

FADE IN:

EXT. FAIRVIEW, GA. - NIGHT

A foggy night rolls into Main Street in a small southern town. Horseshoes clip-clop along the cobblestones. Under the dimly-lit, gas-operated street lamps, a solitary horse drawn carriage circles a quiet town square.

SUPER: "FAIRVIEW, GEORGIA: 1862"

EXT. SOMERSET STREET - NIGHT

The carriage turns onto Somerset, past Signac house, a substantial Victorian home.

EXT. SIGNAC HOUSE (SECOND FLOOR WINDOW) - NIGHT

From a lamp-lit second-story window, the sensual cries of a woman making love filter through the night.

INT. SIGNAC HOUSE (PARLOR) - NIGHT

White, male HANDS in military dress open a gun case holding an 1860 Army Colt revolver. A hand withdraws the weapon.

INT. SIGNAC HOUSE (SECOND FLOOR HALL) - NIGHT

The woman's cries reverberate through the second-floor corridor, leading to the master bedroom.

EXT. TATUM HOUSE (ATTIC WINDOW) - NIGHT

A small black hand pulls a curtain back. GLORIA TATUM (11), daughter of the house slave, listens to the sensual moans from her neighbor's home.

The moans subside, followed by a moment of silence. Gloria stands, riveted.

EXT. SIGNAC HOUSE (SECOND FLOOR WINDOW)

SILHOUETTES, a man and woman, break apart, as a third man enters. The cries of the tempestuous SACHA SIGNAC (26), her husband PAUL (45) and his slave JOB (30) fill the night.

SACHA (V.O.)

You're never here. You always
leave!

PAUL (V.O.)
 In hell is where I'll leave you.
 And you, I trusted you!

One figure aims a gun. The other crouches.

JOB (V.O.)
 Please, massa. No!

Two gunshots pierce the air. A final gunshot, then silence.

INT. TATUM HOUSE (ATTIC WINDOW)

Gloria's eyes go wide with horror. The curtain falls closed.

INT. SIGNAC HOUSE (CELLAR) - NIGHT

Paul drops Sacha's body into a freshly dug grave. Her arms interlock with the naked Job. Paul heaps earth over them.

PAUL
 Almighty and most merciful Father.
 We have erred and strayed from thy
 ways like lost sheep. We have
 followed too much the devices and
 the desires of our own hearts. We
 have offended thy holy laws.
 (throws his hands up)
 By the grace of Almighty God
 above, I condemn you to dwell in
 this pit for eternity, souls
 thrown to oblivion, hidden from
 light forever -- never to rest.

Paul leans on his shovel, soundlessly crying.

EXT. GEORGIA HIGHWAY 21 - MORNING

A DeSoto tows a trailer of household articles along Georgia Highway 21 past billboards of fighting American G.I.s and Japanese soldiers.

SUPER: "GEORGIA, SEPTEMBER 1942"

INT. DESOTO (MOVING)

Captain DAVID SINCLAIR (38), sweating through his U.S. Army uniform, drives while his wife, ALISON (32) a slightly depressed, attractive brunette, fans herself and looks at passing farmhouses. A road sign reads: "Fairview, GA. Home of the Fairview Tigers-State Champions 1940".

ALISON
It's not Atlanta.

DAVID
It's the best we can do on a
Captain's pay...

David notices a button on his wife's blouse is open.

DAVID
(smiling)
...'til the war's over, anyway.

ALISON
(blushing)
David!

She buttons the button and crosses her legs.

In the backseat, MURIEL (16), a young version of Alison,
and PETER (9), wearing a W.W. II helmet, sit alongside a
large cooler. Peter pokes Muriel with his toy rifle.

MURIEL
Stop it, termite!

PETER
Mom, she's hitting me!

DAVID
Peter, stop hitting your sister!
to Alison)
It'll be fine. You'll see.

Alison frowns.

EXT. FAIRVIEW, GA. - MORNING

The DeSoto follows the path of the horse-drawn carriage down
Main Street, circling town square. Fairview's a typical
1940s rural town, half black, half white, population about
15,000, with a church, courthouse, library, two movie
theaters, hardware and farm implement store, drugstore, etc.

INT. DESOTO (MOVING)

PEDESTRIANS, mostly senior citizens, pass by.

ALISON
Oh, my God.

DAVID
Hey, all the young men are off to
war and the women are working in
the plants.

