

BROWN III

---George! King George. Here, you can see the initials.

MISS HUGHES

"K.G."?

WYSTERIA

Yes. King George. Of England.

BROWN III

Well! After coffee, it will be my pleasure to personally conduct you through the house.

MISS HUGHES

We've just had the tour.

BROWN III

Oh my!

MISS HUGHES

And let me tell you it was...

BAXTER

---interesting, unique, entertaining, and informative.
(bowing)
Thank you.

WYSTERIA

Miss Periwinkle is a descendent of the family.

BAXTER

We are doubly honored. But of course, we knew a little bit about The Magnolias before we arrived.

MISS HUGHES

Or we thought we did.

Baxter takes the plate of cakes to Miss Hughes.

BAXTER
 (under his breath)
 Why not put something else in your
 mouth, please.

EXT. ROAD. DAY. THE PAST.

The bend in a dusty road.

A Yankee RECONNOITERING PARTY is breaking up, one of the
 Party, a SHARPSHOOTER, remaining.

He takes up a position in bushes but with a clear view of
 the turn in the road.

A bit down the Road, Captain Swain, resplendid in his
 uniform, but without his Saber, on his jet-black horse,
 rides at an easy pace.

EXT. THE MAGNOLIAS. FRONT LAWN. DAY. THE PAST.

The House, gleaming and fresh, is the backdrop for an
 anticipated wedding ceremony.

GUESTS and SERVANTS are going to and fro into and out of the
 House.

Beneath two Magnolia Trees the MINISTER speaks with a woman,
 who is unmistakably RACHEL.

Standing alone, watching the road, in her Bridal Dress, is
 Miss Hominy.

INT. THE MAGNOLIAS. PARLOR. DAY.

Miss Hughes munches on a piece of cake. The bell dings from
 the Hall.

PERIWINKLE
 (to Brown III)
 You can stop worrying, Lucille.
 I'll get it. Please excuse me, Mr.
 Baxter.

With some ceremony, much to Brown III's exasperation,
 Periwinkle goes into the Hall, Brown III closing the door.
 Before Brown III can summon up the proper tone, Wysteria
 jumps right in---

WYSTERIA

What do we have to do to get on the
Pilgrimage?

INT. THE MAGNOLIAS. ENTRANCE HALL. DAY.

A MAN examines the construction of the stairs while a WOMAN stands by the desk as Periwinkle enters.

WOMAN

We're trying to find Pinehill
Plantation.

PERIWINKLE

(craftily)
It's very difficult to find.

The Woman is disappointed. The Man starts out.

PERIWINKLE

(CONT'D)
But you've found us. And we're
right here.

INT. THE MAGNOLIAS. PARLOR. DAY.

Baxter and Miss Hughes have been consulting some papers.

BROWN III

Pinehill!? You're going to
Pinehill? First off,
they're...they're hard to find...

WYSTERIA

---and they don't even have a
ghost!

MISS HUGHES

And you do?

Brown III nervously clears her throat. She is clearly uncomfortable about this kind of talk but she must play all her cards.

MISS HUGHES (CONT'D)

Why doesn't that surprise me?

BROWN III

Actually, he's more of a spirit. A
presence.

WYSTERIA

No. He's a ghost.

MISS HUGHES

And who is "he"?

WYSTERIA

Why, Captain Roger Swain, of course. The Captain expired barely twenty feet from where I sit. Miss P, Miss Periwinkle sees him all the time. Has conversations with him.

MISS HUGHES

That, I believe.

BROWN III

But I'm sure you'll understand that's our little secret.

BAXTER

Certainly. Of course.

BROWN III

(almost desperately)

They're going to say terrible things about us. Those Pinehill people. They'll say that we're not professionals. That we haven't painted the place in years. That the wallpaper is peeling. That we're old. But we have something they'll never have. US!

This inspires Wysteria with an overpowering idea which she confides in a whisper to Brown III who seizes the idea.

BROWN III (CONT'D)

Mr. Baxter! Would you and... her, join us for supper? After your visit to Pinehill...

WYSTERIA

--if you can find it!

BROWN III

---and experience first-hand what we'd offer visitors on the Pilgrimage.

Baxter bows to the Ladies.

BAXTER
Ladies --- thank you. We look
forward to it.

Miss Hughes is speechless. Finally.

EXT. BASEBALL FIELD. DAY.

On the non-playing side of the chain-link backstop, Palmer Motley, muttering to himself, plants seedlings.

Palmer, Jr. whizzes past on the nearby street on his skateboard.

PALMER MOTLEY
Junior!

Junior reluctantly stops, goes to the backstop.

JUNIOR
Yah?

PALMER MOTLEY
Whare yu goin'?

JUNIOR
Noplace.

Palmer laughs approvingly, stabbing deeply into the earth with the trowel.

EXT. MAGNOLIA WAY. DAY.

Junior clacks by as the "El Dorado" Bus crawls by, each window splattered with elderly faces gawking.

The Bus stops. The door swishes open. Junior stops and peeks in.

BUS DRIVER
Pinehill---?

Junior shrugs his shoulders then points them in the opposite direction.

EXT. THE MAGNOLIAS. SIDE YARD. DAY.

Baxter and Miss Hughes walk away from the House.

BAXTER
 (trying to be firm)
 Really, Miss Hughes, they're nice
 old ladies and we needn't insult
 them.

A pause. She bursts into laughter.

MISS HUGHES
 "...never bloomed again..."!

BAXTER
 (a little lighter)
 Tact and patience and a bit of
 respect. There's work yet to be
 done.

She is distracted by the sight of the Cabin just as Baxter
 sees Buck, who walks toward them carrying a leaf rake.

BUCK
 Afternoon, again.

BAXTER
 (to Buck)
 Must be quite a chore keeping up a
 place like this.

MISS HUGHES
 If by "chore" you mean "work" and
 if by "work" you mean keeping the
 place clean, then by the look of it
 in there it's been more than a
 "chore".

BUCK
 (calmly)
 Now, Miss Hughes...

BAXTER
 ---the first.

If looks could kill.

BUCK
 Better than bein' the last, I say.
 Now, sometimes a bit of dust is
 exactly what's needed. It's what
 people expect. A spider web or two,
 peelin' paint. It's like these here
 leaves. Some people like seein' 'em
 (MORE)

BUCK (cont'd)
 scattered about and some folks
 don't. But what can I do? Leave
 'em? Rake 'em? Pick 'em up?

MISS HUGHES
 Burn 'em.
 (she pivots smartly to
 Henry)
 Surely, we can spare a few minutes?
 I'd like to get a better look at
 that cabin.

Baxter starts to look at his watch but checks himself.

BAXTER
 Go ahead.

She splits off towards the Cabin, nearly slipping on a neat
 pile of leaves. Baxter removes and pockets his watch.

BUCK
 Impestuous--

BAXTER
 She's happier sticking her head
 down a privy than in the big house.
 She'll have my job one day.
 (smiling)
 That'll show 'er.

BUCK
 Well, Mr. Baxter, it's folks that
 tiptoe aroun' what they think are
 my feelin's who I can't abide.

Relieved, Baxter relaxes, taking out a pack of cigarettes.

BAXTER
 She certainly doesn't tip-toe. Mind
 if I smoke?

BUCK
 What did I jus' say---?

Buck stops, fishing out a cigar.

BAXTER
 Ha. "Mind" indeed. I've been living
 among people who seem to mind
 everything.

BUCK

Jes' do what I do. Take it out. Say
"Pardon me if I smoke". And smoke.

Buck cracks a match for Baxter and they enjoy a satisfying moment of reflection and smoking.

EXT. THE MAGNOLIAS. CABIN. DAY.

Miss Hughes stands in amazement before the Cabin.

MISS HUGHES

I can't believe it.

She opens a latch on the door several times in succession with a religious awe.

MISS HUGHES (CONT'D)

This cabin hasn't changed in 150
years.

EXT. THE MAGNOLIAS. SIDE YARD. DAY.

Baxter and Buck are still enjoying their smoke.

BAXTER

You enjoy working here?

BUCK

(pause)

I don't think of myself as working
here.

Buck brushes off some dirt from his pants.

BUCK (CONT'D)

Now, Mr. Baxter, I think what
you're really asking me is, What do
I think of the ladies?

BAXTER

That's exactly what I meant. I
should have asked it.

BUCK

Well it's not a question of what I
think of 'em is it? It's what you
think that's important.

BAXTER

Right you are, Buck. Right you
are.

In the distance we can see that Periwinkle has begun another Tour of the House. In addition to the Man and Woman, a GRANDMOTHER and her teen-aged GRAND-DAUGHTER have joined the Tour. Periwinkle gestures dangerously with her cane.

BUCK
Where's your home?

BAXTER
Atlanta.

BUCK
No. Your home.

Baxter smiles, increasingly impressed with Buck's easy ways and ability to read his mind.

BAXTER
Broweridge, Kentucky.

BUCK
Been there lately?

BAXTER
Coupla months ago. Mother's funeral.

EXT/INT. CABIN. DAY

Miss Hughes, still in a reverential awe, leans her head against the dusky red bricks, pressing her pudgy fingers into the face of the brick.

MISS HUGHES
Hand-made.

She moves a finger along one of the mortar joints. Sand hourglasses down.

MISS HUGHES (CONT'D)
...and untouched for generations.

There is something touching and sincere in her idolatry.

She slowly pushes the door open a crack. It is very dark inside so she must open the door wider, enough to squeeze in.

In the darkness, it takes a moment for her eyes to adjust. Though there are lawnmowers and garden tools, the interior is an intact slave cabin. A large hearth, dirt floor.

Exposed beams above. Several shafts of light from nail holes in the roof pierce the darkness.

As she steps in and closes the door, a fine rain of dust is caught up in the beams. She allows some of the dust to settle in the palm of hand. She closes her hand, pressing it to her heart.

EXT. ROAD. DAY. THE PAST.

Captain Swain rides into view of the Sharpshooter, who takes careful aim and fires.

The Captain is hit in the heart. His body falls lifeless on the Road, into the deep dust.

EXT. THE MAGNOLIAS. SIDE YARD. DAY.

Still enjoying their smoke Baxter and Buck break a reflective moment.

BAXTER

Your mother -- she worked for "Miss Hominy Ann Hampton"?

BUCK

The "widow before she was ever a bride"? Indeed she did. Miss Hominy was the last to live here. After she died, the place went to seed. House and garden. "Eyesore", the city said. Brought in the bulldozers. Some of the ladies in town got real worked-up. Lay down right in front of 'em.

BAXTER

(laughing)

I can see the whole thing right now. Did you?

BUCK

Oh, no sir. But my mother seen it and that's how I know. They saved the house but not those two old Magnolias. Every year I ask 'em if I could plant some Magnolias but they won't never let me.

A moment of reflection and recollection is broken by a shout of "Henry! Henry" from an excited and approaching Miss Hughes, who, despite her exuberance, is immediately put off

by the clouds of smoke.

MISS HUGHES
Do you mind?

BUCK
(offering cigar)
Help yourself.

Despite all this, she manages to bubble up again.

