"Willfully provocative, gaudily transgressive and altogether staggering . . . Mr. Harris writes as if he's known all his life how to twist audiences into all kinds of pretzels . . . Until I encountered his potent brew of minstrelsy and melodrama I hadn't known it was possible—except perhaps in plays like *Bootycandy* by Robert O'Hara—to cringe and laugh and blush at the same time."

—Jesse Green, *New York Times*

"Jeremy O. Harris is the rising star of American theater."

—*Economist*

"The play acts like a whittling knife, refining and clarifying as it cuts. The first act is broad and impressionistic, and each of the next two sections is more realistic and denser with psychic danger than the last. The back wall of the stage is a mirror; part of the point is your own reaction. Should you laugh or keep quiet? You can't know until the ordeal is done—and even then, I can attest, the uncertainty may linger for days."

—Vinson Cunningham, *New Yorker*

"This wildly imaginative work asserts itself with a daringness rarely seen on our stages these days."

—Frank Schreck, *Hollywood Reporter*

"*Slave Play* is an explosive, raw, and very funny piece of theater about race, sex, and power, as all are acted out on the black body and consciousness . . . This play should start discussions, throw forward discussions, and cause a cultural ruckus far outside the realms of theater."

—Tim Teeman, *Daily Beast*

"*Slave Play* announces the arrival of a bold and challenging new voice in theater."

—Thom Geier, *Wrap*

"This is a demanding play, and one of the things that it demands is the audience's discomfort. But that discomfort is productive—and in the end, it brings its own satisfactions. It creates a space in which the messiness and rawness of race and power and fantasy and trauma can unspool into a chaotic churn of impressions. *Slave Play* posits that we live in a world in which white people are always carrying the whip. Then it jerks the whip out of their hands and wields it over them instead."

—Constance Grady, *Vox*

"This is masterful storytelling, searing and illuminating, and not to be missed."

—Jennifer Vanasco, *WNYC*

"One of the most thoughtful and challenging theatrical works on interracial relations, institutionalized racism, and their effects on people of color . . . Harris's play raises issues about the role and responsibility that white people have in creating racial fairness in our society, and how people of color still struggle to emancipate their identities in a white-dominant culture."

—Pete Hempstead, *TheaterMania*

SLAVE PLAY

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JEREMY O. HARRIS

THEATRE COMMUNICATIONS GROUP
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For Maxwell Neely-Cohen,
on the occasion of his thirtieth birthday,
the only person who will love this play.

For Erika J. Simpson,
my writer, my Kaneisha.

For Mom,
who taught me how to listen.
Thank you.

SLAVE PLAY

Production History

Slave Play had its world premiere at New York Theatre Workshop (James C. Nicola, Artistic Director; Jeremy Blocker, Managing Director) in New York City on November 19, 2018. It was directed by Robert O'Hara. The scenic design was by Clint Ramos, the costume design was by Dede Ayite, the lighting design was by Jiyoun Chang, the sound designer and original music were by Lindsay Jones; the movement director was Byron Easley, the intimacy director/fight director was Claire Warden, the dramaturg was Amauta Marston-Firmino, and the stage manager was Jhanaë K-C Bonnick. The cast was:

KANEISHA	Teyonah Parris
JIM	Paul Alexander Nolan
PHILLIP	Sullivan Jones
ALANA	Annie McNamara
DUSTIN	James Cusati-Moyer
GARY	Ato Blankson-Wood
TEÁ	Chalia La Tour
PATRICIA	Irene Sofia Lucio

This production of *Slave Play* opened on Broadway on October 6, 2019 at the Golden Theatre, a Shubert Organization Theatre (Philip J. Smith, Chairman; Robert E. Wankel, President).

It was produced by Seaview Productions; Troy Carter; Level Forward; Nine Stories; Sing Out, Louise! Productions; Shooting Star Productions; Roth-Manella Productions; Carlin Katler Productions; Cohen Hopkins Productions; Thomas Laub; Blair Russell; WEB Productions; Salman Al-Rashid; Jeremy O. Harris; Mark Shacket, Executive Producer; and New York Theatre Workshop. The creative team and cast remained the same as the NYTW production, except for the following cast change:

KANEISHA — Joaquina Kalukango

Setting

MacGregor Plantation, a few miles south of Richmond, Virginia

Characters

KANEISHA: a dark, black woman unafraid of what she knows she wants; twenty-eight

JIM: a white man and inheritor of more than he knows how to handle; thirty-five

PHILLIP: a mulatto who still has to learn his color; thirty

ALANA: a white woman who wants more than the world sees fit to give her; thirty-six

DUSTIN: a white man but the lowest type of white—dingy, an off-white; twenty-eight

GARY: a dark, black man whose life has been lived with the full trauma of his color; twenty-seven

TEÁ: a mulatto who is studied in her black and her white; twenty-six

PATRICIA: a light brown woman who knows many lives; thirty

Notes on Style

Slave Play is a comedy of sorts. It should be played as such. I'm not sure where the music is coming from but it's there. You should not work to make the audience comfortable with what they are witnessing at all.

The events of the play are happening in real time. There shouldn't be so much scene "transitions," the action of the play should just fall into the next moment. A (//) in the text delineates a dynamic shift in present location to a new location on the plantation.

Southern accents should be used, deeply and broadly, until they are not. You will know when.

Perhaps the spaces on the MacGregor Plantation are literalized with deep verisimilitude (this is preferred in some ways) but if they are not they should be presented with the bareness of a black box. An aesthetic that will telegraph to an audience: "If only they had more money, but they are doing what they can . . ."