MURIEL
Half of 'em look dead.

Muriel hands David a bottle of Coca-Cola from the cooler.

DAVID
Open it, baby.

She does. Peter crosses his eyes and pulls his lips apart to make a funny face at the townsfolk.

DAVID
Peter, stop that.

Muriel hands David the bottle. Peter shoots at pedestrians with the toy rifle.

MURIEL
PETER! He's making a scene!

ALISON
Leave him alone, Muriel!

MURIEL
But, Mom -

ALISON
ENOUGH!

Alison never yells. David, embarrassed, clears his throat.

DAVID
Everybody, relax! OK?
Everything's
gonna be all right.

ALISON
Do you know where you're going,
David?

DAVID
Of course. It's supposed to be on
Somerset Street...

ALISON
And?

DAVID
... and I'll stop and ask.

EXT. FAIRVIEW TOWN SQUARE - MORNING

David parallel parks the DeSoto and dons his military cap. He steps out of the car, shuts the door and leans his arms on the door frame, peering in at Alison who turns away.

DAVID

Alison? Honey?

ALISON

Huh?

He takes her chin in his hand and leans in to kiss her. She turns her head. He sighs and gives her a peck on the cheek.

Stepping into the bright sunlight, he spots an older black woman, CYNTHIA TATUM (60's), dressed like a "lady" with white hat and gloves, seated on a park bench reading a yellowed newspaper. He approaches.

DAVID

Excuse me, ma'am.

Cynthia resembles Gloria Tatum, from so long ago. Noticing David's uniform, she lowers her paper.

DAVID

I'm looking for Somerset Street.

No answer. She stares at the pages in her lap.

David starts to go.

MRS. TATUM

My boy was at Corregidor.

David stops. She removes a glove.

DAVID

Is he all right?

MRS. TATUM

Ain't heard.

DAVID

I'm sorry.

The newspaper in her hand, dated May, 8th 1942, shows the headline: "Corregidor Falls: General Wainwright Surrenders".

MRS. TATUM

Where 'bouts ya lookin' on Somaset?

DAVID

Place called the Signac house.

MRS. TATUM

Down three blocks, over two.

DAVID

Thank you.

She straightens her dress.

MRS. TATUM
(brightens, a little)
That your wife?

DAVID
Yes, ma'am.

From the DeSoto Alison smiles and manages a wave.

MRS. TATUM
Nice lookin' lady. Pretty hair.

DAVID
Ah... I think so.

She rises, folds her newspaper and steps away.

MRS. TATUM
Well, then. Welcome ta Fairview -
and kill me ah Jap when ya get ova
there.

DAVID
(stunned)
Oh - yes ma'am.

EXT. SOMERSET STREET - NOON

The DeSoto eases along Somerset Street, pulling up to the Signac House. A large "Sold" sign swings from a dilapidated iron fence.

INT. DESOTO - NOON

The Sinclairs are astonished by the ramshackle condition of their abandoned house.

EXT. SIGNAC HOUSE - NOON

Curling paint peels from the dry wood siding. The house sports broken and boarded windows, dangling shutters, lopsided gutters, an overgrown front and back-yard, a partially collapsed, rusty fence, etc.

INT. DESOTO - NOON

David swings the DeSoto into the drive.

DAVID
So, a little paint, some grass
cutting. Spruce it right up.

ALISON
 (very disappointed)
 Oh, David.

EXT. SIGNAC HOUSE (SECOND FLOOR WINDOW)

A curtain flutters open. A light goes on, then off. Or maybe it's just the sun.

ALISON
 Someone meeting us here?

DAVID (O.C.)
 Not that I know of.

The curtain falls closed.

INT. DESOTO

Muriel makes a face.

MURIEL
 It looks haunted, Daddy.

Peter grabs her.

PETER
 Bhaaaaa! Got'cha!

Muriel screams. Alison jumps.

ALISON
 Peter, enough!

DAVID
 Let's get out and have a look
 around.

EXT. SIGNAC HOUSE (FRONT YARD) - NOON

The Sinclairs exit their car. David removes the "Sold" sign, tossing it in the trash.

ALISON
 How old is this place?

DAVID
 Maybe, ah - century.

A stray DOG on the property distracts Peter.

PETER
 Oh, wow! Look, Dad.

Peter dashes for the dog and the animal runs for him.