MISS HUGHES
That cabin is magnificent!
(simplistically to Buck)
Do you know who lived in that
cabin?

BUCK
(drawing it out)
Slaves.

MISS HUGHES
And you're using it a toolshed?

BUCK
Tools is valuable.

Baxter makes a point of remaining silent until Miss Hughes can no longer...

MISS HUGHES
But...

BAXTER
(to Buck)
---Will we see you at supper?

BUCK
Supper?

MISS HUGHES
The ladies made us an offer we
apparently couldn't refuse.

BUCK
Then it will be my pleasure to
serve you. Both.

INT. THE MAGNOLIAS. UPPER HALL. DAY. THE PAST.

Hominy, in her Wedding Gown, comes out into the Hall from her Bedchamber. She carries Magnolia flowers. She stops at

the top of the Stairs, then descends to the Landing. We note the Portrait of an older bearded man.

Down below, the Minister and Rachel enter the House. He looks up at Hominy

MINISTER
Captain Roger Swain is dead.

Hominy sinks to her knees. She manages to support herself on the banister. Rachel rushes up to help Hominy to her feet.

HOMINY
Mother---!

MINISTER
There are Yankee soldiers near. You must leave.

RACHEL
Never!

INT. BAXTER'S CAR. DAY.

Miss Hughes babbles on.

MISS HUGHES
...asking me, "Do you know what history is?" And the way she was touching everything---

BAXTER
Miss Hughes---?

She stops her babbling.

BAXTER (CONT'D)
---open the window and stick your head out.

MISS HUGHES
What?

BAXTER
Pardon me. I am going to smoke a cigarette.

Miss Hughes has no choice. The breeze and sky and clouds merge... as hard rock music is advanced.

EXT. MAGNOLIA WAY. DAY.

The music comes from a boom-box. It rests on a skateboard on Roberta Lee's lap.

She is energy personified. She wears a bathrobe over a hospital gown and sits in a wheelchair being pushed by Palmer Motley, Jr.

Roberta Lee is exhilarated by the ride, the wind threatening her hat.

ROBERTA LEE

Faster, Palmer Motley, Junior!
Faster!

Trying to keep up, balancing the many plastic hospital appliances is MILDRED PIERCE, a tiny woman with a bird face.

ROBERTA LEE (CONT'D)

Mildred, my dear, I hope we are not
late for the meeting!

MILDRED PIERCE

I hope we get there alive, Roberta
Lee!

INT. THE MAGNOLIAS. MASTER BEDCHAMBER. DAY.

The Tour has reached the ornate and impressive Master Bedchamber.

WOMAN

Why is the bed so short?

PERIWINKLE

Back in olden times, people did not
live as long as they do today. Now.
During the War of Northern
Aggression, this very bedroom, or
bed-chamber, was used by the
dastardly Yankee General Rufus B.
Slocum.

There is ominous thunder.

MAN

What kind of sofa is this?

PERIWINKLE

This -- is a Camembert Sofa of the
French Second Empire which is noted
for its extreme comfort.

EXT. MAGNOLIA WAY. DAY.

The rock music arrives with the wheelchair brigade at the
front gate to The Magnolias. Roberta Lee shuts off the
music.

ROBERTA LEE

Thank you, young man.

Junior takes up the boom-box and skateboard.

JUNIOR

That wuz kewl. Gotta go.

He skates off and away. Roberta Lee directs as in battle.

ROBERTA LEE

Mildred: 'Round the back, dear.

INT. THE MAGNOLIAS. PARLOR. DAY.

The Tour continues. Buck busily dusts and straightens.

PERIWINKLE

This -- is the Parlor.

Without losing a beat, Periwinkle manages to tell Buck...

PERIWINKLE

(CONT'D)

Before super. Sherry. Dry. At room
temperature.

WOMAN

What kind of chair is that?

PERIWINKLE

This -- is an authentic Wensleydale
Sidechair please refrain from
touching it as it is an antique.

GRANDMOTHER

Who is the lady in the painting?

PERIWINKLE

This -- is Rachel Hampton. Hominy
Ann's mother.

(to Buck)

Immediately after the meal. Port.

(to Tour)

There was fought two miles from
this spot the Battle of
Consanguinity Creek.

EXT. THE MAGNOLIAS. FRONT YARD. DAY. SEPIA PAST.

Beneath the two Magnolia trees a defiant and partially
disrobed Rachel stands in heavy chains before a distinctly
simian-like GENERAL SLOCUM who is flanked by his distinctly
Praetorian Guard-like and leering AIDES.

JACK (V.O.)

Now, I am convinced that Miss
Periwinkle's favorite movies are
"Gone With the Wind", "Ben-Hur",
and "The Ten Commandments", all of
which she has somehow merged with
the history of The Magnolias.

PERIWINKLE (O.S.)

The Yankee general Rufus M. Slocum
took over The Magnolias and
committed that Infamous Act of
Supreme Disrespect to Southern
Womanhood against Rachel.

GENERAL SOLCUM

In the Most Holy Name of President
Abraham Lincoln I hereby confiscate
this land, this house, and all its
contents for the use by the
Glorious and conquering Grand Army
of the Republic!

RACHEL

This is MY house---!

GENERAL SOLCUM

Silence, rebel!

Rachel is pushed to the ground by one of the Aides. She
rises defiantly to her feet.

GENERAL SOLCUM (CONT'D)

(pharaoh-like)

I decree that you shall
henceforward be deprived of
cucumber sandwiches and juleps and
in their place shall ye eat only of
the weevil-infested hard tack and
drink only of the chicory coffee.

RACHEL

I -- am -- mortified.

She sinks to her knees.

INT. THE MAGNOLIAS. PARLOR. DAY.

The Grand-daughter is mesmerized by the crystal chandelier,
circling beneath it.

GRAND-DAUGHTER

Wow! How much is that worth?

PERIWINKLE

Two-thousand two-hundred thirty-one
dollars and thirteen cents and
since nineteen-hundred and
forty-one we, The Offspring of The
Ladies of The Sacred South,
commemorate the Mortification of
Rachel Hampton by partaking of the
Hard Tack and Chicory coffee
ourselves which we have done this
very day today.

EXT. THE MAGNOLIAS. FRONT YARD. DAY. SEPIA PAST.

Rachel, in chains, weeps on a Stone Bench beneath the
Magnolia Trees. At the appropriate time, she expires.

PERIWINKLE (O.S.)

The strain upon Rachel was too
great and she succumbed within a
fortnight of the occupation.

GRAND-DAUGHTER

"Su...su-cumbed"---?

PERIWINKLE

Dropped dead.

The girl fights back tears.

INT. THE MAGNOLIAS. KITCHEN. DAY.

Tiny Mildred manages to get Roberta Lee into the room.

MILDRED PIERCE

I hope this is important, Roberta Lee. I gave up a Canasta Wake to rescue you. I was ten dollars ahead.

INT. THE MAGNOLIAS. DINING ROOM. DAY.

The Tour continues...

PERIWINKLE

Please note the splendid Gorgonzola Gothic Sideboard and the matching Stilton Bowls.

The Man can restrain himself no longer and is resolved to challenge Periwinkle but a tug and a "please don't" from the Woman deters him. He nearly bites his tongue off in restraint.

Periwinkle shepherds the Tour to the Mantel above which hangs a Saber in its scabbard.

PERIWINKLE (CONT'D)

This sword, which belonged to Captain Roger Swain, is the "Great Mystery of The Magnolias". I will now read to you from Hominy Ann Hampton's memoirs which she titled, "My Life in the Sacred South".

She lifts a slim volume from the Mantel and reads:

PERIWINKLE (CONT'D)

"It was not until Roger's funeral, when I saw him all laid out in his uniform, that I realized that his sword was missing. Indeed, he was not wearing it that fateful day of his death. It was not until weeks afterward that one of the servants found the sword. It was beneath my bed."

GRAND-DAUGHTER

But how did it get there?

PERIWINKLE

No one knows.

A pause. Periwinkle swishes her cane, pointing.

PERIWINKLE (CONT'D)

Now go that way.

And they dutifully obey.

Buck enters with a velveteed box of silverware which he starts to lay out for the evening's meal. He humms, as usual, a medley of Gershwin and hymns.

Mildred bursts Roberta Lee into the room.

ROBERTA LEE

We've missed the meeting?

BUCK

'Fraid so, ma'am. But not supper.

ROBERTA LEE

Supper? Ah, for the Pilgrimage man?
Good! How many?

BUCK

Hmm, seven, now.

ROBERTA LEE

Oh dear! Seven. Odd number. Must do
something about that. Set an extra
pace at the table.

Roberta Lee plucks the candlesticks off the table handing them to Mildred.

ROBERTA LEE (CONT'D)

Use the candelabra. Buck!

BUCK

Yes ma'am?

ROBERTA LEE

This morning I woke up in
gallbladder pain. I check myself
into the hospital, call my doctor
and tell him he had better come
take out my gallbladder.

(rearranges utensils)

Buck? Have you ever been in the
hospital?

BUCK

Once or twice.

ROBERTA LEE

If you want anything you've got to keep asking for it or you won't get it. Am I right, Mildred?

MILDRED PIERCE

When I got my gallbladder removed they kept bringing me jello when I had checked tapioca on the menu. They did it every time. I was too meek.

ROBERTA LEE

Oh, you can't be meek. So I keep insisting that someone remove my gallbladder. To the right of plate, bowl up, tablespoon. Like this.

Forbearing as always, Buck makes the adjustments.

ROBERTA LEE (CONT'D)

Finally I had to call Mildred. They were going to put me in... THE ANNEX! That's where they put the CRAZY PEOPLE! People like Palmer Motley.

MILDRED PIERCE

Oh yes. Palmer Motley. You know what they call him behind his back, don't you?

(mysteriously)

"The Man Who Plants Tomatoes".

Roberta Lee regains the stage.

ROBERTA LEE

Never-the-less. They were NOT going to remove my gallbladder. The only thing they were after was my "Life Force". Buck! Do you have a "Life Force"?

BUCK

I sup'ose so.

ROBERTA LEE

Don't let them take it!

MILDRED PIERCE

What about bread-and-butter plates?

ROBERTA LEE

Oh Mildred! Never for a formal dinner.

INT. THE MAGNOLIAS. STAIRS. DAY.

The Tour huddles on the Landing of the stairs as Periwinkle sweeps the air with her cane.

PERIWINKLE

...he uttered but one word: HOMINY!
Then collapsed in a heap.
Insensible. Lifeless. Blood gushing
out like a fountain from a
dastardly Yankee bullet in Captain
Swain's proud and noble Southern
back ... Hominy Ann Hampton. A
widow before she was ever a bride
... And from that day, until they
were cut down in 1941, those two
splendid Magnolia Trees, "never --
bloomed -- again".

INT. THE MAGNOLIAS. KITCHEN. DAY.

Brown III and Wysteria enter from outside with provisions and flowers.

Wysteria puts aside her ever-present handbag and puts on an apron decorated with the facade of The Magnolias.

INT. THE MAGNOLIAS. ENTRANCE HALL. DAY.