This is a play about shades, colors as much as it's about race. Color play, Shade play, should be of interest to those casting this piece. What does it mean if Gary isn't "blue-black" (in the words of Toni Morrison) but just "black-black"? Does it change his relationship to the space? In my mind yes, but I haven't seen this "black-black" Gary's audition yet.

Everything in life is a performance. I've chosen to present a performance of antebellum life that is in conversation with the ways in which that time has been presented to and informed the world's collective imagination of life in the American South during slavery.

Plato and Socrates, Freud and Jung, Bataille and de Sade, Afrekete and Audre Lorde, Sun-Ra and Parliament, and Prince and Sheila E have all contributed to our understanding of eros and eroticism and labor and leisure. However, only the last three cohorts have considered how to adapt eros to decolinzing efforts or funk with the erotic.

—L. H. Stallings, *Funk the Erotic: Transaesthetics and Black Sexual Cultures*

All that I wanted from you was to give me
Something that I never had
Something that you've never seen
Something that you've never been . . .

—Rihanna, "Work"

ACT 1

"Work"

The lights slowly rise on the cramped quarters of the MacGregor Plantation's overseer's cottage.

A metal framed bed with a feather mattress sits in a room to the side of a large open space that houses a nineteenth-century bachelor's kitchen and a table full of fruits and vegetables in a basket with two chairs before a large black bear-skin rug.

We watch as Kaneisha, a slave, casually (and badly) sweeps the floor of the open living area. Looking down and over distrustfully at the bear-skin rug between broom strokes.

Suddenly, from above, Rihanna's "Work" begins to play.

Kaneisha looks up, as though in recognition, a smile appearing then disappearing from her face—she goes back to sweeping. "Work, work, work, work, work."

Yet soon the sounds of this faraway island girl get beneath her skin, in her spine, her legs, her bottom, and she is dancing. More specifically, she is twerking and suddenly the broom is out of her hand and on the floor. "Work, work, work, work, work."

Her ass moves up and down in revelry as she hikes up her coarse cotton dress and bends into a dutty wine. "Work, work, work, work, work."

Her hands move up to the scarf that wraps her impressive natural afro and she frees her hair of its clutches. Suddenly Drake is singing and she's on the ground . . . "You need to get done, done, done." She throws her hands before her and begins to pop—her staccato undulation in perfect time with Drake's delivery.

Behind her a door opens and standing in the light of the bright Virginia sun is Jim, the overseer, in overalls and a straw hat, holding a large thick whip. He stares at her for a moment before clearing his throat.

The music abruptly shuts off and Kaneisha is still there pop pop pop pop-ing.

JIM

KANEISHA!
The hell you doin?

(With an inhalation Kaneisha is up and staring back at Jim—prey before predator. She puts the scarf back on her head, hiding away her hair.)

KANEISHA

Oh lord . . .
. . .

uh . . .
. . .
. . .
I's sorry Massa Jim.
. . .
. . .
Somethin jus came ova me.

JIM

It's somethin alright!
I aint never seen no no no-
ne- knee- "negress"
move like that there before!

(Jim shifts to hide his growing tumescence.)

Where'd you learn dat?
Thought they beat all the Africa outcha'll
fore we broughtcha up here to MacGregor's.

KANEISHA

Well Massa / Ji—

JIM

(Confused whisper) Aint gotta call me
"Massa"
I don't reckon.

(An awkward pause.)

KANEISHA

. . .
. . .
I—

I thank
I do . . .
Massa Jim.

JIM

Really?
. . .
. . .
Naw, see I'm the overseer
I oversee.
. . .
. . .
I don't own ya.
That's
ya know
that's
Master MacGregor.
Up in the big house.
MASTER.
MacGregor.
I's just . . .

KANEISHA

Ok Massa—
I mean "Jim" . . .
. . .
I just . . .
Aint there some sorta . . . ?
I guess . . .
. . .
. . .
. . .
um . . .
Mista?

Mista Jim?
Is that better?

JIM

Mista Jim's alright.

KANEISHA

Ok . . .
Mista Jim.
. . .
. . .
Um . . .
yeah . . .
What I was tryin to say
was that
yes . . .
y'all did,
when they brought us ova—
y'all did
try to tear it way from us.
The truth of our bodies?
The way they moved
Our bodies.
Told us it
was
devilish
Our bodies
told us that it won't
fit
for civ'lized eyes
Our bodies,
movin like dat
But . . .
But . . .

I guess . . .
I don't know?
Some of it still.
It's just in me?
In my blood? My legs?
My body?

(Jim was trying to listen but he still can't get over the exchange they just had.)

JIM

Yeah . . .
. . .
. . .
. . .
Kaneisha,
I just,
um,
I wantcha to know that the only reason I didn't wantcha callin me "Massa"
was 'cause
you know,
'cause it bothers
me.

KANEISHA

Um . . .
aight
Mista
Jim.

JIM

It's just kind of annoyin?
Don't seem quite fair,

You see?
To put me in the same category
as them folk.
Big House Folk.
We in this little shed,
basically.
I aint
fancy!
Like the MacGregors
up in their
big ol' house.
. . .
. . .

(He laughs.)

Naw
Me?
All I own is this little plot of God's green that we on right now
And I had to work that off . . .
Might as well be a nigga m'self.
Only difference is
I
you know?
I's sorta your manager.

KANEISHA

Ok . . .

JIM

So . . .
yeah.
It's different!
"Massa."

