

THE BRONZE ANNIVERSARY

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Synopsis

ACT I: The curtain rises on lovely Magnolia Honeywell, busily setting the table in her charming dining room. It is her eighth anniversary of marriage to Darryl J. Honeywell, a banker and civic leader. Magnolia fusses over the dinner table, lavishly set, as for a party.

Darryl enters, and looks at the table, then asks, puzzled, what the occasion is. Magnolia cheerfully tells him of the anniversary, and that she has planned a dinner party for a few of their best friends. Darryl is touched, but informs Magnolia that he had made other arrangements, having promised to take his mistress, Ruta Percival, to the opening of a new musical based on the life of St. Francis of Assisi. Magnolia nods in approval, kisses her husband, and asks him to wear a raincoat, the weather being so awful. Darryl promises not to be "too late"; Magnolia tells him to enjoy himself, and stay out as late as he wishes as she has so many socks to mend! She promises to call the best friends and cancel the dinner party. Darryl exits, but not before praising her as a wife, and mentioning something about "missing her". . . .

ACT II, Scene One: In the lobby of the theatre Ruta whines that she is missing the opening number, while Darryl waits to use the telephone, the man in front of him evidently is arguing with his wife. Darryl gets on the phone, and talks to a man, with whom he had arranged to hire a hit man to kill his wife. Darryl now has regrets, and begs to cancel the order. Too late, he is told, the hit man has already left, Darryl pleads with Ruta to let him dash home, but she refuses, saying she'll release certain compromising photos to the papers unless she sees the play. Darryl agrees, and they exit.

ACT II, Scene Two: Magnolia cheerfully sits at the now-cleared dining room table, eating a TV dinner, and listening to the radio. Her friend and next-door-neighbor Velita Sanchez enters. Velita, who admits to having had an extra-marital affair with Darryl six months ago, is furious about his treatment of Magnolia and hands Magnolia a typewritten sheet with seven easy ways to murder an unfaithful husband and not get caught. Velita admits to being expert, having cleverly

drowned her second husband Filbert, after finding him in bed with the exterminator. Magnolia tears the typewritten sheet up, saying she loves Darryl more than anyone realizes. She then pulls a pile of his torn socks from her purse, and begins mending them. Disgusted, Velita exits. Magnolia mends, until the doorbell rings. Magnolia admits a mysterious man in black, who peeks and snoops around, then pulls out a revolver, aims at Magnolia and fires. He misses. Magnolia suggests that it might be the mask, interfering with his vision. He takes the mask off, and aims again, and misses again, and again. Angrily, he throws down the pistol and asks Magnolia for a knife. "Cheese or steak knife?" Magnolia asks. The man in black asks for both. Magnolia dashes off to the kitchen, and returns with the knives, as well as some cheese, crackers and wine. "It's been so long since I've had visitors!" Magnolia says, inviting the hit man to be seated. He is confused, but agrees. They converse for the rest of the act. He admits this is his first murder job, last he was formerly into hot-wiring cars. Magnolia suggests he drop this "dangerous line" and go into garage mechanics. She gives the man the name and number of "a very dear friend" who will give him a break. Later, Magnolia turns up the radio, and the two dance, drink more wine, eat the anniversary cake she had baked, and dance again. Finally, he leaves, after Magnolia has given him one of Darryl's old sweaters, a jar of pickled beets for his mother, and a kiss. After he exits, Magnolia tidies up a bit, then drops off to sleep on the sofa.

ACT III: Darryl returns, sees Magnolia's limp body on the sofa, and believing her dead, calls the police. Afterward, he calls Ruta, and tells her the job was a "success". Magnolia hears most of this conversation, but doesn't move. When the police arrive, Darryl, in false hysterics leads them to Magnolia's body. They examine her, and she pretends to "awake", to Darryl's horror. She sweetly invites the police to stay for sherry and biscuits, and touched they accept. Darryl is extremely agitated as the police grill him, and faints. Magnolia revives him with sherry, telling the police that he has been extremely ill, and she fears for his health. Darryl awakes, finishes off another glass of sherry, while Magnolia—ever the charming hostess—delights the police officers with her vivacity and homemade pastries. Before they leave, Magnolia presses upon each of them a box of sweets "for the children" and a jar of pickled watermelon rind for "their dear wives". The police exit. Magnolia stares at the trembling Darryl and asks him if he needs a seltzer. He faints again. Magnolia phones for an ambulance, then resumes her knitting.

