BENEATH
THE
MAGNOLIA
TREE

ONE-SHEET: BENEATH THE MAGNOLIA TREE

Genre: Suspense / Family Drama
Tone: Intimate, emotionally raw, layered with psychological mystery
Setting: Atlanta's historic West End

Logline:
After her estranged mother's death, a high-profile Atlanta therapist returns home to settle the estate—only to discover a teenage girl claiming to be her sister, a house full of secrets, and a dark family history that refuses to stay buried.

Heroine:
Dr. Maya Collins – 38, brilliant trauma therapist known for helping others heal—but emotionally estranged from her own past. Her return to the West End forces her to reckon with what she left behind…and who she might still become.

Hook:
What begins as a cold, clinical visit home spirals into a haunting confrontation with buried truths, mysterious recordings, and a half-sister who may be the only family Maya has left. But someone else is watching—and wants the past to stay dead.

Themes:

- Generational trauma and forgiveness
- Found family and hidden identities
- The legacy of Black women as protectors and survivors
- Reclaiming truth through grief

Audience Appeal:
Fans of *Secrets of the Summer House*, *The Clark Sisters*, and *A Fall from Grace* will be drawn to its layered emotional stakes, Black female lead, and a suspenseful story rooted in family and community.

BENEATH THE MAGNOLIA TREE

A Suspenseful, Soulful Story of Family, Secrets, and the Power of Truth

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FORMAT

Genre: Suspense / Family Drama
Format: Original Movie (85–90 minutes)
Target Networks: Lifetime | BET+ | OWN
Setting: Atlanta – Historic West End, Buckhead, and South Fulton neighborhoods
Tone: Moody, introspective, character-driven with emotional twists
Target Audience: Women 25–54, fans of domestic thrillers and family-centered mysteries

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LOGLINE

When a high-profile Atlanta therapist returns to her childhood home after her estranged mother's death, she's met by a teenage girl who claims to be her sister—and what begins as a simple estate sale turns into a harrowing journey into buried family secrets, generational trauma, and unexpected redemption.

THE HOOK

You can leave your past behind… but it never really leaves you.
This is a **slow-burn Southern mystery** that weaves grief, suspense, and deeply rooted emotional tension into a story about what we inherit, what we bury, and what it takes to finally come home.
Think *Secrets of the Summer House* meets *The Clark Sisters* with the psychological depth of *The Vanishing Half*.

TREATMENT

Dr. Maya Collins lives by control—control of her image, her emotions, and her environment. A respected trauma therapist with a curated Buckhead lifestyle, she's built her world around success and silence.

But when her estranged mother, **Ruthie Mae**, dies unexpectedly, Maya is called back to the West End neighborhood she's avoided for over 20 years. Her only plan? Sign the documents, sell the house, and leave.

What she doesn't plan for is **Simone**—a guarded 17-year-old claiming to be Ruthie Mae's caretaker… and Maya's sister.

As Maya begins sorting through the home, she's confronted by unsettling reminders of her past: the echoes of abuse, the failure to feel protected, and the pain of abandonment. And yet Simone knows things about Maya's childhood that no one else should.

Maya soon uncovers a series of letters, cassette tapes, and hidden journals that reveal a deeper truth: Ruthie Mae had spent years quietly taking in girls fleeing abusive situations—girls like Simone's mother. Ruthie wasn't indifferent… she was protective, doing what she could with what she had.

But the more Maya learns, the more the house—and the community—begins to feel dangerous. Someone doesn't want these secrets revealed. A neighbor watches too closely. A break-in seems oddly targeted. And the closer Maya and Simone grow, the more Maya is forced to confront not just what happened *in* this house… but who she became *because* of it.

By the final act, Maya must make an impossible choice: walk away from the place that broke her—or stay, and help rebuild it for the sister she never knew she needed.

KEY CHARACTERS

MAYA COLLINS (38)

Polished, repressed, successful. Built her life around emotional distance. Her arc is about reclaiming what she swore she'd never need—roots, truth, and connection.