Just.
This
yeah /
I don't (know about any of—)

KANEISHA

Well I'm sorry Mista Jim.
I'm truly truly / sorry and I—

JIM

There aint no reason to / be sorry Kaneisha

KANEISHA

Don't know what to do about that offense.
. . .
. . .
. . .
It's just something,
when I sees a white man . . .
They . . .
I don't know . . . .
. . .
. . .
I mean,
you is
bout to beat me now
aintcha?
And that's—
I don't know
. . . ?
Something
usually
makes a man feel like "MASTER"
is the title / he deserves . . .

JIM

What makes you think I'm bout to beatcha?

KANEISHA

Well you got that whip, aintcha?

(An awkwardly long pause.)

JIM

Oh.
yeah . . .
this . . .

(He looks at his whip.)

. . .
. . .
Well I am 'bout to beatcha.
. . .
. . .
that's true.
Told ya hours ago,
"I get back? I want my property
all of it,
PRISTINE,
real pretty-like,
want it so clean you can eat off the ground
without gettin
lint
or
crumbs
or
nothing like that on your tongue.
. . .

. . .
Not even dirt!
Don't want to see it!"
Didn't want to see it!
Want to be able to take off my shoes and walk round
barefoot
and not look down at my feet
and see the soles of them to be black.
NO!
Don't want black feet.
Don't want em at all.
Not even outside.
Yet,
Uh,
Here I am,
back in my house
and the outside:
spotless,
pristine,
pretty-like.
The porch, even:
spotless,
pristine,
pretty-like.
I walk up,
look around,
I've got a big ol' smile on my face,
thinking,
"Well I know she new
but maybe Kaneisha aint gonna be
another
uh
another . . ."

(He begins to use the whip to shake loose a thought that's stuck.)

". . .
. . .
another useless,
uh
heifer!"
Yes!
"Another useless heifer
like the rest of em."
But then I come in . . .
I open my door
and I see you,
down on your knees
dancing like
like uh
a damn,
raccoon in heat.

(Kaneisha lets out a small laugh but recovers quickly. He moves toward her.)

And I'm thinking to myself,
the hell?
Then I look down at my floor and there's dirt everywhere
and I know . . .
You know,
I have this whip.
This,
you know
maybe this the only way she gone learn
and I thought you had promise!
You were 'bout to surprise me!

But look at this
this whole room is disgusting.
Now if you were me,
what might you do?
Given the circumstance . . .
what might you do?

(Kaneisha looks around awkwardly.)

KANEISHA

. . .
. . .
. . .
. . .

JIM

Kaneisha?

KANEISHA

Oh!
You,
you actually wan
an answer?

JIM

I asked a question aint I?

KANEISHA

Oh!
Well . . .
I mean . . .
If I was you
I don't think—
I don't think

I'd wanna beat myself, Mista Jim.
That,
to me,
that aint something I'd wanna do.
But I aintchu sir.
I . . .
yeah . . .
. . .
. . .
I don't know what I'm sposed to say.

JIM

You think this here flo' is clean girl!

KANEISHA

It aint dirty sir.

JIM

But is it clean?

KANEISHA

I—

JIM

Would you eat off this here floor?

KANEISHA

Like a dog?

JIM

Yes,
like a dog.
Would you eat off this floor like a dog?

KANEISHA

. . .
. . .
I—
I reckon I would.
It aint dirty by my estimation sir.

(Jim looks at her, he walks over to the table and grabs a cantaloupe from the table. He throws it upon the ground, it explodes.)

JIM

You'd eat that watermelon there off the ground?

(Kaneisha looks down at the cantaloupe and back up at Jim, then back at the cantaloupe.)

KANEISHA

The cantaloupe?

JIM

The watermelon.

KANEISHA

That's a cantaloupe, Mista.

JIM

No it aint,
it's a watermelon.

(Jim looks down at it.
Long pause.)

Aint it?
Coulda sworn that was a . . .

KANEISHA

Watermelons are green,
on the outside,
they green.
Red in the middle.
. . .
. . .
. . .

JIM

What the hell's a cantaloupe?

KANEISHA

What you just threw on the ground?

JIM

The hell . . .

KANEISHA

Cantaloupes are
white on the outside
and orange / on the inside.

JIM

Oh.
Well the cantaloupe.
You eat that cantaloupe off the ground?

(Kaneisha looks down at it.)

KANEISHA

I mean . . .
I said I would.

JIM

Well gone head then.
Get down there an eat if the floor's so clean.
Then maybe I'll spare ya from a beating this time.

(Kaneisha keeps looking.
Jim cracks the whip.)

Gone now!

KANEISHA

I don't really like the taste of cantaloupe . . .

(An awkward pause.)

JIM

What?

KANEISHA

The taste?
Cantaloupe sorta
it's sort of empty in your mouth.
It aint sweet the way it should be
it sort of taste like the color of its skin.
White.
It don't much taste like orange.
The way you imagine orange spose to taste
it just sits there
like this block of nothing.

(Awkward pause.)

JIM

And?

KANEISHA

. . .

(He cracks the whip again.
Kaneisha looks up at him and inhales.
She gets on her knees and bends down and begins to eat the cantaloupe.)

JIM

You like that?

(Kaneisha continues to eat.)

Is it still sitting in your mouth
all empty
and disgusting?
All "white"?

(Kaneisha eats.)

You don't like the way white tastes too much huh?

(Kaneisha begins to eat more ferociously. As though she likes it. Slowly, subtly, moans begin to escape her mouth, and her bum begins to wiggle like a dog wagging her tail.)

Oh . . .
or maybe you do.
You sho'll is clearing it all up down there.
Like you like it.
Like you think the floor is real clean.
Clean as a plate.
Pretty.
Pristine.
Is that what you think?