As the last of the Tour trickles away, Periwinkle closes up the "Gift Shop" then settles down at the desk for a much-needed rest.

INT. THE MAGNOLIAS. DINING ROOM. DAY.

Brown III enters with the flowers, which Buck takes.

BROWN III

Roberta Lee! Thank goodness!
(stops short)
Oh my---!

ROBERTA LEE

They were going to Annex me!

BROWN III

Oh, dear. Mildred? Why don't you help Olivia in the kitchen?

Mildred, helpful and obedient as always, goes.

ROBERTA LEE

Well? Are we going to be on the Pilgrimage? Or not?

BROWN III

It all rests upon the impression we make this evening.

There is ominous thundering.

Roberta Lee's gaze is drawn to the Sword above the Mantel.

From the Kitchen we hear arguing, followed by the appearance of Wysteria and Mildred Pierce.

WYSTERIA

Turtle!

MILDRED PIERCE

French onion!

WYSTERIA

Turtle! It's the obvious choice.

MILDRED PIERCE

That's why it should be French Onion.

Wysteria reasonably frames the question for Roberta Lee.

WYSTERIA

For the soup course: turtle or French onion.

ROBERTA LEE

.... Corn.

This is exactly what Brown III fears will be the norm for the evening.

WYSTERIA

Humph! Let's ask...

Through the opened door we, and the ladies, can see into the Hall that Periwinkle is motionless, her head prostrate on the desk.

BROWN III

Oh my God!

They rush into the---

INT. THE MAGNOLIAS. ENTRANCE HALL. DAY.

Brown III, Mildred Pierce, Roberta Lee and Wysteria crowd the desk. Brown III immediately dialing the phone. Periwinkle awakens, unperturbed.

PERIWINKLE

It is a good thing that I am not a sound sleeper or I would keep waking up in the funeral home.

The sense of relief quickly gives way to the dilemma at hand.

WYSTERIA

Miss P, the soup course. What should it be?

PERIWINKLE

Why, soup, of course.

A car horn sounds from outside.

EXT. MAGNOLIA WAY. DAY.

Jack's truck is parked on the street at the Front Gate. He bounds out of the cab grasping a large cluster of something vegetative.

He shouts in a Shakespearean manner as he traipses through the Gate and down the walk.

JACK

The legumes have arrived! Some of mother earth still...

INT. THE MAGNOLIAS. ENTRANCE HALL. DAY.

Jack bursts into the Hall.

JACK

---clinging to their delicate tendrilly roots. Behold! A bunch 'o beets---

From Roberta Lee's POV the scene is a painterly frozen moment: Wysteria, Periwinkle, Brown III around the Desk,

Mildred examining the sheet music on the piano, Buck at the foot of the stairs and Jack holding the beets in triumph.

JACK (V.O.) (CONT'D)

I am firmly convinced that this was the moment of inspiration. The moment when everything seemed to change. Because suddenly a scheme sprang full-blown into Roberta Lee's fertile brain. Maybe it was the threatening storm. Maybe it was the sight of the dangling beets. Or my handsome self. Or maybe it was something irretrievable, even unknowable, working its way through the house, through -- us. Through -- me.

The moment is shattered.

ROBERTA LEE

Buck! Ladies--!

With the assurance of a General indicating an objective.

ROBERTA LEE (CONT'D)

The front porch!

EXT. SKY. DAY.

Storm clouds darken the horizon. Thunder. The air is yellow. Leaves are kicked up and circle.

EXT. THE MAGNOLIAS. LOWER GALLERY. DAY.

All, except Mildred Pierce, assemble on the Gallery. Mildred sits at the piano.

ROBERTA LEE

Ladies! I have a feeling that something good will happen this evening. Buck! Don't forget that extra setting.

BROWN III

For whom?

ROBERTA LEE

For all those who have gone before.

PERIWINKLE

(softly, as though to
herself)

Just now, I dreamed: I was on tour.
On the stairway. Pointing to the
door. As always. And the door swung
open and standing there was.
Captain Roger Swain. He stepped in.
Uttered HOMINY! ... Then bounded up
the stairs. Swept Hominy Ann up in
his arms and carried her out. They
were married under the Magnolias.

Mildred plays "The Soldier's Return".

PERIWINKLE (CONT'D)

Captain Swain returned to the war
where he rallied his men at
Gettysburg. Returned to a
victorious Southern Nation... Roger
and Hominy had many children whose
children lived here and we all...
suddenly disappeared off the face
of the earth. Except Buck.

An appropriate punctuation of thunder.

INT. THE MAGNOLIAS. UPPER BEDCHAMBER. DAY.

We see, through the wavy glass window, Jack pushing Roberta
Lee down the path towards the Front Gate.

Mildred's playing continues.

EXT. THE MAGNOLIAS. LOWER GALLERY. DAY.

Mildred stops playing and comes out onto the Gallery. No one
wants to break the moment as the day has turned into late
afternoon. But Brown III finally does---

BROWN III

Ladies --- we'd better get cooking.

EXT. THE MAGNOLIAS. DAY. THE PAST.

We are looking into the Upper Bedchamber through the wavy
glass. We see the face of Hominy. She is very, very old.

INT. THE MAGNOLIAS. UPPER BEDCHAMBER. DAY. THE PAST.

The room looks much as it does in the present with the
exception of some florid wallpaper and the portrait of

Rachel above the mantel.

A PAINTER, easel, paints, and brushes all laid out in readiness, is having tea with Hominy, who seems in a reverie.

Soft, big-band music plays from a radio.

PAINTER

He was a Calvary officer?

Hominy doesn't seem to have heard.

PAINTER (CONT'D)

Miss Hampton? Hominy Ann---? Was he a Calvary officer?

HOMINY

That is correct.

PAINTER

Do you remember what rank?

HOMINY

Rank? Rank--?

PAINTER

Was he a Captain?

HOMINY

Roger Swain... Captain? Yes. Yes.
Captain Roger Swain.

She leans back in her chair, savoring the memory, summoning an image.

HOMINY (CONT'D)

He was a handsome man. And with a full beard.

The Painter scribbles notes.

HOMINY (CONT'D)

And I want a large portrait.

EXT. PINEHILL. DUSK.

Baxter and Miss Hughes walk away from the plantation house.

Pinehill is grand and immaculate, its huge white columns perfection itself. The landscape is crowded with blooming azaleas. A shaft of sunlight breaks through the dark clouds

bathing the house in Biblical glow.

JACK (V.O.)

Ah, there it is! Pinehill. Even the
azaleas seem to bloom on cue.
Pinehill is an institution. The
Magnolias is a house.

Baxter and Miss Hughes stop to view the house.

MISS HUGHES

Well? Can there be any doubt?

BAXTER

(enigmatically)

None whatever.

MISS HUGHES

Yet --- somehow I thought you were
going to choose The Magnolias.

BAXTER

(surprised)

Why?

MISS HUGHES

We should be on our way back to
Atlanta. But instead? Supper.

BAXTER

Aren't you hungry?

MISS HUGHES

Not that hungry.

BAXTER

Would it improve your appetite to
know that the Georgia Preservation
Federation is going to buy The
Magnolias and turn it into a...
real museum?

MISS HUGHES

No! Wonderful! But are they going
to sell?

BAXTER

(laughs)

Not in a million years.

MISS HUGHES

Then...

BAXTER

Before they put me behind a desk,
this is what I did. And I was
darned good at it.

MISS HUGHES

But the Pilgrimage---?

BAXTER

Pinehill from the outset. But I
needed to get a sense of...of---

MISS HUGHES

---the opposition?

BAXTER

Very good! Now, I've got three
pieces of paper ---
(takes them out)
A report from the Fire Marshall.
The State Buildings Inspector. And
this---

He holds it out as though for Miss Hughes but withdraws it
teasingly.

BAXTER (CONT'D)

Now-now, Miss Hughes. I wouldn't
want you to become bored.

EXT. THE MAGNOLIAS. LOWER GALLERY. NIGHT.

Buck, in a white serving jacket, black pants, and tie, sets
up a table for drinks. As usual, he humms a tune, gospel
this time.

Palmer Motley, Junior, slouches up. He wears clothes vaguely
similar to Buck's but the pants are too short and the shirt
too large and he wears outlandish sneakers.

Junior stows his skateboard behind a bush and presents
himself for inspection, which Buck takes seriously.

BUCK

Stand tall, Palmer Motley, Junior.
Make your father proud of you.

JUNIOR

My father's been in The Annex! He
plants tomatoes!

BUCK

Doesn't excuse bad posture. Take some pride in yourself. Didn't I ask you to wear your Sunday shoes?

JUNIOR

Man, these are---

Buck, remarkably forbearing, does his best to tug and pull Junior's clothes into shape.

BUCK

Now -- don't do anything to call attention to yourself -- and only speak if spoken to.

JUNIOR

Yeah... sir. Uh---

BUCK

Yes?

JUNIOR

What time do I get off?

Buck can only sigh at today's youth.

INT. THE MAGNOLIAS. KITCHEN. NIGHT.

The Kitchen is a melange of sounds and steam and bustle as Brown III, Wysteria, and Mildred work. All now wear "The Magnolias" aprons over their evening clothes.

INT. THE MAGNOLIAS. PARLOR. NIGHT.

Periwinkle gazes at the Portrait of Rachel.

INT. THE MAGNOLIAS. DINING ROOM. NIGHT.

Junior sits in a corner out of the way as Buck places napkins.

Brown III sweeps in for inspection, glass of Port handy.

BROWN III

This will not do at all. These napkins are simply folded! And what's keeping Roberta Lee?

She catches sight of Junior.

BROWN III (CONT'D)

Oh, Buck. Not him.

JUNIOR

(rising)

I'm fine, thank you.

This confirms to Brown III impending disaster as Wysteria pops in.

WYSTERIA

Lucille! Your venison is calling!

Brown III rushes out. Buck goes out in the opposite direction.

Junior remains standing. He eyes the napkins on the table. He goes to the table, picking up one of the napkins.

EXT. THE MAGNOLIAS. FRONT YARD. NIGHT.

Baxter and Miss Hughes stand on the path eyeing the House, so decrepit by day, so transformed by night. Kerosene lamps light the Gallery. The windows blaze cheerily. The white columns are blue. All is stillness and peace except for some low rumbling in the distance.

MISS HUGHES

Are you going to tell them before
or after supper?

BAXTER

After. No reason to ruin what
promises to be a good meal.

MISS HUGHES

I must say that those ladies didn't
give the impression they're about
to be closed down.

BAXTER

They wouldn't. You don't keep a
place like this alive for so long
without being able to deal with
disasters on a regular basis.

MISS HUGHES

I wouldn't call becoming property
of the Federation a disaster.

BAXTER

No, you wouldn't....

Miss Hughes starts towards the House. Baxter remains.

MISS HUGHES

Henry---?

BAXTER

I've bought a thousand years of history. And yet -- sometimes I feel like I'm stealing from my mother.

INT. THE MAGNOLIAS. ENTRANCE HALL. NIGHT.

Brown III rushes into the Hall, removing her apron. She peeks out of the window. She's working on another glass of Port.

