

SCENE 1

Singing/humming "In the Sweet By and By" Buck is preparing the Dining Room for a gathering.

Coming down the aisle or entering off the stage are Miss Periwinkle and Miss Wysteria, in their Sunday clothes, purses on arms, and carrying casseroles.

They stop before entering the house to admire a nearby sight.

PERIWINKLE

Miss Wysteria, Palmer Motley's redbud tree is coming out! That's a certain sign Spring is here!

WYSTERIA

That tree is completely mad. I've seen it blooming at Christmas and there Palmer Motley would be - planting his precious *tomatoes*.

PERIWINKLE

Palmer has a lot of faith in that tree.

WYSTERIA

And it lets him down almost every year!

PERIWINKLE

But he sticks by that tree through everything, Miss Wysteria, and when it correctly heralds spring it rewards him with the *first* and most *splendid tomatoes* of the season.

They ascend the steps to the porch.

PERIWINKLE (CONT'D)

I must rest....

(she rests standing)

I think I like the harbingers of spring more than spring itself.... I'm ready.

They enter the house. Buck takes the casseroles from them.

WYSTERIA

Oh, Buck, are we early for the meeting?

BUCK

Oh no ma'am. Just gettin' things set up.

Mrs. Laurence Worthington-Brown III has breezed up the aisle, stopping

to note something on the ground at
the steps, and into the house.

BROWN III

I thought I was late.

PERIWINKLE

We thought we were early.

WYSTERIA

Then I guess we're all on time.

Brown III expertly starts the meeting
with an authoritative banging of
her gavel.

BROWN III

I call the bi-monthly Desert Meeting of The Offspring of The
Ladies of The Sacred South to order!

WYSTERIA

Dessert? Isn't this the Covered Dish Meeting?

PERIWINKLE

Yes, isn't this the second Wednesday?

BROWN III

No, it's the first Tuesday. Isn't it? Buck?

BUCK

It's the third Thursday. Of a five Sunday month. In the
spring.

BROWN III

And what is that?

Buck motions toward the Portrait of
a scowling hard-boned woman in black.
The Ladies rise in unison some of
them placing a hand over the heart,
some saluting.

THE LADIES

"Hard tack and chicory coffee---"

WYSTERIA

In honor of Miss Rachel's "mortification at the hands of the
yankee invaders".

BROWN III

God bless Miss Rachel.

PERIWINKLE

Damn the yankees!

BUCK

(carried away)

Glory Hallelujah! so to speak....

Buck offers up a tray of "hard tack",
which the Ladies are reluctant to
partake of.

BUCK (CONT'D)

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

BROWN III

(worried)

Oh, I wish the other Ladies were here.

A phone rings, annoyingly loud.
Brown answers it. Periwinkle will
forsake the tea cakes for something
from Brown's desert bag.

BROWN III

Magnolia Grove Plantation... Oh, Roberta Lee!... What? Oh,
but you've got to come. This is an important meeting. An
important meeting. So, what is the matter?... Gallbladder?
Didn't you have it removed last year?...Yes, I'm sure that's
something you'd remember but... Oh all right but Roberta Lee
Townsend I am very disappointed with you.

(she hangs up)

Buck, it looks like it might rain. Go out and roll up my
car windows. And there is a cigarette butt on the steps.
And Buck! I need a drink. Buck: a *drink*.

Buck fetches the drink. The phone
rings again. In the meantime,
Periwinkle has taken advantage of
the lull to transfer into the
cushioned and roped-off fancy Chair,
where she will nap.

BROWN III (CONT'D)

(answering)

Magnolia Grove Plantation... Mildred! Mildred Pierce, not
you too... Oh, Roberta Lee's gallbladder... I know. That's
what I told her but she still maintains she's never had it
out... Well, I'm not sure if they *can* grow back... Now,
Mildred...Not another funeral! You've got to start moving
in younger circles... Wake - funeral, it's all the...what?
A canasta wake?... Well it is simply going to be a disaster
thank you so very much for helping.

Hangs up sharply as Buck returns
with the drink.

WYSTERIA

Cancellations?

BROWN III

(plucking the drink from the tray)

Desertions.