ACT III, Scene Two: Darryl again revives, and pleads with Magnolia to forgive him. Magnolia laughs, and asks if he can remember the \$20,000 insurance policy he gave her as an anniversary present for their first, paper, anniversary. Darryl nods. Magnolia reminds him of the \$20,000 shares of cotton mill stocks he gave her on their second, cotton anniversary. And the cow farm in Lanchester he purchased for her on their third, leather anniversary. Darryl nods. Magnolia tells how that was the last anniversary they celebrated, before Darryl started drinking and carrying on with loose and wanton women. Darryl suddenly feels ill. Magnolia acidly announces that her gift to him was bronze nitrate poisoning, undetectable if done slowly, gradually, as she had been doing for the past weeks. With him gone, and all his property heaped upon her, she can enjoy life to the fullest, and never feel guilty, since it was justifiable, almost, with him hiring a hit man and all. Darryl collapses as the sounds of sirens are heard in the background. Magnolia puts on her apron, tidies up, and sets a platter of cookies on the table. The doorbell rings.

Magnolia: (Wiping hands on apron) Oh my, I hope they do like shortbread. . . .

CURTAIN

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Act III, Scene II

(The curtain rises on Magnolia, cradling Darryl's head in her lap, wiping his brow with her handkerchief).

Darryl: Wha . . . What happened?

Magnolia: You fainted again. Are you alright now, sweets?

Darryl: (Somberly) No. I feel ill. Very ill.

Magnolia: Was it something you ate?

Darryl: I had a bite at Ruta's. Grilled cheese sandwiches and applesauce.

Magnolia: That sounds harmless enough.

Darryl: She might have poisoned me. She's still angry with me for not bringing a corsage. She usually wears one to the theatre.

Magnolia: Oh. How was the play?

Darryl: Francis died. But not before singing "Birds Do It, Bees Do It". Quite awful, really.

Magnolia: Maybe that's what made you ill?

Darryl: No. I survived *The Sound Of Music*, didn't I?

Magnolia: Poor Darryl! Would you like to lie on the sofa?

Darryl: Please. (He feebly attempts to rise).

Magnolia: I'll help. (With great effort, picks Darryl off ground and helps him to feet).

Darryl: Ring up Dr. Edvale. I'm sure I need a physician.

Magnolia: (Leading Darryl to sofa) I've called an ambulance.

Darryl: An ambulance? Whatever for? It's only a rotten case of indigestion. You know how expensive ambulances are, Maggie. I'm ashamed of you. It'll have to come out of your allowance for next week.

Magnolia: (Helping Darryl settle on sofa) Yes dearest.

Darryl: I'm sure it's nothing serious, but if it is . . . Maggie, I want you take care of dear Ruta.

Magnolia: I'll take care of her alright. I'll ship her off to China in a barrel marked "dead fish—dispose at will".

Darryl: Now Mag, I'm perfectly serious.

Magnolia: So am I.

Darryl: You're still angry about the anniversary party aren't you?

Magnolia: You didn't even get me a gift.

Darryl: My, my! How mercenary we suddenly become. Eighth anniversary. You baked me that cunning marble cake shaped like a set of ale tankards? They would be clever.

Magnolia: Perhaps.

Darryl: Our bronze year. That's a good solid title for such a shaky marriage . . . Irony, isn't it?

Magnolia: Terribly. Eight bronze years.

Darryl: They haven't all been so bad. Not the first three years, anyway. Remember our very first wedding anniversary. Our paper anniversary. you baked me that cunning marble cake shaped like a newspaper. That was so cute. You worked so hard on the damn thing. What did I give you?

Magnolia: A life insurance policy. A \$20,000 life insurance policy.

Darryl: Oh yes, I was being cautious, in case I died eating that tremendous cake. Not that I should have worried. You're a fine cook Mag. That's one of the reasons I married you. A fine cook.

Magnolia: The next year you gave me all those shares in Georgia cotton mills for our second anniversary. And the cow farm in Lanchester

for our third, leather anniversary. You were so dear and generous then.

Darryl: I give you a very bountiful allowance, Mag. You can't accuse me of being stingy! I was an extravagant newlywed. I've since matured.

