

THE BEGUILED

Written by

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Based on the novel by
Thomas Cullinan

FADE IN:

EXT. WOODS - DAY

A wild landscape in the morning light.

We hear cannons in the distance.

TITLE: "1864, VIRGINIA. 3 YEARS INTO THE CIVIL WAR"

The small figure of a young blonde girl comes into frame.

MAIN TITLES begin in red script over the woods as we follow the girl, AMY, 12, carrying a basket.

We follow her as she dips in and out of the light in the shady grove, picking mushrooms as she finds small pockets of them. She wears braids and a faded prim cotton dress of the era and sings a song to herself.

The SOUND OF BATTLE increases in the near distance. SMOKE drifts over a shady glade, surrounded by trees and high bushes.

Close on Amy's freckled face; she shudders at the SOUND of a loud CANNON, and bravely continues, adding mushrooms to her basket.

She stops at a little shady patch of mushrooms, and as she picks them, she comes across a SOLDIER'S BOOT.

AMY'S POV:

We follow the boot up legs, and to the body of a man -- a WOUNDED SOLDIER, in a dirty, blood-stained Union uniform.

Amy carefully leans in to take a closer look at his soot-covered face with a beard.

Suddenly his eyes open -- she jumps back with a scream.

The soldier looks at her.

MCBURNEY
Are you frightened?

AMY
No... Yes.

He looks at the young girl.

(CONTINUED)

MCBURNEY

So am I.

Amy moves in closer.

AMY

Can you move at all?

He struggles to lean up a little on one arm.

MCBURNEY

I'll try, if there's some place to go.

AMY

The Farnsworth school is just on the other side of the woods. The Miss Martha Farnsworth Seminary for Young Ladies.

He thinks about this.

MCBURNEY

Any men about?

AMY

No men, just four other students, a teacher, and Miss Farnsworth. The slaves left. I can't say you'll be welcome as a Yankee, but it will be better than here.

MCBURNEY

True enough. I'll accept your invitation, can you help me up?

Amy struggles to help him up.

MCBURNEY (CONT'D)

Can you hold on just a bit, while I get my breath?

AMY

Oh, yes, sir.

She uses all her strength to support his weight.

AMY (CONT'D)

You're a lot heavier than my brother.

(CONTINUED)

MCBURNEY

Where's he now?

AMY

He got killed in Tennessee.

MCBURNEY

That wasn't none of us, I was
never in Tennessee.

Now upright, he smiles at her in gratitude.

MCBURNEY (CONT'D)

What's your name?

AMY

Amelia Dabney.

MCBURNEY

Mine's McBurney... Corporal John
McBurney.

AMY

Pleased to make your
acquaintance Corporal.

They start off slowly.

The leg of his torn uniform is covered in blood.

(CONTINUED)

MCBURNEY

We're, off to where was it now?

AMY

Miss Farnsworth's Seminary for
Young Ladies.

MCBURNEY

With only five students?

AMY

The other girls have gone home,
but Miss Martha kept it open.
It was mainly we didn't have
anywhere else to go.

They slowly make their way through the brush.

AMY (CONT'D)

My home is Georgia, and my
mother thought it would be
better if I stayed up here in
Virginia for a while... what
with your General Sherman down
there so close to Atlanta and
all...

Smoke rises behind them and cannons BOOM.

AMY (CONT'D)

Did you run away?

WIDE SHOT

We follow them as they slowly make their way into the
distance of the Southern landscape.

MCBURNEY

I'm with the Sixty-Sixth out of
New York...We were hit and I
fell and everything began to
blaze...

AMY

Do you want to go back? I can
show you the way?

(CONTINUED)

MCBURNEY

Not now. Maybe later when my
leg stops bleedin'.

CUT TO:

EXT. MANSION - DAY

CLOSE ON A WROUGHT IRON SIGN: "THE FARNSWORTH SEMINARY FOR
YOUNG LADIES"

Through the gates, a neglected-looking Southern mansion
stands amongst dry plants and weeds. Nothing else in sight.

Smoke rises in the distance.

Amy and McBurney approach the gates.

CUT TO:

INT. PARLOR - DAY

A class is in session.

In a large living room that has been converted into a
classroom, EDWINA, a tightly-wound, delicate beauty in her
late-twenties, instructs a class of girls.

She stands straight, with her high shirt collar buttoned to
the top and her hair pulled back primly. She looks confined
in her tight, proper clothing.

Edwina speaks in a gentle, well-bred manner and soft voice,
as she makes herself an example of a Southern lady to her
students.

There are four girls listening:

ALICIA, 17, a bored, pretty blonde with long hair stares off.
Her bodice slightly open, she fans herself with a notebook.

CLOSE SHOT

On a fly buzzing in the corner.

Alicia watches it.

JANE, a prim 16-year-old with freckles, sits next to her
carefully following along.

Next to them is EMILY, a practical 15-year-old.

(CONTINUED)

Their faces are pink and dewy in the heat of the room, and they are all dressed in plain, long dresses of the period, faded after being washed and mended many times. Some of them are half-dressed in petticoats.

There is a blackboard propped up with a sentence in French written on it.

EDWINA

Le Mari de Marie est ici a Paris
aujourd'hui.

The girls repeat after her in unison. Alicia is pouty as if she has better things to be doing.

CUT TO:

EXT. KITCHEN GARDEN - DAY

The SOUND of a BELL ringing breaks the silence of the hot day.

In the bright sun, a woman with a large sun hat turns to reveal: MISS MARTHA FARNSWORTH, 40's, a pale, worn, Southern beauty.

With elegant posture, she looks like a lady, not accustomed to work outside in the kitchen garden. She turns to MARIE, a dark-haired 12-year-old who is helping beside her.

The BELL RINGS AGAIN, and Miss Martha lifts her skirt hems and rushes to the gate, followed by Marie.

MISS MARTHA

Can't be the patrol, they were
just here.

CUT TO:

EXT. MANSION - DAY

WIDE SHOT

Miss Martha and Marie rush to the front gate.

A VOICE calls out from a window above.

EMILY (O.S.)

Amy and somebody's there!

The BELL clangs again.

(CONTINUED)

AMY
Help! Miss Martha!

Miss Farnsworth swiftly moves to Amy who is halfway up the walk to the large house. McBurney lies on the ground in front of her.

The other girls rush out to them.

Miss Martha's hat has fallen behind her, her hair is swept up off her face.

Jane leans in to get a better look at the stranger.

JANE
Is he dead?

Miss Martha checks his pulse.

MISS MARTHA
Not yet.

She turns to Amy.

MISS MARTHA (CONT'D)
(sternly)
How'd he get here?

AMY
The woods were burning, I
couldn't leave him there to die.

The girls all gather around him.

MARTHA
You know you're not supposed to
go that far!

She looks at McBurney laying on the ground.

MISS MARTHA
We'll get him to the porch for
now. You can all help, Edwina
take his legs...

EDWINA
Yes, Miss Martha.

The girls surround McBurney.

(CONTINUED)

McBurney opens his eyes, and looks up at:

THE BACK-LIT GROUP OF CURIOUS, FLUSHED-FACED GIRLS, looking down on him. Their hair ranging from sandy blonde to chestnut brown.

With a weak smile -- is he dreaming? -- he turns his head a little to see:

Miss Martha glaring down at him severely.

MCBURNEY
Sixty-Sixth New York, ma'am, and
your grateful prisoner.

JANE
A real blue belly!

WIDER on the group as they lift his dead weight.

Standing tall and efficient, Miss Martha helps the younger girls where his body is dropping. They start to make their way toward the porch.

JANE (CONT'D)
(whispers)
You know they rape every
Southern woman they come
across...

MISS MARTHA
Stop that nonsense, Jane!

MARIE
(in awe, staring down
at him)
You wouldn't know from his face
that he was a Yankee, would you?

MISS MARTHA
Run ahead, Amy, and open the
door for us. And then you come
right back here and tie that
blue rag on the gate...

ALICIA
(maliciously, she bends
down to inform
McBurney)
(MORE)

(CONTINUED)

ALICIA (CONT'D)
 The blue rag's so the patrol
 will know we've captured a live
 Yankee...

McBurney's eyes open briefly, he looks with pain and fear.

Alicia looks down at him through her hair, with a haughty look.

EXT. MANSION PORCH - DAY

The group reaches the porch. We SEE the beautiful facade of the house with the great columns rising behind them. They struggle to get McBurney up the steps.

Miss Martha nods. She braces her back against a column as they set him down.

EMILY
 Is he breathing?

MISS MARTHA
 Why didn't you call out before,
 Emily? You must have seen them
 crossing the fields!

EMILY
 I'm sorry Miss Martha. I forgot
 it was my turn to look out.

MISS MARTHA
 Someday you'll forget and it'll
 be Union scroungers in our
 garden! That's how we lost most
 of our chickens.

The girls cluster around him, fascinated.

MISS MARTHA (CONT'D)
 Marie, you get up and look if
 you can see any of our soldiers.

Marie reluctantly leaves them.

(CONTINUED)

EDWINA

We ought to wash his wound.

MISS MARTHA

And sew it up. Amy -- didn't I tell you to go tie that blue rag on the gate for the patrol?

Amy reluctantly starts to go.

AMY

Couldn't we wait a bit?

EDWINA

After all the blood he's lost, he'd die if he went now.

The girls look at Miss Martha.

AMY

Wouldn't it be the Christian thing to do?

She looks at him.

MISS MARTHA

Yes, and you're quite right, Edwina, he'd never make it. We'll wait until he's in shape to be taken away. Emily, put some water on to boil. Jane, Alicia, find any cloth we can spare and bring it to the music room.

Miss Martha and the others use all their strength to bring him inside.

The door of the mansion closes behind them.

We hear the roar of BATTLE in the distance.

CUT TO:

INT. MUSIC ROOM - DAY

Soft light comes in through the sheer curtains.

A shrouded harp and harpsichord stand in the corner of the music room with a few music stands and gold chairs.

(CONTINUED)

Family portraits hang on the walls from another time, when concerts were held. There are faded linens and other remnants from the mansion's former glory.

CLOSE SHOT

Miss Martha's steady hands with shears as she cuts the fabric of the pants of McBurney's uniform.

CLOSE SHOT

Torn pants fall on the floor.

CLOSE ON MISS MARTHA

She sees his nakedness -- then looks away, composing herself to her ladylike ways. She covers him with a piece of linen.

McBurney lies on a pale day bed, unconscious and pale under his thick beard. Beads of sweat form on his forehead.

His hands are bandaged and he is naked, other than a cloth across his lap.

Edwina carefully puts a soft pillow under his head.

MISS MARTHA

I need more cloth please,
Edwina. Anything you can find.

EDWINA

Yes, Miss Martha.

Miss Martha is leaning forward, stitching his wound.

A strand of her pinned-back hair has fallen forward in her work; she pushes it back, in concentration. Her brow perspires.

Edwina moves a pot of water, as she goes for the cloth.

McBurney's belt is draped over a chair.

MISS MARTHA

There's enough metal in there to
shoe a horse... I think I got
most of it.