WYSTERIA

I'd feel a lot better if Roberta Lee was here.

BROWN III

We'll have to do with who we've got. Today we are to be visited by a man from the Georgia Historical Society. His purpose is to determine our suitability for inclusion in a Pilgrimage of Historical Homes. I had counted on a show of strength by The Offspring to impress this man with the vitality of our organization.

WYSTERIA

(indicating Periwinkle)

Well, Lucille, there goes vitality. And, besides, Pinehill always gets chosen for these things.

BROWN III

Oh Pinehill! What does Pinehill have that we haven't?

WYSTERIA

Youth, hundreds of volunteers, a roof which doesn't leak, historians, billboards, and a full-color brochure.

This brings both back to earth,
particularly Brown.

BROWN III

Why do we continue to delude ourselves? We're not a *meeting* of The Offspring of The Ladies of The Sacred South. We're not even a *committee*. There are only five of us left. What we are is a *seance*.

Periwinkle snorts herself awake.

BROWN III (CONT'D)

(summoning strength)

We, however, are *authentic*.

PERIWINKLE

You mean, old. And, Lucille, when will you learn that my hearing's as good as it's ever been.

BROWN III

(knocking her gavel)

We will come to order!

PERIWINKLE

Must you bang that thing?

BROWN III

I was rapping.

WYSTERIA

You're not supposed to sit in that chair.

PERIWINKLE

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

BROWN III

If you please--!

Periwinkle relents and makes a great show of stooping under the velvet rope and back into a regular chair.

BROWN III

Now that I've thought about it, whether there are three of us or five makes no difference. Sheer quantity is not something which would impress that man from Atlanta. Quantity is not important.

WYSTERIA

I disagree. Don't we need to be on the Pilgrimage so *more* people will see Magnolia Grove?

BROWN III

Well of course but we certainly don't want to put ourselves in the same class as Pinehill. They get thousands and thousands of visitors but we wouldn't want those kind of people here.

WYSTERIA

And what kind are those?

BROWN III

Oh you know. *Families*. Still dripping from the beach. People wearing *sandals*.

PERIWINKLE

(after a pause)

Jesus wore sandals.

BROWN III

What?

PERIWINKLE

You mean I couldn't give Jesus a tour of the house 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

(beat)

Then why's it called a Pilgrimage?

A YOUNG COUPLE with a GIRL 4 and a GIRL 7 have come up to the house and ring the doorbell.

PERIWINKLE (CONT'D)

Mine---!

BROWN III

(under her breath)

Thank goodness...

(remembering)

-- Yes, please....

Periwinkle greets the Family by handing a brochure to the Father and then looking down at their feet. Luckily, they are not wearing sandals.

MAN

(handing Periwinkle money)

Two adults please.

PERIWINKLE

(to the Girl 7)

And how old are you my dear?

GIRL 7

Daddy, I forgot what you told me to say.

The Father embarrassingly adds to the total.

PERIWINKLE

The tour will start in a few minutes. You can walk around the garden. I'll start the tour in the front of the house.

MOTHER

When will it start?

PERIWINKLE

Oh, in a little while.

MOTHER

But---

PERIWINKLE

Go on - go on out and enjoy the garden.

The Family sit on the Bench.

The phone rings, Periwinkle answers.

PERIWINKLE (CONT'D)

Magnolia Grove Plantation... One to four p.m.... Last tour?
Oh, about at four... You're not wearing sandals, are you?...
Fine. Thank you and good-bye.

Periwinkle rejoins the "meeting".

BROWN III

Now --- I think that when this gentleman arrives it's
imperative that we put our very best feet forward...

PERIWINKLE

And whose feet might those be? What you mean, Lucille, is,
"Let's hope Miss P keeps her mouth shut and doesn't fall
asleep."

(Periwinkle emphasizes the point with her cane upon the
floor.)

BROWN III

Must you bang...?

A MIDDLE-AGED COUPLE have arrived
and knock at the door.

PERIWINKLE

(as she rises and goes to answer the door:)
I was rapping, "gently tapping at our chamber *floor*... it's
some visitor, only this and nothing more...."

The lighting now emphasizes Brown
and Wysteria as Brown carefully
waits for Periwinkle to greet the
new arrivals.