ALISON
No, Peter, don't!

There is an instant bonding.

ALISON
Aw, honey, don't. That thing has bugs.

MURIEL
Can I have a cat?

ALISON
No!

DAVID
Sure, honey.

ALISON
Peter's allergic to cats. Peter, leave that dog alone. It'll give you fleas.

MURIEL
He'll give the dog bugs, is more like it.

PETER
Aw, Mom. Is it okay, Dad?

DAVID
I don't see the harm.

ALISON
David!

MURIEL
Please, Mom, just a little cat.

Alison, ignoring Muriel, nods "yes" at Peter.

PETER
All right! Come on, boy.

Peter and the dog run to the back of the house. Alison glances disapprovingly at David.

Muriel fixes on Alison then defiantly pulls out a lipstick. Alison grabs it.

ALISON
I told you, not until you're 18.

MURIEL
But it's not red. It's pink!

Muriel hangs back, sullen, as Alison heads for the house, David in tow.

EXT. SIGNAC HOUSE (FRONT VERANDA) - NOON

David and Alison walk up the front steps, but Muriel remains behind. Alison peers through the ornamental glasswork framing the doorway.

INT. SIGNAC HOUSE (GALLERY) - NOON

In the center of the unfurnished gallery hangs a crystal chandelier. To the right is a mahogany stairway.

EXT. SIGNAC HOUSE (FRONT VERANDA) - NOON

ALISON
 Didn't you say the place was
 furnished?

DAVID
 That's what the agent said.

ALISON
 Uh huh.

David inserts the key into the lock, then realizes Muriel is still on the walkway. He thinks to call her, but Alison's waiting. After a beat, he turns the key.

The door jams. And again. Finally, he heaves himself against it, breaking it free. Dust flies everywhere. Alison starts coughing. He lifts her up, carries her across the threshold.

ALISON
 (smiles, despite
 herself)
 David, please. Put me down.

INT. SIGNAC HOUSE (GALLERY) - NOON

He carries her inside: the timbers creak beneath them. Dusty curtains flutter from the displacement of old air.

DAVID
 Whew!

He sets Alison down. She shivers with cold.

ALISON
 Well, we don't need a fan in here.

Alison throws open windows, as Muriel enters. David lifts his daughter and swings her across the threshold.

DAVID
For a damsel in distress...

MURIEL
(giggling)
Daddy! Doh-ohnt!

Peter's laughing and the dog's yapping outside. The only one not having fun is Alison, slamming windows open.

David sets Muriel down.

ALISON
This place is cold as an ice
plant.

Peter, flushed, runs in. The dog, yapping at Peter's heels, stops at the threshold. Peter reaches behind Muriel, finds a light switch and flips it.

PETER
Ta da!

Nothing happens. The dog whimpers outside the door.

DAVID
I'll find the fuse box before
dark.

The dog refuses to enter.

PETER
C'mon boy. Come on.

The dog turns and takes off, Peter in pursuit.

ALISON
Peter!

DAVID
He'll be fine, Alison.

ALISON
He'll be fine or I'll be fine?

DAVID
Look, I didn't mean it like that.

ALISON
Oh? How did you mean it?

Alison surveys the room.

DAVID

Baby, I know you can handle this.

ALISON

So, how long has this place been haun... I mean, vacant?

MURIEL

You said haunted.

ALISON

I said vacant.

DAVID

Since thirty-one.

ALISON

Eleven years?

DAVID

Listen, hon, you don't like it, we can leave.

ALISON

I don't leave. I don't go AWOL on my family. That's your style.

David turns away, hurt. Muriel strokes his hand.

INT. SIGNAC HOUSE (PARLOR) - NOON

Alison enters the adjacent parlor, sofa and chairs covered in dust. Water-stained curtains hang unevenly. A buffet table missing a leg rests on end. David and Muriel look for phone and electrical outlets.

DAVID

A phone hook-up. Have that within a few days.

Behind the family, the parlor wall gently fluctuates. Unseen, subtle impressions of HANDS and FACES emerge, mouths open, as if in a scream.

Alison stoops to focus on the oriental rug, an unusual pattern of flora, gazelles, birds and other animal figures. Muriel, too, is captivated by the rug.

MURIEL

It's pretty, Momma. It's got birds.

Alison runs her hands over it. On contact she is overpowered by a vision.