Magnolia: The next year was our book anniversary. I worked all afternoon baking you a lemon cake in the shape of the Gutenberg bible. But you came home late, with lipstick on your collar and a copy of "Hints To Heloise" in your hand. A paperback copy at that! I cried all night!

Darryl: Poor grudge-filled little Maggie. I've said time and time again, the stores were closed!

Magnolia: I forgave you, until the following morning. There was a phone call from Feldman Fur Company. I was so excited, I thought you had bought me . . . but it was about a coat you had bought Ruta. A new mink coat. I cried and cried and cried. Then I rubbed onion slices into my eyes so I could cry some more, so that when you came home you would see how red my eyes were, and know I'd been crying. But you didn't come home that night. Nor the next. I finally ran out of onions.

Darryl: Oh dear. Get me a cig, will you dear?

Magnolia: They're not good for your health. And don't change the subject. It hurt me deeply.

Darryl: It was a tacky mink on sale. Dyed at that.

Magnolia: (Wailing) I don't have any mink!

Darryl: (Clutching stomach) Please Mag, you're making me ill. Get me a seltzer. The pain is getting worse.

Magnolia: A seltzer won't help you. Nothing can help you.

Darryl: And what does that mean?

Magnolia: (Bitchily) Despite your little lapse of memory, I didn't forget to make you a little anniversary gift this year. . . .

Darryl: If this is about cake, I'm in no mood. . . .

Magnolia: No, it's not a cake. You've already eaten it, or drank it, in little bits and tiny doses this past week. A full three grams I should say.

Darryl: What are you raving about?

Magnolia: Bronze! Bronze nitrate poisoning. Completely undetectable, if ingested into the bloodstream slowly, gradually and carefully. I've served you enough bronze nitrate to kill a horse, or in your case, it's ass. You won't live much longer. (Looks at wristwatch) Another two or three minutes. Probably less. I dumped a full gram in your Maypo this morning.

Darryl: I don't believe you! You've been reading too much Agatha Christie!

Magnolia: What do you mean, you don't believe it? You never thought dear Magnolia would mind if you ran off with a cheap tart for a week, or bought her a mink coat, or an apartment with white carpeting? No! Dear Maggie wouldn't mind sitting home like a fool mending dirty stockings while the great and glorious master of the house sees a musical show with his mistress! What kind of fool do you take me for?

Darryl: You're vile!

Magnolia: (Picks up bag of mended socks and throws them at Darryl) There's what I think of you damn socks! I can't wait until you die! I'll collect your insurance, and your stocks, and your pension at the bank, and I'll buy myself a floor-length sable coat and a new Cadillac and a cruise to Hawaii and a diamond ring and a silver tea set and . . .

Darryl: (Clutching heart) Stop! Now you're really killing me!

Magnolia: (Evilly) Go on. Die! The faster you die, the quicker I get your money. The quicker I spend it. On jewels and gowns and cars and expensive restaurants!

Darryl: You'll pay for this. you can't get away with it. It'll haunt you. You'll die of guilt.

Magnolia: Guilt? Guilt? Why should I be guilty? You tried to have me killed. Yes, Darryl sweets, your young man with the gun was here tonight. A charming lad. I may ask him to accompany me to Rome, or Hawaii, or Paris.

Darryl: I don't know what you're talking about!

Magnolia: Darryl! You do know. I heard you talking to your concubine on the telephone. "It's a success" you said. You should have heard yourself. Such joy! Such happiness. Mean old Maggie, dead at last. Now tell me Darryl, why should I feel guilty?

Darryl: (Rises, stumbles toward her) I won't let you do this . . . (Collapses into a heap).

(Magnolia stares at the lifeless body. A siren is heard in the distance. Calmly, she picks up the socks, replaces them in the bag, and returns the bag to the table. On the table, she picks up an apron, ties it around her waist, and starts to tidy up the house. The siren becomes louder and louder. Magnolia looks in the mirror, plays with her hair, then walks into the kitchen and returns with a platter of cookies and sweetmeats. The siren stops in front of the house. Magnolia sets the platter on the table and arranges the flowers. The doorbell rings) Magnolia: (Wiping hands on apron) Oh, my, I do hope they like short-bread. . . .