BROWN III

Miss Wysteria, we have had visitors. *Official* visitors.

WYSTERIA

The gentleman from Atlanta?

BROWN III

(with an air of concern)

The Fire Marshall and the State Building Inspector.

WYSTERIA

(lightly)

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

BROWN III

Well, the Age of Charm has come to an end. Time has caught up with Magnolia Grove. And we're falling apart. Unfortunately, there is no charm in that.

WYSTERIA

How much money will we need?

BROWN III

(with gravitas)

The family jewels.

WYSTERIA

But there aren't any.... Have you told Miss P?

BROWN III

Not yet. But there is a way. The Pilgrimage. We simply must convince this gentleman to choose us or we will be forced to close.

WYSTERIA

Close? Magnolia Grove has stood since 1767. It has withstood the British, the blight, the British again, the Yankees, carpetbaggers, the boll-weevil, Miss Rachel's idiot son Mortimer, the railroad, the super-market, the interstate, and every mayor and city council of this town!

BROWN III

But what will happen to us?

WYSTERIA

Is the issue the preservation of The Offspring? Or Magnolia Grove?

BROWN III

We ARE Magnolia Grove.

WYSTERIA

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

Pause.

BROWN III

Well then. As soon as Miss P finishes with this tour, I'll take her place.

(checking her watch)

The last thing we want is for this gentleman to learn about Magnolia Grove from Miss Periwinkle's tour.

The lights reveal Periwinkle gathering her Tour together in the "front" of the house.

In the course of her Tour, Periwinkle freely, and somewhat dangerously, uses her cane to punctuate her narration. She begins by directly addressing the Two Girls:

PERIWINKLE

Do you know what history is?

The Girls shake their heads in unison.

PERIWINKLE (CONT'D)

(not sweetly:)

Then you are DOOMED to repeat it!

(now sweetly:)

My name is Rosabelle Periwinkle and I am 83 years old. I will be your guide today.... Here we are standing at the *front* of the house....

This assemblage freezes as the lighting shifts to the opposite side as HENRY BAXTER and CAROLINE HUGHES enter.

Baxter's middle-aged, wearing a sports coat with no tie. Hughes is in dress black. They observe the details of the exterior of the house. She is going through a large binder.

CAROLINE HUGHES

Here it is. Magnolia Grove. Built in the late 18th Century. Now in the hands of a local historical society...

(closes the book)

All this for a silly Pilgrimage? Busloads of tourists seeking "Moonlight and Magnolias"?

BAXTER

Our mission: To find the most romantic moonlight and the sweetest magnolias.

CAROLINE HUGHES

Les' not fergit de mint julips, massah.

They laugh.

BAXTER

Well, it's not called a Pilgrimage for nothing. It's a serious business. It's a religious experience. Like going to church. Or coming home.... I grew up in a town like this.

Now Periwinkle catches sight of
Baxter and Hughes.

PERIWINKLE

Are you joining the tour?

BAXTER

Yes. Why not?

They join and then Periwinkle starts
all over, though this time directing
her opening interrogation to Hughes:

PERIWINKLE

Do you know what history is?

Hughes starts to answer but is
restrained by Baxter.

PERIWINKLE (CONT'D)

Then you are DOOMED to repeat it! ... My name is Rosabelle Periwinkle and I am 83 years old. I will be your guide today. Here we are standing at the *front* of the house. This house was built in the year 1773. Before the Revolution. It is constructed of sundry and various materials. Among them: Wood.... Now, if you will, we will walk along the *side* of the house where we will go to the *back* of the house....

Periwinkle leads the Tour off.
Baxter and Hughes hang back.

BAXTER

Ah-ah, Miss Hughes. Hold your tongue. Tact and patience.

CAROLINE HUGHES

But...

BAXTER

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

CAROLINE HUGHES

It's not the place. It's what they say. You're not seriously going to consider this for the Pilgrimage.

BAXTER

I have taught you too well.

CAROLINE HUGHES

Magnolia Grove shouldn't be on a Pilgrimage. It ought to be on a safari.

They start off to rejoin the Tour.

BAXTER

Lead on, great White Lady of the Sacred South....