(Kaneisha moans in the affirmative looking up at him. She's eaten all the big chunks by now. Her bum is still moving in a sort of twerk en retard.
Jim is barely hiding his stares or his tumescence.)

I see you're
you're
you're
you're jigabooing again.

(Kaneisha looks up at him.)

Doing whatever it is you were doing before.
It's—
Do it like you were doing it when I came in.

KANEISHA

What do you mean Mista Jim?

JIM

I mean . . .
make your behind bounce
up like it was before.
Jigabooing this way and that.

KANEISHA

Like this?

(Kaneisha does it.)

JIM

Exactly like that.

KANEISHA

I can't really control it Mista Jim.
Is this bad?
You gone beat me for this Mista Jim?
For moving like this?

JIM

No I aint gone beatcha.

KANEISHA

You aint?

JIM

Nah . . .
you
you've cleaned up the way you was supposed to.
You done ate off the floor,
you done proved to me that you aint like them others.

KANEISHA

You don't think I'm a lazy negress Massa—
I mean, MISTA Jim?

JIM

I think you beautiful Kaneisha.
Look at what you doing to me

(He takes her hand and places it on his erection.)

KANEISHA

Oh Mista Jim!

(He pulls her up to her feet and begins to kiss her deeply. He starts to pull up her dress and pull down his pants.)

JIM

Kaneisha!

KANEISHA

Mista Jim,
call me a nasty negress.
A nasty, lazy negress.

(Jim turns her around and guides her toward the bear-skin rug. He pulls up the back of her dress and gets right next to her ear.)

JIM

I know you can't read,
but how 'bout I just spell it with my tongue?

(He puts his head between her legs.
Kaneisha lets out a sigh of disappointment.)

//

(Bright Virginia light crashes into the boudoir of Madame MacGregor. Alana, a woman in her thirties, but far from done . . . stands fanning herself and unbuttoning, then rebuttoning her bodice. She moves from her vanity, to her four-poster bed onto which she flops. Yet after a moment she still can't get comfortable there. Still too hot.
She walks over to the window and throws it open, letting her head out to breathe in the afternoon light and breeze.
Finally somewhat comfortable she walks over to her daybed and sits again, more regally and cleans up her hair.)

ALANA

(Yelling offstage) Phillip!
Phillip, your mistress needs you.
I got an itch only you can scratch!

(From far off we can hear someone making their way up the stairs of a grand house.
Suddenly, Phillip, a young mulatto man with an imposing countenance, enters the boudoir in a smart tux with tails.)

PHILLIP

Mistress?
You called?

ALANA

(Still fanning herself) Phillip!
This heat wave is sending me down a well of unease
and I'm at a loss for what to do.
. . .
I tried to ready myself for a day in town by getting dressed
putting on my makeup,
jewels,
but now town feels so far
and I, too tired.
. . .
Then, I thought I'd busy myself with a game!
One of the ones me and mammy used to play with each other when I was a girl?
But "Clean the Pickaninny" aint much fun by your lonesome.
. . .
Then I thought I'd read a book,
but every book is the same:
"A man is sad"
"A man is sad so he builds a cabin"
"A man is sad so he finds a wife"
"A man is sad so he leaves his wife"
"A man is sad so he befriends an injun"
"A man is sad so he kills an injun"
"A man is sad"

"A man is sad"
"A man is sad"

(She flops back on her daybed.)

PHILLIP

I'm sorry to hear bout that Mistress.

ALANA

Then I remembered,
"I always feel so calm when Phillip is playing me songs on his little fiddle."
So I thought to get you to play something for me.
Would you like that?

(Phillip smiles, uneasy.)

PHILLIP

I thought I won't 'llowed to play when Massa MacGregor won't home.
Massa MacGregor say he don't want me makin no mulatto magic.
Say mulattoes was gifted with music to woo whites away from they God-given paths.

ALANA

Oh nonsense!
That man is so superstitious!
Anyway,
mulattoes aint the ones with magic.
Any magic a mulatto has was spent on their flesh.
Obviously.
That Africa voodoo is all over them real black uns,
The ones straight from Africa.
That's why mama always said if they're blacker than the night

and can't count to ten
without gruntin like a gorilla
then you don't let em on your land.
The gorilla niggas are the ones who cast the spells.
Everybody knows that.

(Alana fans herself more furiously.)

PHILLIP

. . .

ALANA

So go on in there and get that fiddle.
Let me hear something.
Settle my mind a bit.

PHILLIP

Yessuh Mistress.

(Phillip exits.
Alana stands up and looks around her boudoir.)

ALANA

"Mulatto magic"!
Who's ever heard of such a thing . . .
Half-breeds have no witchcraft.
. . .
. . .
Or do they?
. . .
. . .

(She looks out the door, concerned.)

No . . .

(She is attacked by another flash of hot and begins to unbutton her bodice once again.
Phillip reenters with a violin.)

PHILLIP

Mistress?
Where would you like me to / stand

ALANA

(Pointing to the window) Turn around!
My bodice is undone!

(Phillip does.)

Go right there!
Next to the window,
so your notes can ride on the breeze
and cool my breast
and my mind.
But don't turn around!
I don't want you to see . . .
It's just . . .
it's so hot.

PHILLIP

Yessuh Mistress.

(Phillip walks with his back to Alana all the way to the window, the Virginia sun beating down on his brow.
He begins to tune the violin.)

ALANA

Oh Phillip!
No!