EXT. THE MAGNOLIAS. FRONT GALLERY. NIGHT.

Just as Baxter and Miss Hughes step onto the Gallery, Brown III lurches out of the door to greet them.

BROWN III

Ah, Mr. Baxter! Won't you please have a seat out here and enjoy a drink. Buck!

Miss Hughes sits. Baxter, ever the gentleman, remains standing. Thunder. A puff of wind. The lamps flicker.

BROWN III (CONT'D)

Quite a storm brewing. Perhaps the lamplight will be more than decorative this evening.

Buck appears.

BROWN III (CONT'D)

Buck. Drinks for our guests. If you will excuse me, please.

She goes in, leaving the door open to the Hall. We can see her retrieve and down the remainder of her Port as she disappears into---

INT. THE MAGNOLIAS. PARLOR. NIGHT.

Periwinkle has fallen asleep in one of the Antique Chairs, the protective ribbon across her chest as though a seat belt.

Brown III enters. Tries to extract a last drop from her glass. Wakes up Periwinkle.

PERIWINKLE
Dinner---?

BROWN III
You're not supposed to sit in that chair.

PERIWINKLE
People have been sitting in this chair since before the Revolution.

BROWN III
Listen, I want you to go out and keep Mr. Baxter and that girl entertained.

Periwinkle extricates herself from the chair, not particularly motivated.

BROWN III (CONT'D)
Miss Periwinkle: entertain them.

Brown III leaves. Periwinkle contemplates her task.

EXT. THE MAGNOLIAS. LOWER GALLERY. NIGHT.

Periwinkle appears in the doorway. Baxter rises. She stands there a moment longer in silence then bursts into song---

PERIWINKLE
"There's a land that is fairer than
day, And by faith we can see it
afar/ For the Father waits over the
way/ To prepare us a dwelling place
there. In the sweet by and by ---"

BUCK
"...by and by..."

PERIWINKLE
"In the sweet by and by.."

BUCK
"...by and by..."

PERIWINKLE
"We shall meet on that beautiful
shore. In the sweet by and by..."

BUCK
 "...by and by..."

PERIWINKLE & BUCK
 "We shall meet on that beautiful
 shore ---"

Baxter and Miss Hughes applaud.

BAXTER
 I haven't heard that one since...
 well, it reminds me of home.

PERIWINKLE
 It's a good old tune. Thank you,
 Buck.

BUCK
 My pleasure.

PERIWINKLE
 It is a hymn that binds us all
 together.

Baxter moves one of the rockers for Periwinkle.

PERIWINKLE (CONT'D)
 No-no! Mr. Baxter, if you please,
 you will help me to sit upon the
 steps. I simply cannot abide
 rocking furniture.

She is now safely and comfortably on the steps.

PERIWINKLE (CONT'D)
 Thank you. Buck, I will have my
 sherry now, if you please. Mr.
 Baxter?

Baxter indicates he will take a glass. Buck serves them just
 as there is a roll of thunder and flash of lightning.

BUCK
 When it comes, t's gonna day-luge.

Buck goes into the House.

MISS HUGHES
 Maybe we ought to... do what we
 have to do and go.

BAXTER

Afraid we'll be trapped here,
overnight? With Captain Swain?

MISS HUGHES

I meant I'm not prepared to spend
the night.

BAXTER

Strangely, I am. There's a packed
suitcase in my trunk.

Baxter takes a place on the steps beside Periwinkle. He begins his story straightforwardly, ends mystified, somewhat at sea.

BAXTER (CONT'D)

When I was home for my mother's
funeral, before I left, my Aunt
Tilly washed, folded, and packed
all my clothes. I forgot to take
out one suitcase. When I finally
noticed it there I... I didn't take
it out. I don't know why. Just left
it there.

PERIWINKLE

Your mother is telling you
something.

BAXTER

You mean my aunt.

PERIWINKLE

No. I mean your mother. Mr. Baxter!
(raising her glass)
Another, if you please.

As Baxter complies, Miss Hughes uses the moment to get some things straight.

MISS HUGHES

The sideboard you pointed out in
your "tour": you called it
Gorgonzola Gothic: there's no such
thing.

Miss Hughes has greatly underestimated her adversary and Periwinkle takes full advantage. Baxter has already deduced as much and rather enjoys the little scene.

PERIWINKLE
The sideboard you said?

MISS HUGHES
Yes.

PERIWINKLE
Well. What is it after all? Only a piece of furniture. What is important is that it is where it is. And has been for nearly two centuries. That the builders of this house were served from it. That Miss Hominy Ann was most likely courted in its presence and upon it rested her fan or the tips of her splendid fingers.

MISS HUGHES
But you didn't say that.

Baxter hands periwinkle her Sherry.

PERIWINKLE
Thank you. Mr. Baxter, what is the time?

Baxter pulls back his sleeve forgetting his watch is in his pocket and stopped.

MISS HUGHES
Six-twelve.

PERIWINKLE
Miss Hughes, you have thirty minutes, the length of a "tour": kindly tell me everything you know about something you have spent your life studying.

Baxter lifts his glass in tribute.

BAXTER
Touche.

PERIWINKLE
Sherry, Mr. Baxter. Dry sherry.

INT. THE MAGNOLIAS. DINING ROOM. NIGHT.

Brown III closely watches Junior as he moves vases of flowers.

Mildred fiddles with pace-settings. She "discovers" and is amazed by the napkins, which are now folded into the most amazingly complex and beautiful shapes.

MILDRED PIERCE

Why, I haven't seen a fold like this since. Well, I've never seen a fold like this.

Brown III joins in the examination of the napkins.

BROWN III

Did you do this?

Junior nods "yes".

BROWN III (CONT'D)

Mildred, he's one of those idiot savants. We have got ourselves our own little rain boy here.

Wysteria throws open the door for Roberta Lee, now using a walker.

BROWN III (CONT'D)

Roberta Lee! Why, you're lovely. We're all lovely.

Roberta Lee has no time for compliments.

ROBERTA LEE

Candles! Candles everywhere!

Wysteria and Mildred quickly comply.

ROBERTA LEE (CONT'D)

Lucille, open the windows there just a bit and close the curtains. There! Don't you see?

The lacy curtains flutter in the breeze.

BROWN III

Oh yes! Wonderful effect.

Buck enters from the Kitchen.

BROWN III (CONT'D)

(grandly)

The future of The Offspring of The Ladies of The Sacred South is in the balance.

Mildred, mystified, looks up at the windows.

MILDRED PIERCE
What's it doing up there?

Brown III desperately trying to salvage the moment.

BROWN III
Not valence! Balance! Our future is
in the balance.

Roberta Lee takes center stage.

ROBERTA LEE
Ladies! I have taken steps to
insure our success this evening.
But... I cannot tell you what, or
else your knowing of it might spoil
the entire effect.

She motions for Buck to turn off the lights.

The room is transformed into a painting, a portrait of a
moment captured.

BROWN III
(softly)
Buck. Our guests.

EXT. THE MAGNOLIAS. GALLERY. NIGHT.

Buck steps out on the Gallery.

BUCK
Shall we retire to dinner?

The party disappears into the house, Miss Hughes sneaking a
quick snort to brace herself for the foolishness to come.

Buck remains on the Gallery, empty and silent.

A wind kicks up and it starts to rain. He blows out the
lamps. He is distracted by a sound, a movement in the
darkness. It is likely just the wind.

INT. THE MAGNOLIAS. DINING ROOM. NIGHT.

The room glows goldenly. All are seated. There is one
setting unattended.

PERIWINKLE

Mildred, would you say the blessing
please.

Mildred is caught off guard. She is never singled out for
this honor.

MILDRED PIERCE

Me? Oh! I'm not prepared. Oh dear,
my mind has gone quite blank--!
(gathering herself,
singing)
"Night and day, you are the one
Only you beneath the...

BROWN III

--AMEN!

MISS HUGHES

Wonderbar.

MILDRED PIERCE

I.. I'm sorry, I....

BAXTER

(rising)
May I propose a toast: The
Magnolias: may it forever stand.

EXT. THE MAGNOLIAS. NIGHT.

The House, blue in the evening, windows glowing gold, stands
against the wind and rain.

ALL (O.S.)

To The Magnolias!

Into this idyll we notice a DARK FIGURE in a greatcoat,
carrying a lantern coming across the lawn.

INT. THE MAGNOLIAS. DINING ROOM. NIGHT.

Buck ladles soup from a huge tureen barely being held onto
by Junior, Brown III certain of its certain crash.

Roberta Lee is attentive to the sounds of the storm.

EXT. THE MAGNOLIAS. NIGHT.

The Figure, impressively outlined against the House, adjusts
his hat, which is military, and approaches the House.

His gait is indeed military as he steps onto the Gallery, stopping for a moment to adjust his coat, we can see flashes of gold and gray.

As he ascends the steps he promptly trips knocking over the table with the drinks.

INT. THE MAGNOLIAS. DINING ROOM. NIGHT.

Roberta Lee starts out of her chair.

ROBERTA LEE
(fairly convincingly)
My goodness!

WYSTERIA
What was that?

PERIWINKLE
(matter-of-factly)
Sounded like someone falling down
on the gallery.

There is an ominous knocking at the front door: three resounding raps.

ROBERTA LEE
(not quite as convincing)
I wonder who that could be?

Miss Hughes, tasting her soup, rolls her eyes.

Buck starts for the door.

ROBERTA LEE (CONT'D)
No-no! Mildred, would you--?

Again, Mildred is overcome by the attention. She takes especial care to do her task properly.

Baxter rises. All eyes follow Mildred out. We follow her through the Parlor and into the Entrance Hall. The three raps are repeated, Mildred halting at each one.

EXT. THE MAGNOLIAS. LOWER GALLERY. NIGHT.

The door opens. Mildred can only stand there with the door and her mouth open.

INT. THE MAGNOLIAS. ENTRANCE HALL. NIGHT.

The Figure is Jack, well-bearded and dripping wet. As he steps in, Mildred backs away. He removes the greatcoat. He is dressed in a Confederate Captain's uniform.

Relishing his role, he tosses the coat with a flourish toward the banister. Missing.

His attention is caught by the Portrait of the Captain on the Landing. He's done quite a good job.

INT. THE MAGNOLIAS. DINING ROOM. NIGHT.

All wait in silent anticipation for Mildred's return. Except Miss Hughes, still on the soup, pausing only to replenish her wine.

Jack appears at the doorway. Periwinkle slowly comes to her feet, pointing.

PERIWINKLE

Captain -- Roger -- Swain! But
you're a ghost.

JACK

My dear lady! I can assure you I am
not --- a ghost.

With a flourish, he pulls off his gauntlets.

JACK (CONT'D)

Such a disagreeable evening.
(snaps his fingers)
Wine!

Buck brings wine and takes the gauntlets. Miss Hughes, polishing off her wine, jumps to her feet.

MISS HUGHES

What a farce! This is...

She is stopped mid-sentence as Jack takes her into his arms.

JACK

---Hominy Ann! How I've missed
you!

Jack plants a big, dipping wet kiss on Miss Hughes. Upon release, she plops into her chair, too stunned to do or say anything.