Edwina with flushed cheeks, looks down on McBurney's handsome face.

(CONTINUED)

CLOSE SHOT

Edwina's hands dip a cloth into a bowl of water. She wrings it out -- water drips.

CLOSE SHOT

Edwina's hands wipe the cloth over McBurney's forehead.

A slight moan from McBurney, still unconscious.

CLOSE on her hands and cloth wiping soot off of his face. Water drips down his face, on to his scruffy beard, down his smooth chest.

She carefully wipes his chest.

Miss Martha finishes up her work.

Edwina, on the verge of fainting, steadies herself with the back of a chair.

MISS MARTHA (CONT'D)

Edwina, please get more water
and I'll bathe him. I'm going
to get him a clean nightshirt.

EDWINA (SOFTLY)

Yes, Miss Martha.

Edwina follows Miss Martha to the door.

Edwina glances back at McBurney.

Miss Martha opens the door wide -- swiftly.

In the doorway, the school girls all crowding around trying to get a glimpse of the man, scatter backwards, caught.

MISS MARTHA

I thought so!

ALICIA

(almost hopefully)
Is he going to die?

Miss Martha and Edwina come through the door. Miss Martha shuts it behind her.

MISS MARTHA

Not today, I don't think.

(CONTINUED)

She locks the door.

CLOSE SHOT

The key turns in the lock and is left there. We hear the stiff metal turn.

AMY

Then what'll happen?

MISS MARTHA

We'll turn him over to the patrol, of course. If by some miracle he lives through the night, which I doubt. In the meantime I don't want anyone poking in here or lurking in the hall...

AMY

His name, in case you've wondered, is Corporal John McBurney.

MISS MARTHA

I'm afraid he won't be here long enough - dead or alive - for his name to make any difference to us.

She turns to Edwina.

MISS MARTHA (CONT'D)

There's too much distraction for any more studying today.

EDWINA

We have a lot of mending to do.

MISS MARTHA

Good! To the sewing room, all of you!

She claps her hands to shoo them away.

INT. SEWING ROOM - DAY

CLOSE on a girl's hand carefully stitching a thin piece of cloth.

(CONTINUED)

EDWINA (O.S.)
Careful, keep your stitches in a
straight row.

In an old salon, the girls sit around a table with Edwina.
Everything in the room feels faded.

The table has small pieces of cloth, bits of old curtains,
tablecloths, and sewing supplies. They chat as they sew.

AMY
Jane, it's the same for you as
all of us, you don't leave
because there's nowhere for you
to go...

JANE
There is so! My father is with
General Lee and if I so desired,
soldiers would come escort me to
him now.

ALICIA
If anybody knew where that was.

EMILY
My mother wrote me from
Charleston that the blockade is
fearful. She says I probably
eat better here than I would at
home.

EDWINA
You do.

ALICIA
You should have never brought
that Yankee here, Amy.

JANE
I agree. He's probably a spy
and will let the blue bellies in
at night to raid our garden.

EDWINA
I doubt that, Jane.

EMILY
Miss Edwina, aren't you afraid
of that blue belly?

(CONTINUED)

EDWINA

No. And it is very bad manners
to call him a blue belly. He
has a name, Corporal John
McBurney.

AMY

(dreamily)
Johnny...

The girls giggle.

CUT TO:

INT. MUSIC ROOM - DAY

McBurney is passed out, as Miss Martha sits next to him with
a bucket of water and pieces of cloth.

Having volunteered before as a nurse, she keeps a
professional posture, but it is clear that she hasn't seen a
man's body in a long time.

She pushes her hair back as she dips a cloth into the warm
water and cleans his arms carefully. Sunlight outlines his
body as she cleans his shoulders and chest. Then his legs.

Miss Martha takes a deep breath, and lifts the cloth covering
him, as she moves the cloth to his hips and inner thighs...

CUT TO:

INT. SEWING ROOM - DAY

The girls continue their sewing under Edwina's guidance, as
the afternoon sun streams through the sheer curtains.

CUT TO:

INT. MISS MARTHA'S ROOM - DAY

It's late afternoon.

Miss Martha goes to a basin and splashes water on her face,
taking a moment to compose herself. She smooths her hair
back in place.

(CONTINUED)

Her room is that of a lady of the time, with a delicate vase on a fine dresser.

Suddenly she's interrupted by the sound of A LOUD BANG -- a spoon hitting an iron pot O.S.

CUT TO:

INT. MUSIC ROOM - DAY

EXTREME CLOSE UP

McBurney opens his eyes -- alarmed.

His head rests on an embroidered linen pillow case.

CUT TO:

INT. FOYER - DAY

Miss Martha rushes down to see Jane and Alicia.

JANE

It's our boys, Miss Martha.
They'll be passing our way.

Alicia's bosom is pushed up in her tight bodice.

ALICIA

Can't we go and greet them?

MISS MARTHA

Confederate soldiers? Alone?

JANE

I think, maybe they have some
prisoners.

MISS MARTHA

I don't want them to see you
girls. Go upstairs!

They run upstairs.

Miss Martha goes to the mirror in the foyer on her way out. She buttons her collar high and smooths her skirt.

CUT TO:

EXT. MANSION - DAY

A small group of CONFEDERATE SOLDIERS march past the school's gate.

They are battle-weary, in worn uniforms. Behind their wagon, Yankee prisoners march slowly along.

Miss Martha opens the gate to greet them.

MISS MARTHA

What's the news?

CONFEDERATE SOLDIER

Taking these Yanks to prison to die.

A CONFEDERATE CAPTAIN rides up on his horse, bowing his head to Miss Martha as he dismounts.

INT. GIRLS' BEDROOM - DAY

CLOSE on Amy, perched at the window; she looks down on the scene.

AMY

You think Miss Martha's going to tell them about him?

Alicia, Jane, and Marie pass a row of single beds with faded blankets and quilts and lean in around Amy, trying to see.

THEIR POV:

EXT. MANSION GATES - LATE AFTERNOON

The Captain, now standing, talks to Miss Martha at the gate.

She stands composed, like a lady, with a subtle tilt of her head, as if she was at the entrance of a ball.

CAPTAIN

You all alone, ma'am?

MISS MARTHA

Just a teacher and a few students.

(CONTINUED)

CAPTAIN

Well, take care. Ma'am. Lot of these Yanks got separated from their outfits. They're roaming these woods and they're desperate.

MISS MARTHA

Yes, Captain. I wonder if you might have a few cartridges you could spare.

CAPTAIN

What good would that do you, ma'am?

MISS MARTHA

My father left his revolver, and I'd feel much safer knowing I might use it if needed.

He nods in respect.

CUT TO:

INT. BEDROOM - LATE AFTERNOON

Girls' POV from the house.

They see the Captain handing Miss Martha a small packet.

JANE

Is she telling him?!

Jane looks over Amy's shoulder.

AMY (O.S.)

He's giving her something?

CUT TO:

EXT. MANSION - LATE AFTERNOON

Through moss-covered trees, we see the Captain and his group start off.

(CONTINUED)

AMY (O.S.)
They're leaving, she didn't tell
them!!

WIDE on Miss Martha as she strides toward the mansion.

INT. MISS MARTHA'S ROOM- DUSK

Close with Miss Martha as she opens a drawer and takes out a
revolver.

She loads a few cartridges into the gun, and puts it back,
shutting the drawer.

CUT TO:

EXT. MANSION BALCONY - EVENING

Surrounded by mossy trees, Marie walks around on look-out as
the evening sun sets.

We hear the sound of CICADAS and CRICKETS joining in.

INT. HALLWAY - EVENING

Edwina passes the music room to see the door open --

INT. MUSIC ROOM - EVENING

In the low light, Edwina pauses to look through a space in
the slightly open door.

She sees Amy inside kneeling at the beside of a sleeping
McBurney, whispering to him.

Edwina shoots her a look.

EDWINA
(trying to keep her
voice down)
What are you doing there!

Amy looks over to her in the doorway.

AMY
I was just telling him something
private.

(CONTINUED)

EDWINA

Let him rest.

AMY

(whispers to McBurney)

See you later.

Amy bids adieu to sleeping McBurney and heads out, stopping at Edwina in the doorway.

AMY (CONT'D)
I was just checking on him. I
thought he might want some
company.

Edwina is stern with her.

EDWINA
He's not one of your wounded
birds or beetles.

Amy gives her a look and rushes out, as Edwina closes the door.

McBurney watches her.

Under her tight-laced primness, it seems like Edwina might burst.

The door shuts -- we hear the KEY turn the lock.

CUT TO:

INT. LIBRARY - NIGHT

Miss Martha, standing tall in her high collar, reads from the bible in the candlelight.

The girls all sit in attendance. Edwina carefully follows along.

Alicia goes up to Miss Martha and whispers to be excused.

MISS MARTHA
Can you wait?

Alicia shakes her head.

MISS MARTHA (CONT'D)
Alright, then.

Edwina watches as Alicia slips off.

MISS MARTHA (CONT'D)
Does anyone wish to ask for
special blessings?

(CONTINUED)

EDWINA

I pray that the Lord will see
fit to restore the health of the
wounded soldier.

The girls lower their heads.

MISS MARTHA

We will pray for his return to
health and for his early
departure.

CUT TO:

INT. MUSIC ROOM - NIGHT

CLOSE on McBurney as he sleeps.

We hear the sound of the KEY turning the lock.

In the dark room, Alicia sneaks up close to his face.

She touches his beard, and moves in close to him, getting a
good look at him.

She leans in and lightly kisses his lips, then kisses him
longer this time. With his eyes still closed, he seems to
kiss her back.

McBurney's eyes open for a second, looking lost, as if in a
dream.

Alicia looks at him, still breathing softly.

ALICIA

(whispers)
Good night, Corporal.

Alicia sneaks off before she's caught.

McBurney watches her go.

CUT TO:

INT. LIBRARY - NIGHT

Slipping in with an innocent look on her face, Alicia rejoins
the group in prayer.

(CONTINUED)

Heads are lowered in the candlelight.

JANE

I ask God's blessing on our
armies, and the safe return of
our boys.

Edwina glances up from her bible at Alicia, knowing she is up
to something.

Alicia gives her an innocent smile like -- *what?!* She slips
back into her chair and bows her head with the others. She
has a tiny secret smile on her lips.

Edwina returns her head down in prayer.

MISS MARTHA

And we pray for those we have
lost. May we all be kept from
harm throughout this night.
Amen.

GIRLS

Amen.

CUT TO:

INT. STAIRWAY - NIGHT

The girls follow Edwina up the stairs, whispering.

Miss Martha follows behind, to keep them together, holding up
a candlestick in the dark stairwell.

MISS MARTHA

To your rooms, quietly girls.

FADE OUT.

FADE IN:

EXT. MANSION - MORNING

Birds chirp as the sun rises over the old mansion.

A cannon fires in the distance.

We SEE some SMOKE far off in the distance.

INT. MUSIC ROOM - MORNING

The birds continue as Amy opens the door and peeks in.

