

ACT ONEScene 10

SCENE: The portico and front lawn of Peckerwood. There is bluegrass and there are bluebloods: a gathering of the family, all in Sunday best, to meet BEAU's Yankee girl friend. The tone is roughly the same as General Sherman was received in Atlanta.

Prominent in the gathering are the fluttering COUSIN FAN and the emaciated UNCLE JEFF.

The background music is languid as molasses.

JEFF

Must be something mighty special about this Dennis woman
(Music fades out)
if'n Beau skittles her all the way down here from New York City. Mornin', Cousin Fan.

FAN

Peculiar mornin', Uncle Jeff. Mighty peculiar. Is it generally known that Beau and his lady friend have a child with them?

(Reactions of shock)

JEFF

No-o-o-o!

FAN

And she hain't even met Mother Burnside yet.

JEFF

Ho-ho. Looks like we're gonna have some fireworks here at Peckerwood.

(SALLY CATO sweeps on. This is a handsome, horsey woman)

SALLY CATO

Well, now -- !

JEFF

Why, Sally Cato.

SALLY CATO

Hello, Jeff honey.

FAN

Didn't rightly 'spect you to be comin' round for the doin's.

SALLY CATO

(Dripping sweetness)

However could I manage to stay away when me and Beau've been engaged since grammar school? I wouldn't feel like a true daughter of the South if I didn't ooze out all the hospitality that's just simmerin' in my innerds!

(The GUESTS almost snap to attention as MOTHER BURNSIDE appears from within the house, on BEAU's arm. She is a massive octogenarian)

MOTHER BURNSIDE

What do you mean I don't look happy, Beauregard? I'm always happy.

(She scrutinizes each GUEST disdainfully)

When are you gonna trot out that New York filly? All I can see around here is family.

BEAU

Now, Mother --

MOTHER BURNSIDE

'Ceptin' you, Sally Cato. When we got peaches right here, ripe for the pickin', I cain't see why any man would go hankerin' after some Northern alligator pear.

BEAU

Mother, the War Between the States is over.

MOTHER BURNSIDE

(Dismissing such nonsense)

Don't give me any of that Appomattox applesauce.

SALLY CATO

(Kissing BEAU's cheek)

Welcome home, Beau sugah.

BEAU

(Uncomfortably)

Hello there, Sally Cato.

(Calling)

Mame! Mame honey, we're all out here, waitin' for you.

MAME'S VOICE

(Off, Southern as a candied yam)
Ah'm just bustin' to meet yoah sweet little ol' mothah!
Ahm comin', Beau sugah.

(MAME sweeps on in a hoop skirt,
looking like Scarlett O'Hara)

BEAU

Mother, may I present Miss Mame Dennis.
(He steps aside revealing his
massive MOTHER)

MAME

Oh, Miz Burnside, you're more than I expected.

BEAU

And these are my kin-folk.

(MAME stares around at the frozen
pusses)

MAME

Chowmed.

BEAU

Oh, You'll all be first-namin' each other soon as I slosh
another gallon of bourbon in the punch-bowl.

(He goes into the house with MOTHER
BURNSIDE. MAME, alone, stares
around uncomfortably.

SALLY CATO slithers up to MAME with
chummy unction)

SALLY CATO

I'm Sally Cato MacDougal. I could tell from the first
instant I set eyes on you that we was gonna be the closest
of friends, Mame.

MAME

Why, that's awfully kind of you, Sally Cato.

SALLY CATO

Was it horses brought you and Beauregard together?

MAME

Horses?

SALLY CATO

My Beau would be bored blue with anybody who wasn't
practically born on a horse.

MAME

Well, I wasn't really born on a horse.

MAME (Cont'd)

(Quickly)

But riding is my life. Dear me, every day, up at the crack of noon.

SALLY CATO

That settles it. Here I've been wrackin' my poor brain tryin' to figure what special I could do to let you know how I feel about your bein' down here. And what could be sweeter than a hunt!

MAME

(Paling)

A hunt?

SALLY CATO

Dawn tomorrow morning. And everybody's invited.

(Exclamations of delights and approval)

Won't we have the lark, all of us -- leapin' those hedges, jumpin' those river gaps, the hounds yappin' around those boulders. I tell you, Mame, every eye in this county is gonna be on you tomorrow mornin'!

MAME

If I'd only known. You see, I didn't bring along any of my riding togs.

SALLY CATO

Don't you worry, Mame child. I've got dozens of things you can wear. You do ride astride?

MAME

(Grasping at straws)

No, no. Side-saddle. Always.

SALLY CATO

(Purring)

Now, isn't that grand. I have a little old side-saddle that'll do you just fine.

(BEAU re-enters, with a tray of punch glasses, PATRICK behind him)

BEAU

Punch, ladies?

(MAME takes a cup of punch and keeps drinking it)

SALLY CATO

Beau darlin', we're havin' a hunt. At dawn tomorrow. And you want to hear something fantastic. Your sweet little Yankee friend is gonna ride side-saddle.

BEAU
I won't allow it. It's too dangerous.

SALLY CATO
But, darlin', she's insisted.

BEAU
Well, anything Mame says she can do, she can do.

(Quickly MAME slams down her
punch-cup and picks up another)

SALLY CATO
Mame sugah, I'm just gonna hold my breath until dawn
tomorrow.

MAME
Do that, honey.

10B / INCIDENTAL - SCENE 10

(The lights fade.)

A grumpy rooster crows indicating
dawn. On the front lawn HUNTSMEN
and GROOMS are gathering along with
MOTHER BURNSIDE, COUSIN FAN, JEFF
and PATRICK. JEFF confronts MOTHER
BURNSIDE)

JEFF
Mawnin', Mother Burnside.
(Music fades out)
Did we get Miss Dennis a nice piece of horseflesh?

MOTHER BURNSIDE
We sure did. Lightnin' Rod.

(From off, there is a fierce whinny
and the stomping of angry hooves.
GROOMS back away from it in terror)

JEFF
Lightnin' Rod. Thought he went mad.

MOTHER BURNSIDE
Did.

PATRICK
My Auntie Mame is riding a mad horse?

MOTHER BURNSIDE
Temporarily.

(Music starts)