PHILLIP

Oh I's sorry Mistress.
I was just trying to make sure it sounded nice.
Gettin it in tune for you.

ALANA

Please don't.
That ghastly sound moves up my spine and stays there.
It's quite unpleasant.

PHILLIP

Yes Mistress.

(Phillip inhales and begins to play a beautiful rendition of Beethoven's Op. 132.
He's very good.
The music does seem to dance upon the breeze as he plays and his body moves with an unencumbered freedom that exists in those who were born to play.)

ALANA

Stop!

(Phillip stops abruptly and looks back at her, before catching himself and looking forward.)

PHILLIP

Yes Mistress?

ALANA

Why are you playing that European garbage?
That Mozart
or whatever
you know that's Master / MacGregor's favorite not—

PHILLIP

It's Beethoven, Mistress.

ALANA

Beethoven,
Mozart,
Chopin,
they are all the same.
Long boring notes.
NO!
That's—
. . .
. . .
. . .
What I wanna hear is some of the negro music you play for the ladies down at y'alls cabin.
I can hear y'all some nights
when I'm laying in bed
hooting and hollering
having a good ol' time.
Nobody has a good time listening to BEETHOVEN.
They suffer through it.
'Cause it's new!
But NO.
I want something that will actually ease my mind.
Play me some of your music.
A negro spiritual!

PHILLIP

A negro spiritual?

ALANA

Or whatever it is that you play for all of them down there . . .
I hear how the negresses bray and swoon from up here . . .

I'd love to see you
playing something like . . .
something like that for once
up here.
Instead of this stuffy European nonsense.
Don't that sound nice?
Being able to play something honest for once?
Something you actually like?

(Phillip shifts uncomfortably.)

PHILLIP

But I like Beethoven.

ALANA

. . .
. . .
Well I don't.
So play something that'll make me hoot and holla like the negresses outside waiting to rut on ya later.

PHILLIP

Yes, Mistress.
I—
I think I can do that.

(Phillip lifts his violin again. This time he looks forward and begins to expertly play a song that sounds somewhat familiar, but alien at the same time.
The tune moves through the wind and up and around Alana's chest. The soothing familiarity encouraging the beginning of a dance.)

ALANA

Oh Phillip,
this,
this is beautiful.
This is so beautiful.
What's it called?

PHILLIP

Um . . .
I don't know.
It's just come to me.

(Yet, by now, the tune's familiarity should finally be syncing up with the musical ear of any person born after the 1970s in America.
As Phillip tosses himself into full revelry, while playing the chorus, we start to hear in the notes: "Ride it, my pony / My saddle's waiting, come and jump on it . . ."
Alana is moving around the room, the song finally taken her over. She undoes her hair and unbuttons her bodice more. She is dancing wildly, her dress slowly falling off her as she moves this way and that, revealing dark black lingerie underneath.)

ALANA

I love this!
I've never heard nothing like this in my life!

(Suddenly, she's dancing in just her lingerie and the heels she had on beneath her dress, like an antebellum Jamie Lee Curtis dancing in True Lies.
She throws herself onto Phillip, who is still not looking behind him, her head against his back, grinding on him. She grinds like this until Phillip sets down the violin.)

Oh Phillip!
My husband was right. You
you done . . .
You done cast some sort of mulatto spell on me!
Spun my head up in a circle so that all I can think of is you every facet of you.

(He turns around, concerned.)

PHILLIP

Oh no, Mistress!
I don't know how that's possible!

(Seeing her naked body, he covers his eyes.)

My apologies, Mistress.
I knew Massa didn't have no reason to lie to us!
Oh lord!

(Alana takes his hands into hers and looks into his eyes.)

ALANA

I like this spell tho.

PHILLIP

Naw hush that up Mistress!
You done let my devilish mulatto music weave its way into your impish female brain,
and lord knows it's bigger than mine own
but it's still weak
in the ways a woman's mind often is.

(Alana starts to laugh.)

What's so funny Mistress?

ALANA

Whatever this spell is doesn't make me feel like a woman tho.

PHILLIP

What do you mean?

ALANA

You've wrapped me up in some spell that's left me
garish!

(Alana sniffs Phillip.)

Set that fiddle down.

(Phillip does.)

I want to be inside you.

PHILLIP

What, Mistress?

ALANA

I want to be inside you!
Aint that queer?
This spell you done weaved with
this mulatto music you conjured up
has done my head in.

PHILLIP

I don't know what you mean Mistress but / you—

(Alana kisses him. Deeply and passionately. He's larger than her but she's very much in control of all of this.)

ALANA

Lie down on the bed.

PHILLIP

Mistress?
Aint Massa gettin / home soon?

ALANA

I don't care.
Lie.
Down.

PHILLIP

Yes Mistress.

(Phillip lies down on the bed.
Alana walks to her vanity and pulls out a long ebony dildo. She smiles.)

ALANA

On the night before my wedding,
my mother gave me this,
told me, "That MacGregor boy is nice
he'll take good care of you,
but he'll never please you,
the MacGregor men, they aint pleasers . . .
That's why so many of their women end up lying with mandingoes.
That's why they have all them stables of mulattoes
and quadroons and octoroons
and so many trees full of noosed-up bucks,
'cause the men,
bless their hearts,

the men don't have much to give the women.
So take this.
It's been my only deterrent from the mandingoes,
and it was my mother's before me.
Take it and use it when you need it."

(Alana smiles.)

But!
I've never felt a need to use it.
Not really.
Never really felt like it much fit with me.
And I'm perfectly satisfied being unsatisfied.
Or at least I thought I was . . .