McBurney winks at her as she approaches him. He is cleaned up and wearing a linen man's nightshirt.

MCBURNEY

Good morning. It is morning, I take?

She nods.

AMY

It's about six.

MCBURNEY

I thought as much from the larks I heard singing.

AMY

Do you like birds?

MCBURNEY

Love them. Anything wild I love... wild and free.

AMY

I think they're robins. I can show you some nests I collected?

MCBURNEY

That would give me great pleasure.

She smiles.

AMY

I better go... Miss Martha's coming to fix your bandages and bring your breakfast.

She slips off.

MCBURNEY

Okay, then. Thank you, darlin'

She smiles back at him as she leaves.

CUT TO:

INT. KITCHEN - DAY

The kitchen is busy with morning activity.

Sun pours in through a window that looks out over the kitchen garden.

A basket of greens and thick ceramic bowls sit on a side table. Heavy iron pots hang by the stove, where Emily takes a pot off.

The girls eat porridge over the kitchen table.

ALICIA

How's the Yank doin'?

AMY

He's fine, much better...

JANE

How long is he going to stay in the music room?

EDWINA

Until he's much better.

JANE

But, how can I practice the harp with a dangerous enemy in the same room?

The other girls are used to her complaining.

Miss Martha sweeps into the busy kitchen. She is more put together than usual.

She passes Edwina, who is wearing a special dress. She wears a beautiful necklace on her pale floral dress. Miss Martha admires it. Edwina continues to shell beans.

MISS MARTHA

Très jolie.

She gives her a loaded look, and then looks over at the other girls. Emily has earrings on and Alicia has a flower in her hair.

(CONTINUED)

MISS MARTHA (CONT'D)

(cool amusement)
Seems like the soldier being
here is having an effect....

(CONTINUED)

Amy passes with her bowl.

MISS MARTHA (CONT'D)
Tell me, Miss Amy, did you find
any mushrooms when you were out
collecting soldiers?

AMY
I did, but only poisonous ones I
think.

MISS MARTHA
Let's have a look later, shall
we?

AMY
Yes, ma'am.

With her dignified posture and rustling skirts, Miss Martha
crosses frame, leaving them.

CUT TO:

EXT. OAK TREES

The sun beams thru fresh linens being hung on a clothes line by
Edwina and Jane.

INT. MUSIC ROOM - DAY

McBurney looks up with a cheerful smile as Miss Martha
enters.

Some of the girls whisper and giggle as they peek in and try
to get a look at him.

MISS MARTHA
(to girls)
Get on about your business, you
have work and studies to do.

EMILY
Shall we not have music here
this morning?

MISS MARTHA
No, we shall not. Please go to
the library.

(CONTINUED)

She closes the door on them.

She goes over to check on her patient.

MISS MARTHA (CONT'D)
Good morning, Corporal.

(CONTINUED)

He looks up at her.

MCBURNEY
I'm disrupting your place here.

MISS MARTHA
Indeed you are.

She sets to work checking his bandages; she is all business.
She takes his hand and examines it.

CLOSE SHOT

His hand in hers.

Miss Martha pauses a moment, looking at his manly hand.

She continues to dress his wounds.

MCBURNEY
You don't mince words, ma'am.
You speak right up, I like that.

MISS MARTHA
Do you indeed? And do you think
it makes a great difference to
me whether you like it or not?

He looks at her, enjoying the rally.

MCBURNEY
I'm sure my opinion means
nothing at all to you, ma'am...
I'm not looking for your praise.

MISS MARTHA
Are you not. What are you
looking for then?

MCBURNEY
Whatever you can spare me. You
have given me plenty and I'm
most appreciative.

(CONTINUED)

MISS MARTHA

Aren't you afraid I'll turn you over to our soldiers?

MCBURNEY

No, I don't think so. I don't say you won't do it, but very likely worse things could happen to me. I don't relish the prospect of prison, but it's better than being dead. And that's what I would be if you hadn't helped me.

There is something lovable about him.

MISS MARTHA

Not necessarily. Is your leg paining you?

MCBURNEY

Yes, some.

MISS MARTHA

Well, I hear that numbness would be more grave. There's brandy if you wish.

MCBURNEY

That would be a pleasure.

MISS MARTHA

It isn't being offered for your pleasure, only for your comfort.

MCBURNEY

Yes, ma'am.

Miss Martha sits up straight.

MISS MARTHA

I must remind you Corporal McBurney, that you are not our guest, but a most unwelcome visitor. We don't propose to entertain you here.

(CONTINUED)

MCBURNEY

I wouldn't expect it ma'am....
though you'll find I'm easily
amused.

McBurney looks to see Alicia in the doorway -- with a fake innocent look on her face. She looks up through blond strands of hair.

Miss Martha turns.

MISS MARTHA

What is it, Miss?

ALICIA

I just wondered if there's
anything I can do to help?

McBurney looks at Alicia.

Martha notices, protectively.

McBurney lies back.

Miss Martha goes back to addressing Alicia.

MISS MARTHA

There is nothing you can do
here. You have enough studies
and other work to keep you well
occupied.

ALICIA

I only thought to help.

MISS MARTHA

That won't be necessary. And
Miss Alicia, you can tell the
others this room is off limits.

ALICIA

Yes, ma'am.

Alicia gives an insolent little curtsy, with a conspiratorial look to McBurney, she leaves.

MCBURNEY

You can trust me in your place,
ma'am.

(CONTINUED)

MISS MARTHA

I don't know you.

MCBURNEY

If you got to know me, I think you would.

MISS MARTHA

You won't be here that long.

Miss Martha nods and picks up her skirts and makes her way out.

MCBURNEY

Ma'am?

MISS MARTHA

Yes Corporal?

MCBURNEY

I'd like a bit of soap and a razor if you have.

MISS MARTHA

I'll see what I can find.

MCBURNEY

Thank you, ma'am.

He smiles at her happily, like a schoolboy.

Miss Martha leaves.

McBurney lies back on his bed, marveling at his fortune to find himself in such a prison.

CUT TO:

INT. PARLOR - DAY

CLOSE on a hand practicing cursive - writing out a poem:

'Never seek to tell thy love,
Love that never told can be.
For the gentle wind does move
Silently, invisibly.'

(CONTINUED)

EDWINA
Careful with your 'E's...

CUT TO:

EXT. GARDEN - DAY

Amy sits in a large oak tree, looking out from its branches.
The days seem endless.

CUT TO:

EXT. KITCHEN GARDEN - DAY

Emily and Alicia hoe in the rows of the vegetable garden in
the hot sun.

Alicia's not cut out for this kind of work.

ALICIA
Are we almost done?!

EMILY
Almost... this is the last row.

Some CANNONS, less than before, are heard in the distance.

CUT TO:

INT. MUSIC ROOM - DAY

Edwina stands in the doorway, something in her hand. She
takes a moment to smooth her hair, before entering.

Small Marie slips past her, beating her into the room to
McBurney.

MARIE
Excuse me, won't you, Miss
Edwina? I have some personal
business here.

Edwina watches as Marie brings a book to McBurney, marveling
about what business a twelve-year-old would have here with
him.

Edwina waits at the door, impatiently.

(CONTINUED)

Marie speaks in a low voice, keeping her conversation with McBurney private.

MARIE (CONT'D)

I wanted to bring this to you last night for fear that you might die before morning, but then I thought since you were unconscious, you wouldn't be able to read it anyway.

MCBURNEY

That's very logical.

MARIE

Are you Protestant?

MCBURNEY

I was baptized Catholic.

MARIE

Well then, here's a prayer book for you.

MCBURNEY

Thank you.

MARIE

I thought you might need to confess if you're on the verge of death.

MCBURNEY

I think I can hold out a little longer.

He smiles at her.

MCBURNEY (CONT'D)

I'm John Patrick McBurney.

MARIE

Pleased to meet you, sir.

Marie curtseys and rushes out.

INT. HALLWAY - DAY

Edwina turns, blocking Marie.

(CONTINUED)

EDWINA
Just a moment, Miss.

Marie stops and looks at her.

EDWINA (CONT'D)
Where do you think you're going
in my jade earrings?

Marie gives her a cute smile.

MARIE
Oh Miss Edwina, don't be
hateful. Everyone is dressing up
today.

EDWINA
Not in my jewelry, they're not.

MARIE
I'll give them back. And how
beautiful you look this morning,
you're all dressed up yourself.

EDWINA
I am not.

MARIE
I haven't seen that beautiful
necklace since last Christmas.

EDWINA
Get to your work.

Marie ducks and runs past her, laughing.

Edwina pauses, embarrassed by her un-ladylike behavior. She starts to leave.

MCBURNEY (O.S.)
Wait, don't run off when you've
just come.

Edwina turns and sees McBurney lean up, across the room.

MCBURNEY (CONT'D)
Did you want to see me about
something?

Edwina nods stiffly and enters.

INT. MUSIC ROOM - DAY

Edwina stiffly glides over to McBurney's bedside.

She opens a white handkerchief and places a small bar of lavender soap, a razor, and a tortoiseshell comb on a table next to McBurney with a pitcher of water on it.

She freezes up, not knowing what to say.

MCBURNEY

Thank you very much.

He reclines, trying to clean his black fingernails.

EDWINA

They look as if you had been trying to dig a pit with them.

MCBURNEY

I was. In the battle, with all that iron flying overhead, my first thought was to bury myself.

EDWINA

And when you couldn't, you ran?

MCBURNEY

I did. I surely to God did.

Edwina looks at him, his eyes smiling.

EDWINA

It wasn't very brave of you to run.

She makes herself busy with some task, straightening up the table beside him.

MCBURNEY

Maybe not, but it was smart, I think.

EDWINA

Because you're alive?

MCBURNEY

And now I've met you.

(CONTINUED)

EDWINA

You don't even know me.

MCBURNEY

I know your name... Miss Edwina Morrow.

EDWINA

And what else have you been told about me?

MCBURNEY

Nothing besides your name. It's a lovely name.

She checks his bandages like a kind nurse.

EDWINA

I hope the girls weren't telling stories.

MCBURNEY

What do you care what is said about you?

EDWINA

I don't...I just didn't want you to have the wrong impression.

Edwina looks at him.

McBurney smiles up at her warmly, his eyes sparkling.

She moves again.

MCBURNEY

Then you do care what I think about you.

EDWINA

You're a stranger here, that's all, and I don't want you to be misled.

MCBURNEY

Well, perhaps you can set me off on the right foot and tell me about yourself. Where are you from, Miss Edwina Morrow?

(CONTINUED)

EDWINA

My father's home is Richmond, I left Savannah when I was quite young. We lived in several places for my father's enterprises.

MCBURNEY

And, are you waiting for your sweetheart to return when this war is over?

EDWINA

I have no one in the military.

He takes this in, studying her. She's uncomfortable with his questioning.

MCBURNEY

And how did you end up here?

EDWINA

Why are you so interested in me?

MCBURNEY

Because something tells me we're both out of place here.

She looks at him.

MCBURNEY (CONT'D)

I'll bet you're the independent sort who the others don't know how to get close to, and then of course there are your looks.