We see the expectant room from Jack's POV, ending with Roberta Lee, a little anxious: is he going to freeze?

Until further notice, Jack continues in the grand tradition of small-town community theater.

JACK (CONT'D)
General Stonewall Jackson is dead.
Chancellorsville....

He delivers the following partially singing, partially reciting: stomping around the room.

JACK (CONT'D)
"The muffled drum is beating/
There's a sad and solemn tread/ Our
banner's draped in mourning/As it
shrouds the illustrious dead." But
we whipped 'em! We whipped 'em
good!

He holds out his glass, which Buck promptly refills.

JACK (CONT'D)
I've just seven days before I must
return. To the war. I've been ill
with a fever, you see. I need.
Rest.

Jack is suddenly attuned to unheard sounds from outside.

JACK (CONT'D)
Ladies! You must keep the curtains
closed. There are Yankee scouts in
the area.

ROBERTA LEE
Isn't this exciting?

MILDRED PIERCE
And dangerous!

Jack quickly and gracefully closes the heavier curtains over the lacy ones. Just as he turns back: a FLASH. Mildred has snapped a picture.

Not missing a beat, Jack continues.

JACK
That lightning was too close!

PERIWINKLE

Captain?

Jack fails to make the connection.

ROBERTA LEE

Captain---?

JACK

Oh! Yes?

PERIWINKLE

Will you join us for dinner?

JACK

(with dash)

With pleasure---

Before he can take his place, a lightness and disorientation comes over Jack, just momentarily.

ROBERTA LEE

Is anything the matter?

MILDRED PIERCE

(believing, almost)

It must be the fever.

JACK

Yes. The fever? Yes---!

Jack leaps back into character. Though now he comes perilously close to falling over the edge, even for Little Theater.

JACK (CONT'D)

We were patrolling the south bank of the creek at dusk when we were ambushed. Something exploded over me! I was knocked off my horse...

He somersaults, landing flat on his back. Gasps from the Ladies. Periwinkle a bit skeptical.

JACK (CONT'D)

All around me lay the bloodied and rotting corpses of my fallen comrades! Vultures circled overhead! There was not a living soul within sight! Then I---!

Roberta Lee stands over Jack, still flat on his back.

ROBERTA LEE

Jack---

JACK

I---! I was...!

ROBERTA LEE

---thank you. Thank you so much.

Vaguely aware that he might have gone too far, Jack pulls himself up, Buck handing him a welcome glass of wine. Roberta Lee leads Wysteria and Mildred in applause, joined by Baxter. Brown III quickly calculating how the evening can be saved.

Periwinkle stands, pointing accusationally at Jack.

PERIWINKLE

I was wrong. That is NOT Captain Swain.

(a beat)

The Captain is much taller than this man.

Brown III tries to disappear into her chair.

ROBERTA LEE

Miss Periwinkle, this is Jack.
Jack.

Miss Hughes takes this chance to pour another glass of wine, only her manner has a swagger to it as she playfully swirls the wine around the glass before downing it, then closes her eyes in an inexpressible long-delayed satisfaction in the wine.

Roberta Lee's speech is advanced.

ROBERTA LEE (CONT'D)

Mr. Baxter, we hope you enjoyed our little surprise. This is what we can offer for the Pilgrimage. A fine dinner. A charming setting. An unexpected visitor from our Past.

BAXTER

Yes. Unexpected. Thank you.

Miss Hughes suddenly seems to become aware of the wine glass in her hand. She looks around as though to see if she is in any way the object of attention, which she is not. She sets the glass down.

About the same moment, the swagger of Miss Hughes takes itself up in Jack, who retreats to a niche near the Mantel, a bottle of wine and glass to keep him company.

Miss Hughes, now recovered from her short "spell" enough to keep her mouth shut no longer.

MISS HUGHES

Tell us -- will the part where he
"spurts blood like a fountain" come
before or after the desert?

The Ladies are too kind to even recognize this impertinence but Baxter rises from his chair.

BAXTER

(angrily)

Haven't you any manners? Can you
ever think of anything than you and
your opinion?

(lightly)

Frankly, my dear, no one gives a
damn!

An embarrassed silence ensues.

PERIWINKLE

...and Captain Swain carries a
sword. That sword.

Everyone turns to the Mantel but there is no Sword.

BROWN III

It's gone!

ROBERTA LEE

So it is.

BROWN III

But where has it gone?

PERIWINKLE

(not looking at or
meaning Jack)

Why, Captain Swain, of course.

But everyone else thinks of Jack.

JACK

Me? I don't have it. Never had
it.

PERIWINKLE

It was there for my last tour. I am certain of it.

Brown III is tempted to cover her head with her napkin.

ROBERTA LEE

Well---!

(spinning)

A visitor from the past and a mystery!

MILDRED PIERCE

Perhaps we ought to proceed to the fish course?

Seeing that the evening has reached a portage, Baxter leaves his place, taking a spot near the Mantel.

BAXTER

Ladies --- if you will indulge me. Please. I rather feel like a thief, stealing your hospitality.

WYSTERIA

Nonsense, Mr. Baxter.

ROBERTA LEE

You underestimate our tolerance for youth -- and Yankees.

BAXTER

I am from Kentucky.

PERIWINKLE

Never left the union!

Jack has discovered his reflection in the wine. He stares incredulously, surprised and perplexed by the beard.

BROWN III

I take it that you have something to say, Mr. Baxter?

BAXTER

Yes, I do.... The Georgia Preservation Federation wishes to purchase The Magnolias.

A pause.

ROBERTA LEE
What about the Pilgrimage?

MISS HUGHES
(delightedly)
Pine-hill.

ROBERTA LEE
Oh, the disgrace.

WYSTERIA
Purchase The Magnolias?

Wysteria's words crystallize the matter.

BROWN III
Never! It is simply not for sale.

PERIWINKLE
(firmly/calmly)
Lucille.

Brown III reluctantly resumes her seat.

PERIWINKLE (CONT'D)
Buck. The fish course, if you
please.

Mildred enjoys a moment of surprise and then satisfaction in Periwinkle's decision.

Buck and Junior clear the soup dishes to make way for the next course.

PERIWINKLE (CONT'D)
Mr. Baxter, we will discuss this
matter over a glass of Port, after
supper, following coffee.

The earlier transference of swagger, for lack of a better name at this point, occurs again, this time from Jack back to Miss Hughes.

It happens just as Jack drains a glass of wine, nearly causing him to fall over.

The swagger, well, let's call it for what it is, the spirit of the Captain, takes great delight now in impersonating, through Miss Hughes, a Southern Belle.

Miss Hughes rises, face flushed, fashioning a fan from her napkin.

She sashays to the sideboard, lying aside the napkin and taking up a folding fan. She gently rests her hand on the sideboard then flips open the fan.

JACK (V.O.)

I should have realized at this point that something was going on beyond my riveting performance and the euphoria of too much good wine.

MISS HUGHES

(softly, almost sultrily)
I do believe I shall suffocate in here. Would one of you gentlemen please accompany me to the veranda.

Jack is at her side in a flash, playing along.

JACK

It will be my pleasure, Miss.
(V.O.)
I should have realized it. But I didn't. Not yet.

She clumsily takes his arm and they leave.

INT. THE MAGNOLIAS. KITCHEN. NIGHT.

As Buck prepares the next course to go out, Junior sits on a high stool watching.

BUCK

Tie those shoelaces.

Mildred breezes in, looks into the oven.

MILDRED PIERCE

Three minutes, Buck.

She breezes out.

JUNIOR

They gonna buy this place?

BUCK

Do you care?

Not certain if he does and not inclined to delve, Junior surveys the room.

JUNIOR

But it's always been here.

BUCK

(laughs)

That man wants to buy it. Not to take it.

JUNIOR

Idn't that the same thing?

EXT. THE MAGNOLIAS. LOWER GALLERY. NIGHT.

Though the rain has ended, distant thundering remains.

Jack breathes deeply of the spring freshness. Miss Hughes, still fanning herself, looks Jack up and down.

Jack, flattered at first, senses there might be more than flirting going on, so his defenses are up, but not too.

MISS HUGHES

(circling him)

"Not bad. Not bad. But this has got to go."

She yanks the beard off, most of it comes off, but not all. Jack in some pain.

MISS HUGHES (CONT'D)

"That's better. Yet there's something missing. But what---?"

JACK

Yes! My face! To make a painful story short: I couldn't find any spirit-gum. They don't call it super-glue for nothing! Ow--!

MISS HUGHES

"Let's walk----"

They walk away from the House toward the side yard, Jack gesticulating and informal, Miss Hughes erect, her hands locked behind her back.

JACK

I know you think this is all a bunch of foolishness. Maybe it is. But Captain Swain really did exist. Lived just down the road. That way.

They stop. Enjoy the sight of the House. The Cabin is near.

JACK (CONT'D)
 And surely he must have stood right
 here. Where I stand. Saw what I am
 seeing---

MISS HUGHES
 "Wait here."

Without waiting for a reply, Miss Hughes pivots,
 disappearing.

JACK
 Yeah --- sure.

At a loss for a moment, he remembers his facial pain and
 disordered face, looking around.

JACK (CONT'D)
 Water----

INT. THE MAGNOLIAS. DINING ROOM. NIGHT.

Buck, assisted by Junior, remove the remains of the fish
 course just as Brown III enters with a silver platter.

BROWN III
 The venison---!

BAXTER
 Marvelous!

Wysteria rises to the occasion as the portions are
 distributed.

WYSTERIA
 Now this fellow comes to us
 courtesy Mr. Beezer and the country
 club.

BAXTER
 Really?

WYSTERIA
 Oh yes. This tasty morsel met his
 demise on the fairway of the
 seventh hole, a challenging par
 five with a slight dog-leg to
 the...

PERIWINKLE
 Olivia---

WYSTERIA

It was in season ---

BAXTER

(thoroughly enjoying)
But on the fairway--?

WYSTERIA

Fortunate for us Jerrod Beezer
carries a rifle instead of a
one-iron.

BAXTER

I'm not certain how his playing
partners feel about that but I
certainly approve. Delicious!

INT. THE MAGNOLIAS. UPPER HALL/BEDCHAMBER. NIGHT.

Miss Hughes wanders into the Hall. She pauses for a moment
before opening the door and entering Hominy Ann's
Bedchamber.

It is nearly entirely in darkness, only a bit of light
coming through the window until a candle on the Secretary
suddenly comes to light.

Miss Hughes surveys the room, in particular the portrait of
Hominy and the dress on the bed.

MISS HUGHES

"Some things are as they should
be."

INT. THE MAGNOLIAS. STAIR LANDING. NIGHT.

Slowly descending the stairs, Miss Hughes lightly touches
the wallpaper. She is brought to a stop by the huge painting
of the tall bearded Captain Swain.

MISS HUGHES

"---and others are horribly wrong!"

EXT. THE MAGNOLIAS. SIDE YARD. NIGHT.

Near the Cabin, Jack splashes water on his face from a pail,
trying to feel his way to an orderly face but remnants of
the beard remain.