(Phillip looks at Alana as she caresses the large ebony dildo, rubbing some oil from her bedside table on it.)

PHILLIP

Do you want me to—?
On you Mistress?

ALANA

Oh no Phillip!
I saw clear as day what I wanted you to do with this as you played that song
and started casting that spell . . .
. . .
. . .
Take off your pants.

PHILLIP

Mistress?

ALANA

Take em off.
That's it.
Like that.

(Phillip lies on the bed pantless. Alana takes a moment to admire him.)

PHILLIP

Now what Mistress?

ALANA

Now turn over.

(Alana sits on the bed as Phillip turns over and begins to slowly kiss and lick his bottom.)

Being the man is so much fun.

(Phillip moans.)

Do you like being the woman Phillip?

PHILLIP

I'm not sure, Mistress.

ALANA

Do you like this?

(Slowly, Alana begins to push the dildo into Phillip. Phillip moans with pleasure and pain.)

PHILLIP

Ahhhhh.

ALANA

You like this?

PHILLIP

I'm not sure, Mistress.

//

(The mid-afternoon Virginia sun snakes its way through stacked-up bales of hay in the MacGregor Plantation's barn. The residue from a recent horse feeding is strewn across the ground.
A white indentured servant, Dustin, enters with a heavy bale of hay and stops short just before a new pile that is being stacked. Winded, he sits down and fans himself for a second.
Just as he sets his head in his hands, Nigger Gary, a slave wearing a straw hat and fine boots beneath a manicured pair of cotton pants and shirt, enters.)

GARY

Boy!
Aint resting time yet.

DUSTIN

Oh,
I was just tired so I sat down for a second.
I'll get back to it lickety-split.

GARY

Lickety-split was before, boy.
Getcha ass up now, I said!

DUSTIN

Yessir.

(Gary begins to laugh.)

What is it?

GARY

"Yessir"?
HA!
"Yessir"!
. . .
. . .
. . .

(Dustin gets up and begins adding his bale to the stack.)

You's a funny white man.
"Yessir."
Is that what they teach y'all
"indentured servants"?

DUSTIN

You're in charge aintcha?
I say "yessir" to the mens in charge.
White, black, whatever.
You's the man in charge.

GARY

I guess I am.
That's what Massa MacGregor told me.
I's in charge.
But
that's what makes you a funny white man.
Ha!
Aint used to seein them allow
no nigga to run they show.
You's a funny white man.

They look atchu and they must barely see ya as white.
And I don't either to be quite honest.
So . . .
now I'm at a bit of . . .
A
what's the word?
A quandary?
A query?
Summin with a "qu" sound.
But now
I
don't know what I should call ya.

DUSTIN

My name is Dustin.

GARY

I know ya name is "Dustin."
Dustin!
Dustin!
That's bout the only white thing aboutcha,
Dustin!
But what should I call ya?

DUSTIN

Your name is Gary.
That's pretty white too don'tcha think?

GARY

It's Nigger Gary.
My name is Nigger Gary.

DUSTIN

Alright, "Nigger Gary" . . .
but the only "nigger" thang about your name

is the title before Gary.
Otherwise you'd just sound like any ol' white overseer.
"You see Gary movin about them heifers yesterday?
Gary with blond hair,
blue eyes,
steely countenance.
You see whicha way Gary took them bucks and heifers?
Gotta love good ol' White Gary.
Good ol' boy
just like the rest of us.
Gary of the Blond Hair.
Gary of Blue Eyes."

(He begins to laugh.)

"Gary of the Pinkened Scrotum"!

GARY

That's enough of that,
Duh!
Stin!

(He kicks down the bale of hay that Dustin has just sat atop the others.
Dustin and Nigger Gary both look at it, then at each other.)

DUSTIN

. . .
. . .
. . .
. . .
. . .
. . .
. . .
Ok . . . ?

GARY

. . .
. . .
. . .
. . .
. . .
. . .
. . .
Why you just standing there
Dustin?
Get it on up!

DUSTIN

. . .
. . .
. . .

GARY

I said get it up!

(Gary kicks him down.)

DUSTIN

Ow!

GARY

Watcha ow'ing about
Dustin?!
That should feel normal for ya.
Shouldn't it?
Seeing how you aint nothing but a white man
waiting for a good dusting
of MY BOOT!

DUSTIN

What?

GARY

That's what you are!
That's what I'm goin to call ya . . .
"Boot Dustin"!

DUSTIN

Boot Dustin?
That doesn't make any sense!
That / is—

GARY

IT DOES!
If I say it does
it do!
Your body only fit for a nigga's boot dustin
so you Boot Dustin!
. . .
. . .
Pick up that hay Boot Dustin.

(Dustin just looks up at him.)

DUSTIN

. . .
. . .
. . .
. . .

GARY

What's your problem Boot Dustin?
You done gone retard Boot Dustin?
You stricken with paralysis Boot Dustin?

Is this what indentured servitude look like Boot Dustin?
Is that what that term means?
I can't read so I can't look it up in a book
but what I seem to be understanding is that INDENTURED SERVANT IS DEFINED AS AN INEFFECTUAL, UNINTELLIGIBLE WHITE!
DOES THAT SOUND 'BOUT RIGHT BOOT DUSTIN?
YOU COM / PREHEND—

("Multi-Love" by Unknown Mortal Orchestra begins to play, stopping Gary mid-speech. Gary looks up, angry and annoyed, before scoffing.
Suddenly, with a scream, Dustin is up and tackling Gary, [ideally when the percussion hits].
They are wrestling and fighting for control. One moment Dustin is atop Gary throwing blows down on his chest and face. The next is Gary on top sending blows down to Dustin.
As the melee pas de deux kicks up more dust and hay from the barn floor, suddenly the movements become more and more erotic. Shirts begin to fly off. Hands begin reaching for belts. Pants fly off revealing matching Calvin Klein's or like . . . 2(X)IST?
Bloodied faces begin colliding, open mouths swallowing chins and noses and ears, missing mouths completely.
This goes on for quite a while until Dustin breaks away and looks at Gary who is just wearing his boots, underwear, and hat. The song ends.)