EDWINA

That doesn't matter to me.

(CONTINUED)

MCBURNEY

In all my travels, I've never
come across a delicate beauty
like yours.

He stares at her, she turns away.

He grabs her arm and pulls her closer to him.

MCBURNEY (CONT'D)

Tell, me Miss Morrow, what's
your biggest wish, if you could
have anything, what would it be?

EDWINA

Anything?

MCBURNEY

Anything.

She is almost breathless, and gives in for a moment.

EDWINA

To be taken far away from here.

He looks into her eyes.

She straightens up and composes herself, standing.

She smooths her hair.

EDWINA (CONT'D)

Good day, Corporal.

MCBURNEY

John.

She looks at him and turns, taking a tray from the table and
glides out.

CUT TO:

INT. HALLWAY - DAY

Edwina braces herself against a wall, and after a heavy exhale, she composes herself and moves on.

EXT. GARDEN - DAY

Late afternoon. Jane and Marie get a pail of water from the pump.

EXT. BALCONY - LATE AFTERNOON

Emily is on lookout as the sun begins to set.

She sings to herself.

CUT TO:

INT. GIRLS' ROOM - EVENING

CLOSE on Amy as she feeds a little piece of lettuce to her pet TURTLE.

AMY

Here you go, Henry.

She arranges an old box of her treasures, a smooth rock, a small bird's nest. She adds a brass button after showing Henry.

AMY (CONT'D)

Mr. McBurney gave me one of his buttons.

INT. DINING ROOM - EVENING

We FOLLOW Amy, the last one to sit at the dinner table.

She takes her seat and looks to Miss Martha to see if she'll be scolded.

Miss Martha, an example of perfect posture, smiles at her. She lowers her head.

(CONTINUED)

MISS MARTHA

The eyes of all wait upon thee;
and thou givest them their meat
in due season. Thou openest
thine hand, and satisfiest the
desire of every living thing.
Bless us and these thy gifts
which we receive from thy
bountiful goodness, through
Jesus Christ, our Lord, Amen.

GIRLS (IN UNISON)

Amen.

Miss Martha looks at them pleasantly as they start their meal.

MISS MARTHA

It has occurred to me that we might all reflect on the unexpected presence of Corporal McBurney in this house -- until his leg heals, of course. And we might discuss how we may practice compassion and what else we may learn from this. What does each of you think of this?

Miss Martha looks around the table at the girls.

MISS MARTHA (CONT'D)

Miss Alicia, can you tell us how we may learn from his presence here?

They all look to Alicia.

ALICIA

Well, maybe the sight of him will remind us there is something else in the world besides lessons.

MISS MARTHA

It seems to me that is all there should be for any young lady your age. If we learn our lessons properly when young, we can expect a calm and happy life when we are faced with the distractions of the world. *N'est-ce-pas?*

She looks to Edwina like, 'Isn't this so?'

Edwina nods.

(CONTINUED)

JANE

With the presence of this hateful enemy, he will be a constant reminder to us that the war is still going on, and the sacrifices and prayers we must make.

EDWINA

May I say, that any breath of fresh air from the outside world, I think is welcome to us all.

EMILY

I heard he said he was a mercenary, so maybe he's not even really the enemy.

AMY

What's a mercenary?

ALICIA

It means he's just paid by the army to fight, he's not really fighting their cause.

MISS MARTHA

Well, we don't know about that.

AMY

He seems to be a student of nature, so I expect to learn about foreign wildlife.

EDWINA

He seems to be a sensitive person.

MISS MARTHA

Does he?

EDWINA

I found him understanding.

MISS MARTHA

Do you, indeed? You must share more of your findings with us, Edwina.

(MORE)

(CONTINUED)

MISS MARTHA (CONT'D)

As dedicated Christians, let us
ask the Corporal to join us in
our evening prayer.

INT. MUSIC ROOM - NIGHT

The women join McBurney in the candlelit room.

He is clean shaven and wearing a crisp shirt and trousers, propped up on pillows on the settee.

MISS MARTHA

Since our music lessons were suspended today in order to permit the Corporal to rest, why don't we have a little music now -- if Corporal McBurney will not be too disturbed by a little *divertisement*?

MCBURNEY

Not at all, ma'am, I'm very fond of music.

MISS MARTHA

Miss Jane?

JANE

Yes, ma'am.

Jane begins playing the harpsichord.

MCBURNEY

Why, you play beautifully Miss Jane.

She smiles, uncomfortable so close to this enemy.

MISS MARTHA

Doesn't she.

ALICIA

I can also play for you, Corporal.

MCBURNEY

I'm sure you can.

Edwina gives Alicia a sharp look -- *do you always have to be such a slut?*

Alicia shrugs at Edwina.

Jane starts to sing and before long they're all singing along with McBurney joining in.

(CONTINUED)

Amy gives McBurney a smile.

The room is full of smiles and merriment -- Edwina and McBurney share a warm glance.

Alicia sneaks a sultry look -- until A LOUD KNOCK at the front door interrupts them.

Jane stops her song.

JANE

Yankees?!

MISS MARTHA

Possibly not. It could be some of our own.

LOUD KNOCKS hit the door below again.

MISS MARTHA (CONT'D)

Edwina, wait here with the girls and I'll go to the door.

She looks at Edwina.

MISS MARTHA (CONT'D)

If it is Yankees or unruly soldiers of our own army, I will rap three times on this door. Then you will take the girls out to the woods behind the garden and stay there until I come for you.

She starts to leave.

AMY

What about Corporal McBurney?

McBurney looks as scared as the girls.

MISS MARTHA

He may remain where he is since he's in no condition to leave. I'm going to get the gun. Be quiet in here, all of you.

Miss Martha starts to go.

(CONTINUED)

AMY

Can we cover him with something?

MISS MARTHA

Yes. Shh.

She leaves.

In silence, the girls lean against the door, trying to hear something.

We hear MUFFLED VOICES. The girls hold their breath.

CUT TO:

INT. MISS MARTHA'S ROOM - NIGHT

CLOSE on Miss Martha's hands taking the gun from her drawer.

We hear banging on the door below O.S.

CUT TO:

INT. HALLWAY - NIGHT

Miss Martha hurries down the stairs.

CUT TO:

INT. FOYER - NIGHT

LOOKING DOWN THE HALL

Miss Martha talks at the open door.

The music room door opens just a crack.

The GIRLS' POV watching Miss Martha, trying to see who she is talking to.

Miss Martha steps aside and opens the door wider as two men enter the house.

They quickly close the door and listen to the loud, heavy footsteps as the men walk down the hall. The steps grow closer and closer and then stop outside the music room.

(CONTINUED)

The girls all stand completely silent and still holding their breath...

The steps continue down the hall toward the kitchen.

CUT TO:

INT. MUSIC ROOM - NIGHT

The door slowly opens and Miss Martha comes in pale, but triumphant, holding the gun. She composes herself, out of breath.

MISS MARTHA
It's all right.

(CONTINUED)

The girls are relieved -- they can breathe again.

MISS MARTHA (CONT'D)

There are just two of them --
two cavalrymen of our own.
They're having something to eat
in the kitchen.

EDWINA

Why did they come?

MISS MARTHA

To offer their assistance before
the army leaves this vicinity.
I haven't as yet mentioned
Corporal McBurney.

The girls look at each other and over to McBurney -- helpless
on the settee.

MISS MARTHA (CONT'D)

I might ask them to take him
with them.

AMY

But he couldn't ride without
hurting his leg.

MISS MARTHA

I could tell them about him and
suggest since he's wounded that
they come back for him, but that
could be weeks or months.

ALICIA

They'll probably insist on
taking him right now, and who
knows what'll happen to him.

MARIE

They'll likely shoot him and
leave him along the road.

(CONTINUED)

MISS MARTHA

I could allow him to stay until he is recovered and then send him on his way alone.

EDWINA

Oh, yes.

MISS MARTHA

There is Christian charity to be considered.

AMY

(close to tears)
You keep talking about him as if he were some old piece of baggage, and not a kind person who is in this room. Oh, please, Miss Martha.

EMILY

And there are the doubts if we can really consider him an enemy.

They all look at Miss Martha. McBurney waits for his fate.

MISS MARTHA

I will allow Corporal McBurney to remain until his leg heals. If one of you is opposed, I will tell the soldiers and let them decide what to do with him.

She looks around at the girls.

No hands are raised.

MISS MARTHA (CONT'D)

Well, then.

She is relieved, and seems to remember the gun in her hand.

(CONTINUED)

MISS MARTHA (CONT'D)

When the soldiers saw me with this, I believe they were more frightened than I was! They said nothing was more frightening than a startled woman with a gun.

She laughs on her way out.

ALICIA

May I accompany you Miss Martha, to say a few words of cheer to our men?

EMILY

I'd like to come too.

MISS MARTHA

They seem decent enough, but there's no need to put temptation in their way. Now get to bed.

The girls file by on their way.

Miss Martha turns to McBurney.

MISS MARTHA (CONT'D)

Would you care to join me for a brandy, Corporal?

MCBURNEY

Yes, thank you, ma'am.

EXT. MANSION - NIGHT

The cavalymen ride off in the moonlight.

The lights in the house go black.

INT. GIRLS' BEDROOM - NIGHT

As the SOUND of the horses' HOOVES fade, we hear an OWL outside their window.

Amy, Jane, and Emily whisper from their beds in the dark room.

(CONTINUED)

JANE

I wonder how long he'll stay.

AMY

Miss Martha seems to be warming up to him, and I believe he likes it here.

EMILY

Oh, what would you know?

AMY

I've talked with him privately.

EMILY

You think just because you found him, you have some special relationship...

AMY

You're just jealous.

JANE

Shhh.

CUT TO:

INT. PARLOR - NIGHT

Miss Martha sits across from McBurney in front of a fire in the small parlor. They sip brandy in the warm glow of the fire.

Miss Martha leans back, letting her guard down, relieved to be with another adult for once.

MISS MARTHA

What a night.

MCBURNEY

It must be tiring for you.

MISS MARTHA

I can't say it hasn't been a struggle.

MCBURNEY

I admire your strength.

She smiles in thoughtful appreciation.

(CONTINUED)

MCBURNEY (CONT'D)

I know it must be hard for you to be strong all the time for these girls, they're lucky to have a woman like yourself to keep going for all of them.

MISS MARTHA

I want to give them what they'll need to survive in these times. It will be such a different world they'll be going out into, I don't think they realize.

MCBURNEY

They can't know what it's like out there.

MISS MARTHA

Sometimes I get so tired... I pray the end is near. It's hard to find any sense in it, how much everyone has suffered.

MCBURNEY

Did you have someone before the war?

MISS MARTHA

I did.

MCBURNEY

I'm sorry.

MISS MARTHA

Everyone has lost so much.

MCBURNEY

I was a coward to leave, but you don't realize what battle really is until you've seen it.

MISS MARTHA

It must be devastating.

He looks at her in appreciation of her kindness.