He notices the figure of Miss Hughes slowly walking through
a low-lying evening mist toward him. She carries the Sword
in its scabbard outstretched before her.

She reaches Jack. She lowers the Saber, pulling it a small way from the scabbard lovingly.

JACK

So there it is. Where did you get it? Where was it? How did you know where it was?

Jack takes it from her, making certain it is the Saber in question.

MISS HUGHES

"I put it there."

JACK

What? But why?

MISS HUGHES

"To be playful. We can be playful. Mostly we're frightful but sometimes we're playful."
(swaggering)

"Nearly caused an apoplexy to the old girls back in there, didn't I?"

She takes the Saber back, skillfully withdrawing it completely from the scabbard.

JACK

Are you playing with my mind or something?

MISS HUGHES

What are you talking about? And what am I doing with this?

JACK

Now wait a minute. I asked you first.

She awkwardly and rather dangerously handles the Saber.

MISS HUGHES

Asked me what first?

Since Jack has made a move towards her, she does manage to get the point of the Saber in his direction. He halts but something is dawning in him.

JACK

Oh ... my ---

MISS HUGHES
Why are you staring at me like
that?

JACK
Hominy Ann?

MISS HUGHES
What?

JACK
No-no.
(slowly)
Miss Rachel---?

MISS HUGHES
Really now. This is pathetic. Keep
your distance! It's not even good
acting.

JACK
Did you or did you not walk out
here with that sword?

MISS HUGHES
Me? Certainly not!
(snapping to attention)
"Indeed I did!"

JACK
(wonderment)
Then indeed it is you. Captain
Roger Swain!

Miss Hughes practically bearhugs Jack.

MISS HUGHES
"Finally!"

She reaches into Jack's pocket for the cigar and pops it
into her mouth.

JACK
I...I can't believe it.
Captain---?

Miss Hughes suddenly discovers herself with her arm around
Jack, whips herself away, spits out the cigar, and slaps
Jack full across the face.

MISS HUGHES

Are you crazy? Just save your
little charade. I'm not the one
you've got to win over.

She turns and speeds away toward the Cabin, going around the corner to the opposite side.

The slap has dislodged more of the remaining beard, leaving the facial hair very much like the Captain's.

Jack rubs his face, smiling. Picks up the cigar, sticking it between his teeth. Laughs. He sees the Saber on the ground. Seriousness comes over him. He gently picks it up, slowly removing the Saber from its scabbard, holding it aloft in the suddenly appearing moonlight.

He takes in the House in its misty splendor then starts toward the Lower Gallery.

EXT. THE MAGNOLIAS. CABIN. NIGHT.

Miss Hughes, recovering her composure, leans with her back against the brick wall of the Cabin, arms outspread, hands touching the bricks.

MISS HUGHES

Idiots! History is too important to
be left to amateurs. Soon you will
be mine.

INT. THE MAGNOLIAS. PARLOR. NIGHT.

The dinner party are settling into the Parlor. Buck pours coffee from a silver service. Periwinkle is at the window. Baxter examines a piece of glassware.

Wysteria delivers Baxter his coffee.

BAXTER

Thank you. Is this, by any chance,
an ashtray?

WYSTERIA

(laughing)
Not by chance but by design.

This is a minor revelation to Baxter.

Wysteria lays a gentle hand on his arm.

WYSTERIA (CONT'D)

And you may even use it.

Once more, Baxter goes to look at his watch, this time, though remembering before he raises his cuff.

Buck presents him with a cigar. Wysteria uses a table lighter to light the cigar.

WYSTERIA (CONT'D)

The smell brings back memories of my late husband. He so enjoyed a smoke in the evenings....

Baxter settles back, smoking, Wysteria takes a place on the sofa admiringly watching.

INT. THE MAGNOLIAS. ENTRANCE HALL. NIGHT.

Buck comes into the Hall. He notices the sheet music on the piano, stopping to leaf through several pieces, finally settling on "Goober Peas". Humming it, he goes to the window and looks out.

EXT. THE MAGNOLIAS. LOWER GALLERY. NIGHT.

Jack, relaxed and confident, paces, puffing away on the cigar. His attire, now, seems to have been ever so subtly transformed into genuineness. The Saber rests on the railing.

Buck comes out from the House.

BUCK

Jack! What do you think yore doin'?

Jack stops in his tracks. Blows a great cloud of smoke. He goes into a coughing and choking fit ending on the floor eye-to-butt with the cigar.

JACK

Was I smokin' --- that?!

Buck slowly reaches down, taking up the still burning cigar, bringing it to his lips.

BUCK

(drawling)

"Indeed you were ----"

Buck grips the cigar in his teeth. He takes a big draw, suddenly noticing his hand when he takes it out of his mouth. He stares at both hands now.

BUCK (CONT'D)
 (still drawling)
 "I do believe I have gone too far
 this time."

Junior comes out with a big glass of lemonade which he intends to sip as long as he can.

Buck seems to be the only one who is almost instantly aware of having been, however fleetingly, the Captain.

Jack expertly attaches the scabbard to his belt.

JACK
 "There! Now I am complete."

BUCK
 Are you? Complete?

JACK
 "What do you mean by that, boy?"

JUNIOR
 Hay, I didn't say nothin'..

BUCK
 He means me, Palmer.

JACK
 "That's right, I mean you. Now get
 me some wine and explain yourself."

Buck is a little unsteady but he pours and hands Jack a glass.

BUCK
 Palmer, you best go in the kitchen.

JUNIOR
 (under his breath, as he
 goes)
 Man, this is a weird place.

Jack drinks deeply.

BUCK
 Why have you returned?

JACK
 (unhesitating)
 "I never left."

BUCK
 How much do you know?

JACK
 (uncertain & hesitant)
 "I...I know only what was."

BUCK
 Can you know what is?

JACK
 "No. I cannot know."
 (angrily whips out the
 Saber)
 "Yes! I cannot know."
 (resheathes the Saber)
 I am... powerless."

Jack turns to go. Stops.

JACK (CONT'D)
 "Did we win?"

Buck is silent.

Jack descends the steps and disappears into the dark. Very distant thunder.

INT. THE MAGNOLIAS. KITCHEN. NIGHT.

Junior sits on a high stool nursing his lemonade. Miss Hughes enters from the outside.

She is already plotting the changes to be made. She opens cabinets, one being filled with nothing but bottles of Port.

MISS HUGHES
 Figures....

INT. THE MAGNOLIAS. PARLOR. NIGHT.

The group have settled down with coffee, Wysteria still enjoying Baxter enjoying his cigar.

Periwinkle initiates the conversation with a firm return of her cup to its saucer.

PERIWINKLE

Shall we get down to business?

BROWN III

Miss Periwinkle! There are five of us Offspring of the Ladies of the Sacred South and I, for one, will not entertain the idea of our selling The Magnolias.

WYSTERIA

Quite unthinkable!

PERIWINKLE

Indeed it is. But how will we survive?

Miss Hughes enters from the Kitchen as Baxter removes an envelope from his pocket.

BAXTER

By accepting this.

MISS HUGHES

Ah! The third envelope---

BROWN III

The third---?

MISS HUGHES

Yes. The other two, which I have here, contain the results of the inspections of this place by the Fire Marshal and Building Inspector.

PERIWINKLE

Have we been inspected?

BROWN III

Unfortunately, yes, and we have been found --- wanting.

PERIWINKLE

Wanting what?

WYSTERIA

Everything.

MISS HUGHES

But this place will want no more
with this...

(takes the envelope &
peeks in)

---check.

WYSTERIA

You can't buy history.

MISS HUGHES

(proudly)

It's Mr. Baxter's specialty.

BROWN III

Specialty? Sir, you are here under
false pretenses.

This accusation weighs heavily on Baxter but he rallies,
taking the envelope from Miss Hughes, placing it on the
table as no one will accept it.

BAXTER

For that I do apologize. But I have
here a fair and generous offer.

A pause. None of the Ladies will budge.

MILDRED PIERCE

Shouldn't we at least look at it?

Jack enters, followed by Buck.

ROBERTA LEE

Jack---?

MILDRED PIERCE

(clasping her hands)

The Captain has returned!

PERIWINKLE

(under her breath)

Indeed he has----

As all attention has turned upon him, Jack summons himself
up to the moment, surveying the room, his hand upon the
Saber. He whips it from the scabbard.

A sudden wind extinguishes most of the candles, which subtly
re-light themselves in advance of Mildred's increasingly
shaking hand.

JACK (V.O.)

Now I've been known to do some pretty crazy things to attract attention and, believe me, I'd like to take complete credit for a great performance --- but....

Jack places the Saber on the table on top of the envelope.

JACK (CONT'D)

"The night before my wedding with Hominy Ann I had a premonition. A dream. I was dead. Dead! Killed on the field of battle."

INT. PINEHILL. BEDCHAMBER. NIGHT. THE PAST.

The Captain splashes water on his face, looking at his reflection in the mirror above the washstand.

CAPTAIN SWAIN

I must do something for Hominy Ann just in case....

EXT. THE MAGNOLIAS. FRONT LAWN. NIGHT. THE PAST.

The Captain, lantern in hand, stands gazing at the house, the white columns blue in the moonlight.

JACK (V.O.)

"No matter who wins this war, times will be hard."

The Captain removes a bandanna from his pocket and places it on the ground. He unfolds it, rings and jewels sparkling in the lamplight.

CAPTAIN SWAIN

These are to preserve your future comfort and happiness against all trials which you may encounter.

INT. THE MAGNOLIAS. UPPER BEDCHAMBER. NIGHT. THE PAST.

Moonlight bathes the room and the bed where Hominy sleeps peacefully radiant and unaware behind mosquito netting surrounding the bed.

The Captain parts the netting and ever so gently kisses Hominy Ann.

CAPTAIN SWAIN

(whispering)

My dear wife. How strange it sounds! And yet in mere hours you will be so.

INT. THE MAGNOLIAS. UPPER BEDCHAMBER. NIGHT.

The room is still and silent. A candle on the secretary has nearly burned down to nothing.

A candle on the Secretary has It sputters.

INT. THE MAGNOLIAS. PARLOR. NIGHT.

All are in rapt attention to Jack, excepting Miss Hughes, who is curiously attentive to the others' rapt attention.

JACK

"I never got the chance to tell her about the jewels. Had I only told her--! Had I only shouted out where they were! Had I only...! Told her! Before I...died."

Toward the end, it is a struggle between Jack and the Captain, Jack finally collapsing onto the floor, exhausted.

The Ladies surround Jack, still flat on his back.

WYSTERIA

Where are they?

BROWN III

(kicking him)

Where did you hide them?

ROBERTA LEE

Tell us!

Jack tries to sit up.

JACK

Tell you... tell you what?

BROWN III

Where did you hide the jewels?

JACK

Me? Hide jewels? What jewels? What are you talking about?

BROWN III

Show us where they are and we'll
use them to save the house!

MISS HUGHES

Where's a drama critic when you
really need one?

Buck brings Jack a glass of wine.

BUCK

(to Jack)

Izzat what they call method acting?