DUSTIN

What the hell you think you doin Nigger Gary?
You're disgusting.
Could have you lynched for deigning to touch me like that.
You can talk to me any way you please.
But when it comes to touch?
I aint "Boot Dustin."

I'm Dustin The White
who can have your nigga slave ass hung up
and tied out for touching me like that
daring to,
hoping to . . .

GARY

Is that so?

DUSTIN

That's so.

GARY

What about if you touch?

(Dustin walks over to Nigger Gary and licks his face.)

DUSTIN

I can touch wherever I please.
With whatever I please.

GARY

You right.
And I can say whatever I want!
However I want!

DUSTIN

Guess those be the powers our races have bestowed us.

(Dustin puts his hand in Gary's underwear squeezing his balls tightly but gently.)

GARY

Boot Dustin?

DUSTIN

You sure you wanna call me that while I'm here,
holding you in my hands?

GARY

I's still your manager.
Massa MacGregor would be quite upset if his favorite buck
was sterilized by some erstwhile
. . .
. . .
um . . .
. . .
Indentured servant!

(Dustin begins to laugh.
He can't stop laughing.
He laughs and laughs and laughs until Gary is infected with the laughter too.)

DUSTIN

What?
"esterwhile . . ."
. . .
um . . .
. . .
what were you trying to say?

GARY

I don't know.

(Gary and Dustin collect themselves and stare at each other.
Breathing each other in.
Dustin reaches over and kisses Gary.)

Boot Dustin?
This is nice.
Real nice.
But I'd like it better if you did it the way you was meanta.

DUSTIN

What do you mean?

GARY

I mean
I want you to do whatchu were just doing.
Throwing your tongue
up
down
around my mouth?
I want you to do that
but on your knees.
. . .
. . .
. . .
Get on your knees
and open your mouth
close your eyes
and let your tongue
dance around what it finds there.

(Dustin smiles.)

DUSTIN

Alright.
Whatever you say Nigger Gary.

(Dustin gets on his knees. A Virginia breeze sends strands of hay through the barn in a burst.

He opens his mouth, his face next to Gary's crotch.
Gary inhales and takes a step back. His hands on his waist.
Dustin closes his eyes and moves his tongue out of his mouth. Flicking it this way and that.
Gary lifts up his well-booted foot and places it on Dustin's mouth and Dustin begins to clean his boot with his tongue.
Gary shivers and shakes writhing ever so slightly as Dustin gets more and more into it, his hands by his side, his face and tongue doing all the work as Gary stands in what can best be described as "The Captain Morgan.")

(Licking) Uhhh . . .
uhhh . . .
so yummy
. . .
this big
black thing.
. . .
. . .
You taste of leather.
. . .
. . .
Of dirt.
. . .
. . .
Of the earth . . .
. . .
. . .
uhhhhh
. . .
. . .
. . .
I always imagined the taste of dirt
on one of you

. . .
. . .
. . .
but never the taste of grass
of soot
of all the elements of God's green.

(Gary is shivering intensely now.
It is about to happen. He is fully erect in his little undies at this moment.)

GARY

Uh-huh
. . .
. . .
Uh-huh.
Uh-huh.
Fuck.
Fuck.
Fuck.
Oh God.
Oh God.
OHHHHH GODDDDDDD!!!

(He comes.
Gary falls down and begins to weep.
Dustin opens his eyes.)

DUSTIN

Oh fuck!
Gary?
Gary.
Fuck.
Uhhh . . .

Can someone help?
HELP!

//

(Phillip and Alana sit on opposite sides of the bed not looking at each other.
They are both semi-dressed.)

ALANA

My husband will be home soon.
You should clean up here
'fore he gets home!
Get one of those negresses from the yard.

PHILLIP

Alana . . .

ALANA

Mistress!

PHILLIP

Mistress.
. . .
. . .
. . .
Massa aint coming back.

ALANA

This isn't time for your mulatto tomfoolery Phillip.

PHILLIP

You don't have a husband Alana.

ALANA

Mistress!

PHILLIP

Mistress.

(The Virginia breeze moves through the boudoir blowing papers through the room.
Phillip stands up and goes to his violin.)

ALANA

It's finally cooled down in here Phillip!
Aint that nice?
To be free of the heat for a moment.

(Phillip begins to play the Beethoven again as he walks out into the hall.)

Phillip!
No more please?
You know how European music rattles my nerves!

(Phillip continues to play as he moves through the house.)

//

(Kaneisha is on all fours, Jim behind her thrusting wildly. She is nearing a space of ecstasy.)

KANEISHA

That's . . .
yes
yes

yes
yes
YES!

JIM

YOU LIKE THAT?

KANEISHA

I love this.

JIM

You do?
Kaneisha you do?

KANEISHA

Call me Negress.

JIM

Kaneisha.
Oh Kaneisha you feel so good.
So right . . .

KANEISHA

Negress!
Mista Jim
please
Negress!

JIM

You feel so good
so good
so
good
. . .
. . .

uh . . .
. . .
Ne
. . .
. . .
. . .
Negress!
You feel so
so
good Negress.