(CONTINUED)

MCBURNEY

I shouldn't have been there. I'd just come from Dublin, I had nothing. I took three hundred dollars to take a man's place.

(CONTINUED)

MISS MARTHA

I see... We've all done things out of our character. We'll look to it that you make your way home. Thank you for your company. If you'll excuse me, I must insist you rest.

Miss Martha stands, her figure outlined by the fire.

MCBURNEY

Good evening.

MISS MARTHA

Good evening, Corporal.

She nods and walks out into the darkness.

FADE IN:

INT. MUSIC ROOM - DAY

Sun floods in and birds chirp on a new day.

McBurney -- clean-shaven and hair combed -- is standing, starting to walk carefully with the help of a cane, as Amy by his side watches. Miss Martha enters.

AMY

Look, Miss Martha!

Miss Martha goes to McBurney.

MISS MARTHA

Now lean on the cane and your good leg. Don't put any weight on your bad leg.

MCBURNEY

Yes, ma'am.

MISS MARTHA

I still wouldn't rush nature to take her course, but if you want to take the risk of reinjuring your leg, feel free to do so.

McBurney slips a little, and Miss Martha and Amy rush to help him.

(CONTINUED)

MISS MARTHA (CONT'D)
Steady, Corporal!

MCBURNEY
Will you help me outside, Miss
Amy?

AMY
Yes, of course Corporal.

INT. FOYER -DAY

Emily and Alicia pass through. McBurney nods to them as he makes his way slowly. Alicia smiles at him coyly.

MCBURNEY
Ladies.

ALICIA
Good-day, Corporal. Miss Amy,
it's your turn in the kitchen
garden.

EMILY
That's right.

AMY
I'm helping the corporal, as you
can see.

ALICIA
Well, I'm sure we could relieve
you.

MISS MARTHA
Girls, that's enough. I'll be
the one to let you know whose
work is needed, now go on your
way.

Emily and Alicia give Amy a bitchy look, and continue on.

CUT TO:

EXT. PORCH - DAY

Amy helps McBurney as he slowly moves along.

(CONTINUED)

He looks out over the garden. Miss Martha stands in the doorway nearby.

MCBURNEY

Your roses need pruning... and those hedges are in terrible shape. The whole flower garden needs help, I'll get to it tomorrow.

MISS MARTHA

Surtout pas. You'll do nothing of the kind. It's kind of you to offer but it has been neglected for some time, and it can remain that way a while longer.

AMY

Have you had much gardening experience, Corporal McBurney?

MCBURNEY

Oh yes, I did a good bit of it.

MISS MARTHA

Well, if you really have a knack for gardening, you can make yourself welcome later in your convalescence. The English box hedge hasn't been trimmed properly for years now, and we have enough with keeping the kitchen garden going.

MCBURNEY

It would be my pleasure, ma'am.

(CONTINUED)

EXT. GARDEN - DAY

McBurney works in the garden in the hot sun, he looks over at Edwina passing. He stares at her.

CLOSE on Edwina over by the mossy oaks with a basket of linens-- she feels his stare, and tilts her head, pretending to not notice him.

CUT TO:

EXT. GARDEN

McBurney prunes a hedge.

CLOSE on McBurney working up a sweat as he sharpens old garden tools on a block of granite.

CLOSE SHOT

He works a blade across the stone, as it sharpens.

EXT. GARDEN - DAY

Edwina and Emily pick some vegetables in the kitchen garden.

McBurney stops to watch her.

CLOSE on Edwina's flushed face as she works in the garden, she steals a glance at him.

CUT TO:

EXT. GARDEN NEAR WATER BASIN- DAY

McBurney continues his work pruning the rose bushes and cutting away dead vines. He wipes the sweat from his forehead.

Amy brings him a glass of water. He thanks her with a wink and a smile.

(CONTINUED)

AMY

Miss Martha told me to return to my lessons but I told her all the things you need me to do.

MCBURNEY

Yes, I'm counting on you to keep my clumsy feet away from bird's nests and my spade from decapitating friendly worms. That plus keep me company.

Amy smiles.

MCBURNEY (CONT'D)

Don't tell anyone else, but I consider you my best friend in this place.

AMY

You do?

MCBURNEY

Of course I do, now hand me those shears, will you, my girl.

Amy beams.

They continue their work.

(CONTINUED)

McBurney looks up to see Edwina watching him through a lace curtain.

McBurney splashes water on his face from a bucket to cool off. Water drips over him.

His eyes meet Edwina's and she turns away.

Alicia and Emily wave to McBurney from nearby.

He gives them a nod.

CUT TO:

EXT. PORCH - DAY

As Amy passes to go inside, Emily and Alicia tug her braids.

ALICIA

You better not be saying unkind things about us to the Corporal.

Amy politely smiles.

AMY

Now, why would I ever do that?

She continues on.

CUT TO:

EXT. GARDEN BY OAK TREES - DAY

McBurney rests on a bench by a great oak.

Miss Martha comes over to him.

(CONTINUED)

MISS MARTHA

Corporal, I wonder how your leg is?

MCBURNEY

It twinges a bit now and then.

MISS MARTHA

I would expect that. You may recall I was opposed to you walking on it so soon, however I can appreciate your need to be active. May I check?

MCBURNEY

Yes, ma'am.

He sits on a bench, as Miss Martha checks the wound under his bandages.

MISS MARTHA

The stitches seem to be holding and the wound is healing nicely.

MCBURNEY

When do you think I'll be recovered?

MISS MARTHA

Some may say you're recovered now. I'm sure the army surgeons would say you're ready to return to duty.

MCBURNEY

So, you'd like me to leave?

MISS MARTHA

I didn't say that.

MCBURNEY

Surely not, you're too polite a lady to be so blunt about it.

(CONTINUED)

MISS MARTHA

I am as blunt as I need to be, Corporal McBurney. Since you brought it up, I will tell you that I think your leg is healed enough to leave by the end of this week.

MCBURNEY

That's in just a few days.

MISS MARTHA

Yes, it is.

MCBURNEY

Where would I go?

MISS MARTHA

I'm afraid that is entirely your business where you go, Corporal. However I should think you might find columns of your troops on the main road to Richmond.

He looks out.

MCBURNEY

Your garden should have continual care, you need a full-time gardener.

MISS MARTHA

Perhaps, but I expect we'll have to do without in these times.

McBurney looks upset, fragile.

MCBURNEY

It's a pity isn't it, that I couldn't have remained helpless.

Miss Martha stares at him for a moment, and then picks up her skirts and leaves, disappearing into the house.

CUT TO:

INT. PARLOR - DAY

Amy lies on a sofa crying.

Alicia, and Emily crowd around her.

MARIE

When?

AMY

I don't know exactly, but she asked him to leave.

ALICIA

We will have to make things so pleasant for him that he won't even consider leaving us, until we decide of course, that it's time for him to go.

EMILY

We might suggest to Miss Martha that it would be nice if Corporal McBurney could join us at the table for dinner.

AMY

Yes, he must get lonely eating alone in his room.

ALICIA

We should show him some real Southern hospitality.

CUT TO:

EXT. GARDEN - LATE AFTERNOON

Jane cuts some wild flowers in a field, making a small bouquet.

CUT TO:

INT. MUSIC ROOM -LATE AFTERNOON

Edwina joins McBurney by the window, alone in his room.

MCBURNEY
I've missed being near you.

EDWINA
Have you?

She looks down shyly.

MCBURNEY
You have no idea how lovely you
are.

Edwina's stiff manner crumbles.

MCBURNEY (CONT'D)
Miss Farnsworth suggested it's
time for me to be on my way.

EDWINA
I don't want you to leave.

MCBURNEY
I don't want to leave you,
Edwina. I love you.

EDWINA
Please... don't ever say that to
me unless you mean it.

MCBURNEY
I do. I knew exactly how I felt
about you from that first day I
talked to you, but was afraid to
say anything for fear you'd
never let me near you again.
I'm only telling you now because
this may be my only chance. I
realize I'm not good enough for
you, Edwina.

EDWINA
That's not true.

MCBURNEY
I'm tired of this war, I want to
see the West...

(CONTINUED)

EDWINA

If you can get to Richmond, my
father can help you.

MCBURNEY

Come with me.

He kisses her- it knocks the wind out of her.

A KNOCK at the door interrupts them.

Edwina, light-headed, stands up, smooths her skirt.

Alicia and Jane enter.

ALICIA

Miss Martha invites you to dine
with us, Corporal.

MCBURNEY

Thank you, that would be my
great pleasure.

Jane and Alicia curtsey innocently.

Edwina rushes out.

CUT TO:

INT. HALLWAY - EVENING

There is a flurry of activity of girls rushing to their rooms.

Amy passes Edwina.

AMY

Have you heard -- the Corporal is joining us for dinner tonight! Evidently Miss Martha was fearful she might have hurt his feelings by asking him to leave so she invited him to dine with us.

Edwina watches her go, and rushes off herself.

INT. GIRLS' ROOM - EVENING

Emily tightens the laces on Jane's corset. Close up on ribbons in their hair.

JANE

Have you got it?

EMILY

Almost.

The SOUND of a dinner BELL ringing.

CUT TO:

INT. HALLWAY - EVENING

Alicia looks at herself in a mirror. She stares for a second and then reaches up and pinches her cheeks.

CUT TO:

INT. DINING ROOM - NIGHT

In the glow of candlelight, McBurney is surrounded by the ladies and girls of the Farnsworth school. They are all dressed up in their best.

(CONTINUED)

The evening is festive, with chatter and the passing of bowls and platters of sweet potato pie, black-eyed peas and biscuits. They are all enjoying having a man at the table, but Jane is still suspicious of the Northern enemy.

A radiant Edwina wears a blue silk dress, that sits off her shoulders.

MISS MARTHA

That dress is very becoming on you, Miss Edwina.

EDWINA

Thank you.

ALICIA

There might be other attractive shoulders here if we were all permitted to wear such dresses.

MISS MARTHA

It is not entirely suitable dress for a young ladies school, but we know that Miss Edwina is accustomed to town society with different views. I suggest we change the subject and that Miss Edwina might consider drawing her shawl to prevent any other speculation on the subject.

Edwina demurely pulls her shawl over her shoulders as Alicia watches.

McBurney gives Edwina a little smile from across the table. She smiles back at him.

MCBURNEY

This is the finest meal I can remember.

MISS MARTHA

Merci Beaucoup...Miss Alicia made the pie herself.

ALICIA

I made apple pie.

MCBURNEY

You don't say?

(CONTINUED)

Alicia smiles, pleased with herself.

AMY
I picked the apples.

MCBURNEY
Delicious.

EDWINA
Is that my recipe, Miss Alicia?

Jane looks at Alicia.

Alicia is coy to Edwina.

ALICIA
Why, yes it is.

Edwina takes a bite, with a glance to Alicia.

MISS MARTHA
(to McBurney)
We're fortunate to have had
enough water for our garden.

MCBURNEY
Yes, ma'am.