JACK

I don't know. But I was great.
Wasn't I? There was a madness to
it. Wasn't there?

(struggles to his feet)

Something happened out there. I
think it was --- the Captain.

MISS HUGHES

He made a grab at me and I slapped
him. That's what happened out
there.

MILDRED PIERCE

We're saved!

BROWN III

What?

MILDRED PIERCE

The jewels! In the sword.

MISS HUGHES

Actually, it's a saber.

BROWN III

Yes! Oh, Mildred, you're right!
Captain Swain hid the jewels in the
sword...

WYSTERIA

---and left it under Hominy's
bed...

MILDRED PIERCE

---but was killed before he could
tell her.

BROWN III

But why didn't she mention it in her memoirs?

ROBERTA LEE

She couldn't have known they were in there---

MILDRED PIERCE

....then they must still be in there....

Periwinkle lifts the Saber from the table, handing it to Baxter.

He unsheathes it. Discovers that the handle can be unscrewed. There is a chamber within from which he extracts a bandana which he lays on the table. He carefully opens the bandana, which encloses jewels.

Junior pushes his way through to the table.

JUNIOR

Man! Rad! Them things really real? Awesome.

BROWN III

These are our salvation!

ROBERTA LEE

This is what they were intended for.

WYSTERIA

Yes. To ensure the continued survival of The Magnolias.

General Huzzahs all around, the Ladies congratulating Jack. Periwinkle and Baxter seem to share a moment as Miss Hughes eagerly approaches Baxter.

BAXTER

Ladies! My congratulations!

MISS HUGHES

(whispers to Baxter)
Waitaminate! Those jewels don't even belong---

Baxter stops Miss Hughes.

MILDRED PIERCE

A toast---!

Buck has already wheeled the Port Cart in preparation for the evening after-coffee round and all quickly secure glasses.

BROWN III

To The Offspring of The Ladies of
The Sacred South---

WYSTERIA

To The Magnolias---

MILDRED PIERCE

To...to---

JACK

---Captain Roger Swain!

ROBERTA LEE

To Miss Hominy Ann Hampton: "A
widow before she was ever a bride."

As the Port is enjoyed, Mildred comes to a realization which she seems to confirm by a careful examination of the jewels.

Miss Hughes, meanwhile, is mystified at Baxter's seeming acquiescence in the proceedings.

MILDRED PIERCE

OH MY! Oh --- my....

At this, Periwinkle relaxes into a knowing smile.

BROWN III

(a little annoyed)
What is it, Mildred?

MILDRED PIERCE

(tentatively)
"...a widow before she was ever a
bride----"?

ROBERTA LEE

(unwillingly)
Oh my....

BROWN III

What? What is it? What are you
talking about?

MILDRED PIERCE
 Hominy Ann never married the
 Captain.

WYSTERIA
 Oh my. Then these belong with the
 Captain's Plantation---

PERIWINKLE
 --- Pinehill.

A silence of depression engulfs the Ladies as they return
 the jewels, with a fond farewell, to the bandana.

JACK
 Then there's no happy ending?
 That's why I prefer the stage.

BROWN III
 We'll have a meeting to elect a
 committee to form a delegation to
 go to -- Pinehill. To return these.

The Ladies help themselves to more Port to drown their
 sorrow.

PERIWINKLE
 (to Baxter)
 Why didn't you speak up? Certainly
 you knew.

Miss Hughes jumps into Baxter's hesitation.

MISS HUGHES
 I would have but he stopped me.

PERIWINKLE
 I am not surprised you find us to
 be stubborn, even obstinate,
 perhaps naive; but that you'd think
 us dishonest is disappointing to
 me, Mr. Baxter.

Miss Hughes snatches up the envelope.

MISS HUGHES
 Perhaps the numbers on this check
 will ease your disappointment.

PERIWINKLE

That would be impossible, my dear.
Buck! Push the Port to the Gallery
for our guests. Ladies! Shall we
consider this?

Meaning the envelope which she holds.

EXT. THE MAGNOLIAS. LOWER GALLERY. NIGHT.

Baxter sits on the Rocking Chair, smoking and drinking Port.
Miss Hughes paces just out of range of his smoke.

MISS HUGHES

Why did you stop me from telling
them?

BAXTER

They knew.

MISS HUGHES

Were they going to speak up?

BAXTER

(regretfully)

But they did. And gave up their
last chance to hold onto this
place.

MISS HUGHES

You're not going native are you?

Baxter laughs, grinding out his cigarette in yet another
ashtray.

BAXTER

Hardly.

INT. THE MAGNOLIAS. PARLOR. NIGHT.

The Ladies, with Buck's help have created a semi-circle of
seating for their impromptu meeting.

EXT. THE MAGNOLIAS. LOWER GALLERY. NIGHT.

Jack comes out opening a bottle of beer.

BAXTER

Quite a performance.

Jack takes an exaggerated bow.

MISS HUGHES
It was poorly conceived,
historically marginal, and
theatrically unconvincing.

JACK
A mixed review!

INT. THE MAGNOLIAS. PARLOR. NIGHT.

Mildred peruses the check.

MILDRED PIERCE
Oh my goodness gracious!

She passes the check to Wysteria, who gasps.

ROBERTA LEE
---speechless?

Wysteria nods her head "yes", handing the check to Roberta Lee, who counts the figures. Her mouth opens. She hands it to Brown III, whose knees weaken but she recovers, going for some Port.

BROWN III
But what's to become of us?

Brown III hands the check to Periwinkle.

PERIWINKLE
Perhaps we have served our purpose.

Periwinkle shows the check to Buck.

BUCK
"Amazing grace...."

PERIWINKLE
I will see Mr. Baxter in Hominy
Ann's bedchamber.

EXT. THE MAGNOLIAS. LOWER GALLERY. NIGHT.

Baxter holds the ashtray in his hand, smiling.

BAXTER
(almost to himself)
If such things happened as appeared
to happen this evening... I think
this would be the sort of place
they'd happen.

Buck comes out, indicating Baxter should follow him. They go into the House.

Jack quickly finishes his beer.

Miss Hughes finishes checking her phone messages.

MISS HUGHES

That saber's been hanging in there probably since the Civil War. How did you know about the jewels?

JACK

I didn't.

MISS HUGHES

That's impossible.

JACK

Yes! Isn't that wonderful! Now if you'll excuse me.

He vaults over the railing perfectly.

JACK (CONT'D)

I've got a date with Richard the Third.

Jack leaps and tumbles across the lawn.

JACK (CONT'D)

"Now is the winter of our discontent made glorious summer..."
(singing)

"The hills are alive with the sound of music---!"

As Jack fades visually and vocally, Miss Hughes entertains a moment of contemplation...

MISS HUGHES

"...the sort of a place they'd happen."

EXT. THE MAGNOLIAS. LOWER GALLERY. DAY. THE PAST.

Large potted plants crowd the Gallery. Bamboo shades screen out the sun.

Nestled in the greenery, sitting at a small wooden table on which sits a typewriter, is ancient Hominy Ann. She is pecking at the keys with a couple of fingers.

A middle-aged black woman, BUELA, pours coffee. Hominy stops typing.

HOMINY
Buela, is it worthwhile?

BUELA
What?

HOMINY
---yesterday.

BUELA
(laughing)
Miss Hominy, I had the biggest
headache I done evah had yes'erday.

HOMINY
No. I mean long ago.

BUELA
Long ago don't be no more.

HOMINY
It's in our memory.

BUELA
Well, times is always betta in ya
head.

HOMINY
As long as its not aching.

They laugh. Buela takes away the coffee service.

INT. THE MAGNOLIAS. PARLOR. DAY. THE PAST.

As Buela passes through the room with the service, there is
a crash.

BUELA
Lordy!

She looks around and spies a hole where a nail once held up
the Saber, which has fallen to the floor.

BUELA (CONT'D)
Another thing to do---

She plops the Saber on a chair and hurries off.

EXT. THE MAGNOLIAS. LOWER GALLERY. DAY. THE PAST.

Hominy throws herself into a last flurry of tapping.

A ten year old boy, YOUNG BUCK, peeks through the palm and fern fronds, fascinated by the old lady at the typewriter.

Seeing Buck, Hominy stops typing.

HOMINY

It's called a type-writer.

She motions for Young Buck to come out from the plants.

She gathers him between herself and the typewriter. She places his finger on a key and helps him to tap out three letters, a space, and three letters.

INSERT: THE PAGE

Following the last paragraph is the title: "My Life In The Sacred South". Young Buck has typed "THE ENF".

The carriage is backed up and the "F" is x'ed out and the "D" added.

HOMINY (CONT'D)

There! Not a perfect ending but I never expected it would be.

INT. THE MAGNOLIAS. UPSTAIRS BEDCHAMBER. NIGHT.

Buck escorts Baxter into the room. Periwinkle is seated near the window. Buck leaves.

Periwinkle summons her hard, impenetrable self.

PERIWINKLE

Mr. Baxter.

BAXTER

Yes ma'am?

This simple courtesy completely melts her.

PERIWINKLE

(under her breath)

"Yes ma'am...."

She manages to pull herself up.

PERIWINKLE (CONT'D)

The Magnolias cannot exist without
The Ladies. We are it's spirit. And
I am now convinced that The
Magnolias cannot continue without
-- you.

Baxter starts to protest but she silences him with a wave of
her hand.

PERIWINKLE (CONT'D)

And the question before us is: What
are we going to do about it?

BAXTER

I'm not certain I accept your
premise.

PERIWINKLE

Would you at least accept a glass
of Port?

She produces a bottle from a knitting basket beside the
chair and motions for Baxter to procure glasses from the
bureau.

Baxter pours.

PERIWINKLE (CONT'D)

To the brim, Mr. Baxter.... To a
pleasant glass of Port.... I owned
this place once. Inherited it. I
was young. Uninterested. I never
saw the place. I sold it to a group
of women calling themselves The
Offspring of The Ladies of The
Sacred South, every "T" of each
"The" capitalized, by the way.
(tasting deeply of Port)
Many years later I got an
invitation to Mortification Day and
I came. I've been here ever since.

Periwinkle finishes her wine, Baxter re-fills it.

PERIWINKLE (CONT'D)

I am not certain what was lacking
in my life that this place has
supplied.

She reaches out to open the window, Baxter helping her.

PERIWINKLE (CONT'D)

There is a peacefulness here.
Security. A feeling that if the
lives of those who are long dead
are remembered, somehow there's
hope that our own lives will not be
forgotten.

BAXTER

Immortality---?

PERIWINKLE

No. Just a lone flower on a simple
grave at regular intervals. No. Not
immortality. Remembrance.

Baxter is drawn to Hominy Ann's portrait.

BAXTER

I can't help but observe that so
many houses like this have become
museums because the families which
built them died out. Had she only
married....

PERIWINKLE

(to herself)

Married--? Mr. Baxter!

She rises from the chair, offering Baxter her arm.

PERIWINKLE (CONT'D)

Downstairs, if you please.

Baxter reaches for the Port.

PERIWINKLE (CONT'D)

No-no! Champagne will be in order.

INT. THE MAGNOLIAS. KITCHEN. NIGHT.