SIMONE JORDAN (17)

Tough, intelligent, emotionally observant. Grew up in Ruthie Mae's house and considers it her only home. Unafraid to push Maya, and protective of Ruthie Mae's legacy.

RUTHIE MAE COLLINS (deceased)

Seen through journals, flashbacks, and audio recordings. Once a community midwife and quiet protector of girls in danger. Misunderstood as cold—when in truth, she was a shield.

MRS. LORETTA BAKER (60s)

Neighbor. Long-time friend-turned-critic of Ruthie Mae. Knows far more than she says and becomes a source of both history and threat.

STRUCTURE (4-ACT)

ACT 1
Maya returns to Atlanta. Meets Simone. Begins clearing the house. Finds cryptic items. Denies Simone's claims.

ACT 2
Tensions rise. Maya finds journals and tapes. Flashbacks intensify. Neighborhood suspicion grows.

ACT 3
Truth begins to unravel. Maya learns the full extent of Ruthie Mae's secret rescues. Someone threatens her.

ACT 4
Simone is in danger. Maya fights to protect her, then chooses to stay and transform the house into a safe space for other girls. She finally plants her own roots.

THEMES

- Black womanhood and protection
- Motherhood beyond biology
- Breaking cycles of silence and shame
- The complicated nature of forgiveness
- Healing through truth and place

COMPARABLE PROJECTS

- *A Fall From Grace* (Netflix)
- *The Clark Sisters: First Ladies of Gospel* (Lifetime)
- *The Secret She Kept* (TV One)
- *The Vanishing Half* (novel tone and complexity)

CASTING VISION

Maya Collins:

- Kerry Washington
- Tika Sumpter
- Simone Missick

Simone:

- Sanai Victoria
- Laya DeLeon Hayes
- Kylie Jefferson

Ruthie Mae (Flashbacks/Voice):

- Loretta Devine
- Alfre Woodard
- Angela Bassett (voiceover tone)

WHY THIS MOVIE WINS

Emotionally rich story built for Black women 25–54
Suspenseful mystery wrapped in generational truth and healing

Star-driven with strong two-hander potential (Maya & Simone)
Set in a culturally resonant location—Atlanta's West End
Built-in social conversation: protecting Black girls, breaking silence, the legacy of quiet caregivers

BENEATH THE MAGNOLIA TREE synopsis

Genre: Suspense / Family Drama
Setting: Atlanta – Historic West End

Synopsis:
Dr. Maya Collins, a renowned trauma therapist with a meticulously curated life in Atlanta's Buckhead, is forced to return to the one place she swore she'd never revisit—her childhood home in the West End. After the sudden death of her estranged mother, Ruthie Mae, Maya intends to settle the estate quickly and leave the past behind.

But her plans are upended by **Simone**, a sharp, guarded 17-year-old claiming to have been Ruthie Mae's live-in caretaker… and Maya's half-sister. As Maya confronts the decaying home and the ghosts it holds, she begins to unravel a tapestry of long-buried family secrets: audio tapes, journals, and whispers in the walls hint at a quiet legacy of protection, sacrifice, and survival.

The deeper she digs, the more Maya realizes that her mother's coldness masked something far more complicated—a hidden history of sheltering abused women and children, including Simone's mother. But someone in the neighborhood wants those secrets buried for good.

Haunted by her past and threatened in the present, Maya must decide whether to run once again—or finally face the truth, claim her roots, and protect the sister she never knew she needed.

CREATED BY

Kelly R. Tenney

CASTING

KERRY WASHINGTON

TIKA SUMPTER

SIMONE MISSICK

CASTING

SANAI VICTORIA

LAYA DeLEON HAYES

KYLIE JEFFERSON

CASTING

MRS. LORETTA BAKER

LORETTA DEVINE

PHYLICIA RASHAD

JENIFER LEWIS

TINA LIFFORD