CUT TO:

INT. MUSIC ROOM - NIGHT

The girls are chatting and Jane finishes playing "Concerto in B Minor" by Oskar Reiding on her violin for McBurney who sits nearby, listening appreciatively.

MCBURNEY
That's a beautiful song.

Jane smiles, flattered.

Alicia leans in to McBurney with baby-doll eyes.

ALICIA
Isn't it? I've always thought
it was rather romantic...

He look at her like a wolf. Jane sits down at the harpsichord and begins to play Stephen Foster's "Virginia Belle".

(CONTINUED)

Edwina enters the room to see Alicia leaning by McBurney, flirtatiously chatting with him at the window.

McBurney turns to see Edwina and makes his way over to her with his cane.

Next to Edwina, he squeezes her hand reassuringly. He looks at her, as she avoids his stare.

He leans in and speaks under his breath, as if it's a tortured burden -- to be so close to her and not grab her.

MCBURNEY

My love.

She looks away, flustered.

Alicia passes by and gives Edwina a snotty look like -- *I'm the one he wants.*

Edwina looks to McBurney.

He leans in, whispers to her under the music, she smiles and they exchange whispered plans.

Miss Martha appears.

McBurney straightens himself and bows to Miss Martha.

MISS MARTHA

May I offer you a *digestif*, some brandy, Corporal?

MCBURNEY

Yes, ma'am.

He nods to Edwina and sits down with Miss Martha, happy to partake.

MISS MARTHA

My father had quite a cellar in his day. The house was full of parties... People traveled from all over to come here.

MCBURNEY

I'll bet it was splendid here, ma'am.

MISS MARTHA

It was. There were elegant dinners and balls... carriages lined up, beautiful gowns and men in full dress...

She smiles and lifts her glass as they sip brandy together.

(CONTINUED)

MCBURNEY

A toast to you, Miss Martha, you must be the bravest lady I've ever known.

She's flattered.

MISS MARTHA

Oh, all bravery is -- is doing what must be done at the time. Tell me, Corporal, do you think this war will be over soon?

MCBURNEY

Very soon, sooner than you Southerners are ready to admit.

MISS MARTHA

I know...

MCBURNEY

And you could use some help around here. A man's help.

He sips the brandy slowly and looks into her eyes.

Miss Martha tilts her head in reflection.

She looks up as the music ends, and sets down her glass.

MISS MARTHA

Please gather for our evening prayers.

Miss Martha starts the prayers, as the others gather around in the candlelight.

MISS MARTHA (CONT'D)

Dear Lord, we ask for your protection over our school and all of the brave members of our army...

AMY

And may we ask to look out for our friend, Corporal McBurney, as he makes his way.

(CONTINUED)

MISS MARTHA

Yes, Miss Amy. Corporal
McBurney's stay with us has
taught us all a very important
lesson, that the enemy as an
individual is not what we
believed. Let us bow in silent
meditation.

The girls bow their heads.

Alicia sneaks a look to McBurney.

Amy looks at her, confused.

CUT TO:

INT. HALLWAY - NIGHT

Edwina passes McBurney and Miss Martha in the dark hallway.

In the dim candlelight, Edwina and McBurney exchange a
knowing look, and Edwina continues on.

Miss Martha stops at her room. She and McBurney stand at her
doorway, as she holds a candelabra, facing him. Is he going
to join her?

She looks at him, she is softer.

MISS MARTHA

Well, good night, Corporal. You
will need your rest.

She touches his arm.

MCBURNEY

Yes, ma'am.

He looks at her.

The moment is filled with anticipation.

Suddenly a door SLAMS above, and a girl calls out:

JANE (O.S.)

Please! Stop it!

AMY (O.S.)

I'm not doing anything!

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

Miss Martha calls up to them.

MISS MARTHA
Girls! Quiet down.

The moment is broken, McBurney looks at her.

Miss Martha gives him a little curtsey.

MISS MARTHA (CONT'D)
Good night, Corporal.

MCBURNEY
Good night, ma'am. Thank you
for your hospitality.

Miss Martha goes up the stairs.

CUT TO:

INT. EDWINA'S ROOM - NIGHT

Edwina washes her face carefully.

CLOSE on her hands as she unfolds a garment folded in paper. She holds up a Parisian lace-trimmed nightgown that looks like it's never been worn.

She carefully slips it on, and brushes her hair -- counting with each stroke, as she imagines herself as a bride.

EDWINA
One, two, three, four, five,
six, seven...

CLOSE SHOT

A small bottle of perfume.

EXTREME CLOSE UP

Edwina puts perfume behind her ears.

Edwina leaves her door slightly ajar.

She lies on her bed next to the glow of a candle, full of anticipation. We SEE the outline of her hair as she waits.

(CONTINUED)

We hear the SOUNDS of the house at night in almost silence.

The battles seem to have moved on.

We hear the sound of CICADAS.

We hear some GIRLS say good-night in other rooms.

CUT TO:

EXT. SECOND FLOOR BALCONY- NIGHT

We see McBurney's outline on the dark back balcony.

CUT TO:

INT. EDWINA'S ROOM -NIGHT

CLOSE on Edwina -- she hears a SOUND on the steps -- the wood CREAKS.

We hear a few heavy STEPS come CLOSER -- and then pass.

Barely breathing, Edwina lies for a few more beats, then sits up.

CUT TO:

INT. HALLWAY - NIGHT

Edwina, holding up a candlestick, carefully walks down the dark hall.

We hear what sounds like muffled GIGGLES.

Edwina in her nightgown makes her way closer to a room -- the door barely ajar, a low LIGHT seeping out.

It's quiet now. Edwina wonders if she was imagining sounds -- then she hears a CREAK and a LAUGH and moves forward.

Edwina opens the door to find --

HER POV:

Over a bare milky white ass, McBurney is in bed with Alicia's naked body on top of him. He's grabbing her and clearly having a good time.

(CONTINUED)

They look up to see Edwina. Edwina steps back -- as McBurney jumps up.

MCBURNEY

Edwina!

EDWINA

No --

INT. SECOND FLOOR LANDING - NIGHT

McBurney, smiling with assurance, moves toward Edwina, as she backs up in shock. He reaches for her.

MCBURNEY

Dear Edwina --

She backs up towards the stairs, he reaches for her. She pushes him away, as she drops the candle and SCREAMS.

In the darkness, we hear McBurney tumbles down the stairs, calling out in agony.

Edwina crumples to the ground.

CUT TO:

INT. HALLWAY - NIGHT

Miss Martha rushes out, followed by the other girls, all in nightgowns.

They crowd around to see -- McBurney lying unconscious at the bottom of the stairs in the darkness.

Miss Martha takes a lamp, and holds it up.

We see blood pooling around McBurney, his leg contorted.

Amy, looking through the stair banister, cries.

AMY

Is he dead?!

Miss Martha leans in to check his pulse.

MISS MARTHA

No, but we have to stop the bleeding.

Edwina joins them at the bottom of the stairs, her tear-stained face in shock.

(CONTINUED)

MISS MARTHA (CONT'D)

What has happened?!

JANE

Oh, Miss Martha!

Edwina is in shock and can't explain herself.

EMILY

Is he going to die?!

MISS MARTHA

(urgent)

Get some rags!

Alicia comes down the stairs, not seeing the severity of it.

ALICIA

I was so shaken I could hardly
bring myself to leave my room.

No one pays attention, Miss Martha rushes to make a
tourniquet. She is much less gentle than on his arrival.

ALICIA (CONT'D)

It was terrible the way he
rushed in, I was frightened half
to death, and then Edwina came
out and began fighting with him.

Emily brings a bowl of water. Amy has some old cloth.

MISS MARTHA

We have to get him to the table.
Help me move him.

Marie comes to her side. Jane recoils, the girls are scared
to get closer.

ALICIA

Is he going to be alright?

MISS MARTHA

Be quite, and help.

The girls help to pick him up.

INT. DINING ROOM - NIGHT

The women gather around, blocking McBurney, who lies on the dining table.

A lamp lights the table from the mantle.

We SEE their backs as they look at McBurney.

Jane turns to us in horror for what she sees. Amy covers her mouth, as Emily ushers them away.

MISS MARTHA

We may have to remove it.

Close on McBurney's unconscious face.

EDWINA

What?! No!

(CONTINUED)

Alicia calls down as she descends the stairs.

ALICIA (O.S.)
Is there anything I can do?

She enters the dining room. They ignore her. Miss Martha focuses on the patient.

ALICIA (CONT'D)
I was so shocked and shaken, I could hardly bring myself to leave my room.

MISS MARTHA
Is that so, Miss?

ALICIA
Yes, I was asleep, when he came upstairs.

Amy brings water.

MISS MARTHA
Were you indeed?

ALICIA
It was terrible the way he rushed in, I was frightened half to death.

MARIE
What did he want?

ALICIA
How should I know?

MISS MARTHA
Be quiet, all of you.

ALICIA
Nothing happened, I swear!

Alicia starts sobbing.

MISS MARTHA
(firmly)
Go to your room.

Alicia sulks off.

(CONTINUED)

Miss Martha goes back to the table. The girls gather around, blocking the gruesomeness of his injury.

Amy squeezes Emily's hand.

Edwina puts a cold compress on McBurney's forehead. He seems to wake up for a moment in a daze.

EDWINA

What are you going to do?

MCBURNEY

(mutters)
I'll still be leaving.

MISS MARTHA

His leg is broken badly this time. I can't repair it, I'm not a surgeon.

JANE

Oh dear lord!

MISS MARTHA

Quiet!

MARIE

What will you do?!

EMILY

Don't distract her!

The girls squabble.

MISS MARTHA

Go to your rooms!

Miss Martha steps aside, as the girls scurry off in tears.

McBurney lies unconscious on the table. Miss Martha turns to Edwina at the mantle.

MISS MARTHA (CONT'D)

We have to amputate.

(CONTINUED)

Miss Martha is stone-faced.

EDWINA

What?! NO!

Miss Martha snaps at her.

MISS MARTHA

Do you want him to die? A very good doctor might be able to do something... but by the morning that leg with start to mortify...

Edwina sobs.

MISS MARTHA (CONT'D)

It's the only chance he has.

CLOSE on Miss Martha's intense face in the lamp light.

MISS MARTHA (CONT'D)

We need more rags and the saw from the smokehouse. Edwina, find the anatomy book.

Edwina wails.

CUT TO BLACK.

FADE IN:

EXT. WOODS - DAWN

In the low morning fog, WIDE on the women and girls of the Farnsworth school gathered around a small pit. Some are wearing black shawls.

They open a blanket and drop something in with a loud thud.

Miss Martha reads a prayer, as Emily shovels dirt over the small grave.

MISS MARTHA

Out of the depths have I cried unto thee, O Lord. Lord, hear my voice: let thine ears be attentive to the voice of my supplications.

(MORE)

(CONTINUED)

MISS MARTHA (CONT'D)

If thou, Lord, shouldest mark
iniquities, O Lord, who shall
stand? But there is forgiveness
with thee, that thou mayest be
feared. I wait for the Lord, my
soul doth wait, and in his word
do I hope. My soul waiteth for
the Lord more than they that
watch for the morning.