Junior is up to his elbows in dirty dishes. Buck enters with
more.

BUCK

You did well, Palmer Motley,
Junior.

JUNIOR

Kin I go then?

Junior pulls his arms from the soapy water of the sink.

BUCK
 (resigned but
 disappointed)
 You can go if you want.

Junior is ecstatic. He starts rolling down his sleeves but as suddenly stops, seeing Buck holding still more dishes. He pushes his sleeves back up.

JUNIOR
 Maybe a few more---

Nearly bursting at the major event in Junior's life, Buck deposits the dishes in the sink and joins Junior in the task.

INT. THE MAGNOLIAS. PARLOR. NIGHT.

The Ladies are huddled in conference while Baxter smokes a cigarette, looking out of the window.

ROBERTA LEE
 What?

BROWN III
 You can't be serious!

MILDRED PIERCE
 Are you insane?

PERIWINKLE
 Yes! I'm as crazy as Palmer Motley
 and his tomatoes.

WYSTERIA
 It goes against the very nature of
 The Offspring.

PERIWINKLE
 Nevertheless. What do you say?

Roberta Lee looks over in Baxter's direction at the opposite side of the room. He turns and smiles.

ROBERTA LEE
 I say we have nothing to lose.

BROWN III
 We have everything to lose!

Miss Hughes, tired of waiting, enters.

Buck and Junior enter, with desert -- and more Port.

The Ladies put their heads together for a final tally. Brown III finding herself the sole dissenter, gives way.

Brown III defers to Periwinkle, who insists that Brown III be their representative. They form into a formidable phalanx of decision.

Buck and Junior head back into the kitchen.

PERIWINKLE

Oh Buck! Please stay. This involves us all. Now. Lucille, if you please---

BROWN III

As President of The Offspring of The Ladies of The Sacred South, I offer you our proposal.

A pause. Understandable, as Brown III is expecting a reply from Baxter, who is blissfully unaware but gradually feels that somehow his is expected to say something.

BAXTER

Yes? Then what is it?

BROWN III

(importantly)
Our Proposal.

BAXTER

Ah! Which is---

PERIWINKLE

Mister Baxter. We are proposing: Marriage.

BAXTER

....What?

PERIWINKLE

To you.

BAXTER

You mean...? What? What do you mean?

ROBERTA LEE

A marriage between The Offspring. And you.

BAXTER
Let me see if I...

ROBERTA LEE
We don't want your Georgia
Preservation Federation---

WYSTERIA
---or its money.

Brown III places the envelope on the table.

MILDRED PIERCE
It's you we want, Mr. Baxter.

MISS HUGHES
Now I know why they keep asking for
the Port.

Miss Hughes snatches up the envelope.

PERIWINKLE
As our dowry, we offer the land,
the house, and everything in it...

MILDRED PIERCE
---and us!

MISS HUGHES
(to Baxter)
I think they mean it.
(to Ladies)
You expect he's going to send me
back to Atlanta and just... stay
here?

THE LADIES
"We do."

PERIWINKLE
In fact, we insist.

A pause.

MISS HUGHES
Henry---?

Henry and Buck exchange looks. Buck breaks into a big smile,
then laughter.

BUCK

Ladies! You done it! You gone and done it!

BAXTER

Right you are, Buck. Ladies! Your proposal is something I won't take literally of course. But I will take it back to Atlanta with me.

PERIWINKLE

Why do you intentionally misunderstand us?

BAXTER

Because I'm not ready to give up all of what I've come to know as the proper and professional approach to history because of an evening's entertainment, splendid as it was.

INT. THE MAGNOLIAS. ENTRANCE HALL. NIGHT.

Mildred sneaks out of the Parlor into the empty Hall and up the stairs.

Baxter and Miss Hughes are escorted out by the Ladies.

BAXTER

Thank you, Ladies. And Buck. I am certain something can be worked out. I'll be back.

Baxter and Miss Hughes leave.

After a moment, Wysteria sits at the piano.

WYSTERIA

How about a song?

The moment is too solemn. Buck finally steps in.

BUCK

How 'bout "Goober Peas" -- if you please.

Wysteria begins playing, Buck singing, the Ladies joining in individually, with little enthusiasm.

EXT. THE MAGNOLIAS. FRONT LAWN. NIGHT.

Miss Hughes leads as they work their way to the parking lot. Baxter is momentarily stopped by the singing.

MISS HUGHES

Do I need to stop your ears with wax?

BAXTER

(laughing)

No.

INT. THE MAGNOLIAS. ENTRANCE HALL. NIGHT.

Their first chorus of "Goober Peas" finishes, Buck encouraging a second but stops suddenly by the sight of a FIGURE on the stairs.

The singing comes to a stop.

The Figure is wearing the Wedding Gown of Hiss Hominy. Whoever it is, certainly makes a grand and evocative statement, except for the pillow case over its head.

FIGURE

I can't see.

BROWN III

Mildred---?

The Figure pulls off the pillow case.

MILDRED PIERCE

There wasn't a veil.

PERIWINKLE

Too late, Mildred. He's left.

MILDRED PIERCE

Too bad.

(meaning more than
"liked")

I liked him.

EXT. THE MAGNOLIAS. PARKING LOT. NIGHT.

Baxter stands at the passenger side of the car with the key ready to unlock it for Miss Hughes.

BAXTER

You know how you feel when you find yourself in church when you haven't been in years -- and you're sitting there and the smell is so soothing and you hear the music and it sounds just like you remember it being and then you walk out into the sunshine and you vow to yourself from now on you're going to start going to church again---?

MISS HUGHES

I never go to church.

Baxter unlocks and opens the passenger door.

MISS HUGHES (CONT'D)

Oh, I need my purse out of the trunk.

They go around to the rear of the car.

BAXTER

You know, I was this close to taking them up on their -- offer.

MISS HUGHES

What stopped you?

BAXTER

I needed a sign. Not a spirit. Or evidence of a spirit. Something... real. Something... actual.

EXT. THE MAGNOLIAS. LOWER GALLERY. NIGHT.

The Ladies have come out on the Gallery to take the night air, but still hoping that Baxter will not leave.

Buck picks up and straightens.

MILDRED PIERCE

I really did like him....

She folds the pillow case and goes into the House.

WYSTERIA

He had manners, he did....

She sighs and also goes into the House.

BROWN III

Once he sees the Atlanta skyline
all this will seem a dream. He'll
doubt we ever existed.

ROBERTA LEE

Well, Ladies, good evening. Another
day in the history of The
Magnolias....

Brown III and Roberta take each others' arm and go into the House.

Periwinkle bids them good evening and sits on the steps.

EXT. THE MAGNOLIAS. PARKING LOT. NIGHT.

Baxter stands over the unopened trunk.

MISS HUGHES

Henry---? Sometime tonight--?

He snaps out of his reverie and opens the trunk. Miss Hughes retrieves her purse. She goes around and into the car. Baxter remains with his hand on the lip, then looks down into the trunk.

We see the Suitcase he is staring at.

EXT. THE MAGNOLIAS. LOWER GALLEY. NIGHT.

From Periwinkle's point of view we see hear the car start, lights come on, and drive out of the lot, and away.

PERIWINKLE

Have a glass of Port with me, Buck.

BUCK

Oh, no ma'am.

PERIWINKLE

I insist.

Buck pours for both, they touch glasses, and enjoy a quiet moment.

A night Mist creeps along the lawn.

Appearing out of the mist is a FIGURE, walking toward the House. As it breaks into the light from the Gallery, we see that it is Baxter, carrying the suitcase. He walks directly up to the stops and sets the Suitcase down.

BAXTER

It seemed you knew about everything from the moment I set foot on the place.

PERIWINKLE

Pure luck and blind faith.

BAXTER

Faith in what?

PERIWINKLE

That's what you've returned for, isn't it? To answer that question.

BAXTER

Yes.

PERIWINKLE

And that's why you'll stay.

Periwinkle rises with Buck's help.

PERIWINKLE (CONT'D)

Buck, I will rest for half an hour, then you may drive me home.

She starts into the House.

BAXTER

But---!

She stops and turns sweetly to Baxter.

PERIWINKLE

Yes---?

BAXTER

What have I done? We've got nothing. This place needs everything.

PERIWINKLE

You need a glass of Port, Mr. Baxter.

She disappears into the House.

BAXTER

I need a barrel of Port. Buck, can you put me up for a few days?

Buck picks up the Suitcase.

BUCK
It will be my pleasure.

Buck and Baxter walk away into the rising mist, gradually disappearing, humming "Goober Peas".

INT. THE MAGNOLIAS. UPPER BEDCHAMBER. NIGHT.

The room is still and silent, only lit from a single candle nearly burned out.

The door slowly opens. Jack enters and stands erect, facing the Portrait of Hominy Ann. He raises a glass of Port, silently toasting her.

His shoulders slump as the flame of the candle dies, the room nearly completely dark except for a shaft of moonlight which illuminates a snake of smoke rising to the ceiling.

EXT. MAIN STREET. DAY.

TITLE: "THREE WEEKS LATER"

Lounging, standing on his skateboard, large placard in hand, on a streetcorner, is Junior, on the look-out.

His quarry lumbers into town. It is a Tour Bus, a green and flowery "Spring Pilgrimage" artfully emblazoned on its sides stops at the corner.

Junior flashes the placard to the Bus. It reads "Pilgrimage".

The door opens. Palmer gestures and then jumps in.

EXT. BASEBALL FIELD. DAY.

A pick-up game of softball is underway as Palmer Motley waters his tomatoes, which have grown considerably, intertwining themselves into the backstop.

The Bus rounds a corner and passes the field.

EXT. MAGNOLIA WAY. DAY.

As the Bus turns onto Magnolia Way, we see Jack, in costume, standing in the bed of his truck. He smartly doffs his cap and gestures grandly, indicating the Bus's direction.

JACK (V.O.)

I think that the very first words I spoke were a lie. This is not a story about the past. This is a story about the future. And it is just beginning.

INT. OFFICE HALL. DAY.

A Hall of many frosted-glass office doors. A SIGN PAINTER is busily scraping "Henry Baxter Historic Acquisitions" off one of the doors.

The door opens and Miss Hughes hands the Sign Painter a paper.

MISS HUGHES

All block letters, please.

She returns into the office, closing the door.

EXT. THE MAGNOLIAS. FRONT GATE. DAY.

Baxter stands at the Front Gate. The azaleas are in full bloom.

The Bus pulls up. Junior pops out, immediately skateboarding away. Baxter enters the Bus.

INT. TOUR BUS. DAY.

Taking the microphone from the driver, Baxter goes instantly into "tour mode".

BAXTER

Do you know what history is? ...
Good! Because this evening you're going to find out. The same way I did.

EXT. THE MAGNOLIAS. FRONT LAWN. DAY.

Baxter leads a long line of the GUESTS down the path towards the House.

To one side of the path we see a newly-planted Magnolia Tree. To the other side Buck digs the hole for its companion.

Standing on the Lower Gallery are The Ladies. They are singing "Goober Peas" as the Guests file past and into the House.

T H E E N F D