CUT TO:

INT. MUSIC ROOM - DAY

EXTREME CLOSE UP: McBurney opens his eyes in confused horror.

CUT TO:

INT. HALLWAY - DAY

Edwina, in a pale cotton dress, sits by the door to McBurney's room, waiting in the quiet house. Her head low and tired, she's been waiting a long time.

SUDDENLY the silence is interrupted by his horrified screams.

MCBURNEY(O.S.)

What have you done to me?!!

Edwina rushes to him.

INT. MUSIC ROOM - DAY

McBurney tries to sit up in bed. His pale face, covered in stubble, is dark, like a broken monster.

Edwina pleads with him in tears.

EDWINA

I've been waiting for days to talk to you...

He gives her a hateful look -- like how can you even speak to me?

EDWINA (CONT'D)

You don't know how sorry I am!

MCBURNEY

(nastily)
About what, my leg?! You could have stopped her!

Edwina cries.

MCBURNEY (CONT'D)

(disgusted)
But, you helped.

Miss Martha rushes in, Amy follows behind timidly.

(CONTINUED)

MISS MARTHA
What is going on here?

MCBURNEY
There you are -- the butcher!

Miss Martha is stoic.

MISS MARTHA
We saved your life.

Amy watches from the side, holding her turtle, afraid.

McBurney looks at Miss Martha with hatred.

MISS MARTHA (CONT'D)
We had to do it.

He blasts at her.

MCBURNEY
I'll bet you did! Did you have
to do it or did you just want to
punish me for not going to your
room.

EDWINA
It was an accident, she saved
your life.

MCBURNEY
You're worse than she is. Did
you lure me up there and plan
this together?!

Miss Martha stands tall.

MCBURNEY (CONT'D)
Did you enjoy it?! Now you can
keep me at your beck and call.

EDWINA
John--

MCBURNEY
Just bring me another bottle.

MISS MARTHA
You've had enough.

Edwina tries to get close to him, but he pushes her away.

(CONTINUED)

MCBURNEY

Get away from me.

Amy stares as they leave his room.

MCBURNEY (CONT'D)

You didn't tell me it was a
house of mad women. Vengeful
bitches...

Miss Martha closes the door behind them.

McBurney lets out a horrific wail O.S.

CLOSE SHOT

The key turning in the lock.

CUT TO:

EXT. BALCONY - DAY

WIDE SHOT

Marie is on lookout.

Her small figure walks it's length, looking out past the
mossy trees.

INT. HALLWAY - DAY

Edwina passes by the closed door of McBurney's room. She
stops and listens to McBurney's muffled sobbing.

Her heart breaks for him.

CLOSE on Edwina- *What have we become?*

INT. PARLOR - DAY

The women are gathered around Miss Martha.

We hear POUNDING from across the hall of McBurney's rage,
smashing furniture.

Miss Martha stays composed.

(CONTINUED)

AMY

What are we going to do, Miss Martha?!

EMILY

Miss Marie said she saw Union troops approaching.

MISS MARTHA

If we let him go, he'll join up with them. He would tell them about our garden and our cow.

JANE

He would lead them back here...

They all look to Miss Martha.

CLOSE on Miss Martha thinking.

MISS MARTHA

Exactly...

CUT TO:

INT. MUSIC ROOM - DAY

It's afternoon. With the shutters closed, light seeps into the dark room.

Alicia carefully makes her way over to McBurney who's resting on the settee.

She sits beside him, and talks in her innocent baby-doll voice. She leans forward, showing some cleavage.

ALICIA

How are you doin'?

McBurney turns to her and doesn't answer. He looks at her like -- *what the fuck do you want.*

ALICIA (CONT'D)

I tried to ease Miss Martha's suspicions about us... I was so worried about you. But, I know you'll be strong again soon.

She touches his chest.

(CONTINUED)

MCBURNEY

Shut up.

ALICIA

Can I get you anything?

MCBURNEY

Get me the key.

ALICIA

Miss Martha would know if it went missing... You know I'd get in trouble for that.

MCBURNEY

Just get it.

ALICIA

Well, there might be another one in Miss Martha's drawer with her valuables.

He grabs her hair and pulls her head back roughly.

ALICIA (CONT'D)

Ouch, you're hurting me.

MCBURNEY

Get me the key.

ALICIA

Alright, I will.

CUT TO:

EXT. GARDEN - AFTERNOON

Marie pumps water into a bucket.

Under a large oak, Amy collects acorns.

CUT TO:

INT. HALLWAY - AFTERNOON

Jane, in a cotton dress, with a sun hat in her hand, walks alone to the stairs.

(CONTINUED)

MCBURNEY (O.S.)
Who's there?

She stops when she hears McBurney through his door.

JANE
It's Jane.

MCBURNEY (O.S.)
Open the door a moment, would
you?

She hesitates.

MCBURNEY (CONT'D)
Please.

C.U. She peeks in the key hole.

She cautiously turns the key, and steps back.

McBurney stands in the doorway, his face is red from crying;
he's been drinking. She is startled as he comes towards her.

MCBURNEY (CONT'D)
Jane.

He grabs her arms. He's desperate.

MCBURNEY (CONT'D)
Jane. Where are you going?

She's frightened.

JANE
I'm just going out to the
garden, Corporal McBurney.

He pulls her closer, pinning her against the wall.

JANE (CONT'D)
Please --

MCBURNEY
Play a song for me. Would you
do that, Jane? One of your
pretty songs. Pretty like you.

She tries to lean back, he's scary.

He lets go of her arms. Tries to be gentle.

(CONTINUED)

MCBURNEY (CONT'D)

I'm not really a bad fella, do you think you could put in a good word for me with Miss Martha and the others? Maybe things could go back to the way they were before... Will you ask her to let me stay?

JANE

She seems to be doing that.

MCBURNEY

I mean for her to say that I'm welcome, and for her to talk to me and let you all talk to me. Would you ask if she'd do that?

JANE

Yes sir. You better go back inside.

She closes the door and hurries away.

CUT TO:

EXT. BALCONY- EVENING

Emily walks on patrol as the sun sets over the mansion.

There's nothing in sight; they seem to be in the middle of nowhere.

FADE OUT.

FADE IN:

INT. KITCHEN - MORNING

Miss Martha and the others have tea at the kitchen table.

JANE

I wish he would just leave.

MISS MARTHA

We have to wait until the Union troops have passed. It won't be long, I'm expecting our men to push them back.

(CONTINUED)

ALICIA

Oh, Miss Martha, I'm so scared.

MISS MARTHA

I know, dear.

ALICIA

He said he was going to kill me
if I made any noise.

EDWINA

Oh, shut up.

Edwina shoots her a look.

MISS MARTHA

Please. We must all be strong.
He'll be on his way soon.

EDWINA

He wasn't harming her. She
isn't harmed, is she?

MISS MARTHA

But he intended to harm her.

EDWINA

How should we know what his
intentions were?

MISS MARTHA

Don't fence with me, Miss.

AMY

I don't think he meant anyone
any harm.

MISS MARTHA

Perhaps not, but we can't be
sure.

Suddenly a loud CRASHING sound comes from the other room.

Miss Martha stands up. Alicia screams.

McBurney staggers in on his crutches, the revolver in his
hand. He is belligerent.

(CONTINUED)

MCBURNEY

Well, well, what are you
Southern ladies learning today?
The art of castration?

EMILY

Why don't you just go?

MISS MARTHA

Yes, why don't we help you
prepare your possessions and you
can leave.

MCBURNEY

Oh, I can leave now? Just
without my leg! You're done
with dressing me up? I'll leave
when I god damn want to. Things
are all about to change around
here. Now I'll tell you how
it's gonna be.

The girls look at him glaring down at them in a stupor.

MCBURNEY (CONT'D)

Do you know why Edwina pushed me
down those stairs? And why your
Miss Martha chopped off my leg?
Because I didn't go to her room,
or Edwina's. No, they didn't
like that --

He knocks over a side table which crashes down, a dish on it
smashing loudly.

MISS MARTHA

That's enough.

MCBURNEY

(forcefully)
I'll tell you when it's enough.

Amy approaches him with her turtle in her hands.

AMY

Oh, please don't shout, Corporal
McBurney. You'll frighten Henry
here.

McBurney grabs the little turtle out of her small hands and
throws him across the floor.

(CONTINUED)

Amy bends down to her turtle in tears. She looks back at McBurney like he's a monster.

With regret, he leans towards her.

MCBURNEY
I'm sorry, Miss Amy, I didn't
mean to do that.

AMY
Stay away from me!

Amy cries.

MISS MARTHA
That's enough.

McBurney turns to Miss Martha. He points the gun at her.

MCBURNEY
What was that?

Miss Martha doesn't drop her gaze.

He feels the girls all looking at him. He lowers it as he drops his head.

MCBURNEY (CONT'D)
Why didn't you just kill me and
get it over with...

McBurney grabs a mostly empty bottle from a side table and staggers out of the room.

The girls sit in shock, prisoners in their house.

AMY
Oh Miss Martha, what are we
going to do?

We hear O.S. a bottle smashing in the foyer.

Jane starts sobbing.

MISS MARTHA
We're going to be alright.

Miss Martha holds Jane's shoulders to comfort her.

MISS MARTHA (CONT'D)

Now, Miss Amy, I want you take a blue rag with you in your basket and go out front. Pretend you're gathering walnuts, and make your way to the gate and tie it on, and then come right back. Do you think you can do that?

AMY

Yes, Miss Martha.

MISS MARTHA

Then hurry right back.

CUT TO:

EXT. MANSION GATE - DAY

With her basket on her arm, Amy's back is to us as she quickly ties the blue rag on the gate. Her hands tremble.

A dark shadow comes into frame and falls over her, with the sound of a footstep.

Amy turns to see McBurney.

MCBURNEY

What are you doing there, Miss Amy?

She looks at him a beat and takes off running. He tries to grab her, but she gets away.

McBurney follows after her as fast as he can go.

CUT TO:

INT. KITCHEN

The girls all turn as they hear Amy's O.S. scream.

Miss Martha gets up to go out.

MISS MARTHA

Go inside and stay there.

CUT TO:

EXT. MANSION - DAY

Miss Martha walks carefully outside, looking around. She sees no one.

The girls run into the house.

We hear the dry grass under Miss Martha's shoes.

The door of the shed shuts.

Miss Martha walks towards it.

CUT TO:

INT. SHED - DAY

Miss Martha opens the door slowly, letting in a stream of light in the dark shed.

We stay CLOSE with Miss Martha as she carefully looks around, her back against the wall.

Suddenly McBurney appears in her face from around a corner, holding a terrified Amy. Miss Martha gasps.

CUT TO:

INT. PARLOR - DAY

The girls move together to the parlor window to get a better look.

CUT TO:

INT. SHED - DAY

CLOSE on McBurney and Miss Martha face to face in the dim shed. McBurney holds the gun up close to her face.

MISS MARTHA
Please, Corporal McBurney.

She looks him in the eye.

(CONTINUED)

MISS MARTHA (CONT'D)

Won't you come inside with me?
We have one more bottle of
bourbon in the cellar.

He looks at her, and slides the gun down her cheek slowly,
lowering it.

He lets Amy go.

CUT TO:

EXT. MANSION - AFTERNOON

WIDE on the mansion as McBurney makes his way back inside,
pointing the gun at Miss Martha and Amy, shooping them inside.

MCBURNEY

Get back inside.

CUT TO:

INT. PARLOR - DAY

The girls scramble from the window and sit, terrified.

Miss Martha enters with Amy, followed by McBurney.

Miss Martha stands erect, between McBurney and the girls,
trying to guard them in some way.

McBurney looks at her from the doorway, fed up.

MCBURNEY

The next one of you to try
something is going to be sorry.

Miss Martha keeps her voice down and controlled.

MISS MARTHA

Miss Marie, please go to the
cellar and fetch that last
bottle of bourbon.

She slips her a key, and Marie moves past, avoiding McBurney
in the doorway.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

MCBURNEY

Amy, I thought we were friends... I never meant any harm to any of you. Look at me, look what you've done to me. I'd rather be dead than a man without a leg, hobbling around. I see how you look at me... your disgust and pity.

He starts to cry.

MCBURNEY (CONT'D)

I'm not a man, I took your kindness and trusted you and you toyed with me and then butchered me.

The girls stare.

He looks up at them with a fierce look in his eye.

MCBURNEY (CONT'D)

I've had enough with your devilment. I've got four shots left, and the next one of you to try something is going to get it from me.

The girls sit in terror. He raises his voice.

MCBURNEY (CONT'D)

Do you hear me?!

McBurney pulls the trigger and shoots the chandelier. It comes crashing down.

The girls scream, Jane cries.

MCBURNEY (CONT'D)

The next shot is for one of you.

He staggers out.

The girls stare, frozen in place. They sit in silence. We hear Jane's whimpers.

Edwina stands up, and starts to go.

Miss Martha grabs her arms to stop her.

(CONTINUED)

MISS MARTHA

Leave him.

Edwina pushes past her.

INT. HALLWAY - DAY

Miss Martha tries to block Edwina.

MISS MARTHA

Don't make a fool of yourself.

Edwina looks at her stone-faced and fed-up.

EDWINA

Get out of my way.

MISS MARTHA

No, Edwina, don't.

She shoves Miss Martha out of her way roughly and moves past her, determined.

Miss Martha falls against the wall in distress.

CUT TO:

INT. MUSIC ROOM - DAY

McBurney lies on his bed. He looks over as his door starts to open slowly -- *what is it now?*

Edwina stands in the doorway.

McBurney watches as Edwina enters, closing the door carefully behind her.

MCBURNEY

What do you want?

McBurney watches as Edwina uses all her strength to push a sofa across the door as a barricade.

She stares at him as she walks over.

He watches her approach.

Edwina leans down to him, bracing her arms on his, and kisses him -- with all her pent-up passion.

(CONTINUED)

He grabs her and pins her down, fed up with her -- he rips her dress open.

She pulls him down towards her. Her eyes pleading for him.

He takes no mercy.

CUT TO:

INT. PARLOR - DAY

Miss Martha sits down with the girls around her. She is concentrating on a plan.

ALICIA

You're going to just let her be alone with him like that?!

MISS MARTHA

Hush, Alicia, we have bigger problems to solve.

JANE

I knew it was a mistake when you brought him here, Amy.

MISS MARTHA

Don't blame her, she did it out of the goodness of her heart... Now we must think... Since no one in this house is safe as long as he remains here. It's just a matter of how we can rid ourselves of him.

EMILY

Can't we leave him back in the woods?

MISS MARTHA

We can't take the risk that he'll meet and bring his troops.

EMILY

We could hang him?!

Miss Martha looks at her.

MISS MARTHA

Let's not resort to brutality...

(CONTINUED)

JANE

We can't go on like this with him here.

MISS MARTHA

We shall have to do something, and quickly, about him. I'm very worried of what might happen next.

AMY

I can tell him he's no longer welcome around certain people, if you like.

MISS MARTHA

You'll do nothing of the sort, Miss.

ALICIA

You're an idiot if you think he's going to take suggestions from you, Amy.

AMY

I was trying to help.

MISS MARTHA

Girls, please.

JANE

Will you go and get help?

MISS MARTHA

I don't want to leave you here alone with him...

MARIE

He loved the mushrooms.

MISS MARTHA

What was that?

MARIE

The corporal sure did love the mushrooms we served him. What if Amy picked the kind -- some especially for him?

Miss Martha looks at her, getting her drift.

(CONTINUED)

MISS MARTHA

I see.

A beat.

MISS MARTHA (CONT'D)

Do you think you could do that,
Amy? Find some mushrooms for
the corporal?

Amy looks at her.

MISS MARTHA (CONT'D)

You'll have to be very careful
that he doesn't notice you
leaving the house.

Miss Martha grasps Amy's wrists in emphasis. Amy looks her
in the eye, determined.

AMY

Yes, Miss Martha.

Miss Martha addresses the group.

MISS MARTHA

We'll make him a nice supper, we
can invite him for a send-off...
We'll get out that smoked ham
and make some biscuits and a
bowl of your mushrooms sauteed
in butter and wine...

CUT TO:

INT. MUSIC ROOM - LATE AFTERNOON

CLOSE on McBurney and Edwina asleep in bed, her face resting
against his chest.

EXT. FIELD NEAR WOODS - LATE AFTERNOON

In the late afternoon sun, Amy walks with her basket,
stopping here and there to pick mushrooms.

FADE OUT.

INT. MISS MARTHA'S ROOM - EVENING

Alone in her room, Miss Martha kneels and prays.

CUT TO:

INT. ALICIA'S ROOM - NIGHT

CLOSE on Alicia in a mirror as she buttons up a special dress.

CUT TO:

INT. GIRLS' ROOM - NIGHT

CLOSE on Amy and Jane braiding their hair, in quiet concentration.

The room is quiet.

The sound of cicadas start outside the window.

CUT TO:

INT. HALLWAY - NIGHT

In the dim candlelight, Miss Martha walks down the hall with a quiet, determined reserve.

CUT TO:

INT. DINING ROOM - NIGHT

A beautiful table is set with candles, wildflowers and platters of food.

Miss Martha and the rest of the household sit around the table, dressed up in their finery. Miss Martha wears taffeta and earrings, the girls in their holiday dresses.

Miss Martha and the girls look up as McBurney comes in followed by Edwina. He is wearing his washed and mended uniform.

McBurney smiles at the warm hospitality. Edwina, at his side, has her hair down and wears a pretty dress. With her flushed cheeks, for the first time she looks unwound.

(CONTINUED)

She smiles at McBurney as they look at each other like --
Isn't this nice?

They sit down and join the party. The girls pass the platters around. Edwina is oblivious to their plan.

MISS MARTHA

Corporal, we'd like to let you know that we harbor no ill feelings, and made this meal in commemoration of your journey ahead.

MCBURNEY

Thank you for excusing my outburst.

MISS MARTHA

Think nothing of it.

MCBURNEY

And thank you for this-- This looks like just about the finest meal I've ever seen.

Edwina is pleased that harmony is restored.

Jane looks across at Emily.

Platters are passed around with the ham, corn bread, greens.

MISS MARTHA

Bon Appetit. Oh, wait-- wait. We haven't said grace.

They put the platters down.

Everyone lowers their heads.

MISS MARTHA (CONT'D)

The Lord is gracious and full of compassion; slow to anger, and of great mercy. Bless us and these thy gifts which we receive from thy bountiful goodness, through Jesus Christ, our Lord, Amen.

Miss Martha looks up.

GIRLS

Amen.

The girls pass the platters.

(CONTINUED)

MISS MARTHA
Where are the mushrooms?

JANE
Here they are.

She passes them.

Wine is poured for McBurney.

MISS MARTHA
Miss Amelia picked these
mushrooms today. Who would like
some? Corporal?

MCBURNEY
Yes, ma'am, I'm fond of them.

Edwina looks at him with love.

Close on the bowl of mushrooms being passed over to him
silently, from girl to girl, no one taking any.

The bowl is handed to McBurney.

All eyes are on him.

MCBURNEY (CONT'D)
What about you, Miss Morrow?

Jane and Emily look to Edwina who is oblivious and lost in
romantic thoughts.

She speaks with a gentle smile.

EDWINA
Thank you.

He starts to serve her some.

The girls look at each other.

AMY
But, Miss Edwina, you don't like
mushrooms.

Jane and Emily stare.

EDWINA
It's true, I don't really.

MCBURNEY
All right, then.

He helps himself.

(CONTINUED)

MCBURNEY (CONT'D)
They look mighty tasty... and I
am hungry!

He gives a look to Edwina. She giggles.

Amy stares as McBurney piles the mushrooms on his plate.

MCBURNEY (CONT'D)
Mmmm... Miss Amy, you picked
these yourself?

Amy nods.

CLOSE on Amy's hand under the table as she squeezes the girl
next to her.

They all watch as McBurney eats up the mushrooms, washing
them down with wine.

He smiles, his mouth full of food.

MCBURNEY (CONT'D)
I don't plan to stay here much
longer, but while I am here,
I'll try to make it up to you
for all the unfortunate things
that happened.

Miss Martha smiles graciously at him.

He takes another big forkful of mushrooms and swallows them
down with more wine.

The girls watch him.

McBurney with perspiration on his forehead, tries to unloosen
his collar. He starts to choke, realizing something is wrong.
He looks up.

The united women calmly watch.

Edwina grasps him, in confused desperation.

EDWINA
John? John?

C.U. McBurney, on the verge of unconsciousness, looks at them
all, realizing...

(CONTINUED)

McBurney collapses to the floor. Edwina falls down to him. She tries to lift his heavy unconscious body. It's no use.

CUT TO BLACK.

FADE UP:

EXT. MANSION - DAY

Birds chirp on a sunny day.

CLOSE SHOT

A girl's hands tie a blue rag on the gate.

CUT TO:

EXT. PORCH - DAY

CLOSE SHOT

A girl's hand sews thread through dark fabric.

MISS MARTHA (O.S.)
Keep your stitches in a straight
line like I showed you.

We SEE the girls kneeling around their project on the front porch as Miss Martha looms over them.

Edwina, completely broken, is in a numb daze at her side.

Martha gives her a nod.

MARTHA
Edwina.

Edwina, looks up at her.

EDWINA (SOFTLY)
Yes, Miss Martha.

She takes her old place at Martha's side, overseeing the girls' work.

EDWINA (CONT'D)
Not so tight, Miss Jane.

CUT TO:

EXT. MANSION GATE - DAY

WIDE SHOT - THE MANSION

The girls carry the body bag down the walkway towards the gate, and drop it there.

EXT. MANSION - DAY

VIEW THROUGH THE BARS OF THE GATE:

The women and girls of the Farnsworth school, in their faded dresses, sit on the grand porch, waiting.

CUT TO BLACK.