(As he says this his thrusts become more and more contained.)

KANEISHA

Yes!
Yes, fuck yes!
That's exactly what I—
what I—
Mista Jim
Massa
Massa Jim
I
I
I
fuck
fuck
are you gonna whip me if I come Massa Jim?
Are you gonna whip me?
For being a nasty negress?
For being your disgusting little bed wench?
Huh?
Huh?

(She is nearing her climax.)

JIM

I
I
I

(Jim has almost completely stopped thrusting at this point.)

KANEISHA

Are you gonna beat me like the dirty
little—
wait
wait
Mista Jim.
Why?
Why you gone all / soft all of

JIM

(In a full British accent) Kaneisha . . .
Kaneisha I'm sorry.
But.
. . .
. . .
I
. . .
. . .
This doesn't work for me.

KANEISHA

No
no
no
no / no
NO!

JIM

Starbucks?
Starbucks . . .
Starbucks.
Starbucks!
STARBUCKS!
STARBUCKS!
STARBUCKS!

(Jim stands up and begins putting back on his clothes as Kaneisha looks up at him dejected.
Suddenly the doors burst open and two young women, Patricia and Teá, rush in.)

PATRICIA

Oh my god.
You two were making such good progress!

TEÁ

I know,
like,
I was so excited for you two.

(Kaneisha bursts into tears.
Jim just puts on his clothes silently, not looking at either.)

No,
no
that wasn't meant to trigger.
I apologize.
You all did wonderful work.

PATRICIA

Yes.
Truly
so brave.

TEÁ

I think we all should take a little breather?

PATRICIA

Yes.

TEÁ

Let's meet back in the big house in fifteen?
How's that sound you two?

(Kaneisha nods.)

Jim?
Jim?
How does that sound?

(Jim stands up and walks out of the room.)

END OF ACT I

ACT 2

"Process"

Lights up on the main house of the MacGregor Plantation. It is outfitted with all the fittings of modernity but still feels haunted by the antebellum South.

Jim, Kaneisha, Alana, Phillip, Gary, and Dustin sit in a semi-circle in modern–day leisure wear eating snacks and drinking water, nervously looking around at each other. (Note: another option is that over the intermission each of the couples enters the space at different paces in various states of undress.)

It should be noted as well, that Jim is British, Kaneisha speaks in a natural Southern dialect but none of the others are from the South and henceforth speak in their natural accents.

Teá and Patricia enter and sit down on either side of them on the floor. They both have iPads in their laps. From time to time they look down at their iPads as though reading a note.

Alana does the same but with a notebook she has that is filled to the brim with notes and bookmarks.

TEÁ

Ok partners,
so
um . . .
let's like . . .
process?
Ok?
Um . . .
. . .
. . .
Day Four!
. . .
. . .
Wow . . .
Day.
Four.
I think it's really important to reiterate
that
what we all just explored
was incredibly difficult
and triggering,
but it was also fantasy.
Right?
And like,
fantasy is complex
and it is multifaceted
and it is real.
Like real
REAL.
It's our earliest form of processing.
You know?

Like,
there is a true . . .
what's the word?

PATRICIA

Materiality?

TEÁ

Yes!
Thank you Patricia.

PATRICIA

You're welcome T.

TEÁ

There's a real materiality
to our psychic spaces.
And Day Four is all about
manipulating those psychic spaces
like the raw material they are
in order to process the ANHEDONIA, right?
The emotional numbing
that's brought us all here
together,
in this room.
But
again,
just like . . .
Um . . .
Just like anything
that's raw
it's going to leave us tender!
And that's therapy right?
Therapy is all about pushing ourselves

outside of our comfort zone so that we can tenderize
the scars that have started to form.

PATRICIA

Exactly!
And since our Day Four
Fantasy Play was cut
short / we all—

PHILLIP

/ Who cut it short?

(A chorus erupts of: "Exactly!" "That's what I wanna know!" from everyone but Kaneisha and Jim.)

ALANA

Did someone say "Starbucks"?

TEÁ

I don't think that matters, Alana.

PATRICIA

Actually it does matter, Teá.
"Starbucks" was said, and
now Fantasy Play is done.
Now we process. Those were the rules.
Over the next hour things are going to be hard.
There's a lot of processing that needs to happen.
And processing / is a—

JIM

Can you stop saying processing?
We aren't computers.
My emotions aren't materials.

PATRICIA

Great note Jim.
Really great note.
I'm going to process—
I apologize.
Ruminate on that.
But you are heard.
You are affirmed
and I see you.

(Jim sighs and shifts uncomfortably. He looks at Kaneisha who is staring intently at Teá and Patricia.)

TEÁ

So let's begin unpacking, ok?
While it's still hot for all of us . . .
How does that feel?
Who wants to go first?

(Patricia and Teá each open a new window on their iPads in preparation to take notes on what is being said.
The group is silent.)

. . .
. . .
. . .
. . .
. . .

(Teá reaches below her seat and grabs a box of tissues and walks over to the middle of the circle and places them there.
She walks back to her seat.)

. . .
. . .
. . .
. . .
. . .
. . .
. . .
. . .

PATRICIA

There's no right or wrong way to enter into this, everyone.
. . .
. . .
. . .
. . .
Ok . . .
um,
would it help if
Teá or I facilitated / some questions?

TEÁ

And if that—
(Recognizing her mistake) Oh my god I'm so sorry I made that intervention Patricia.

PATRICIA

It's fine.

TEÁ

No it's not, for me, Patricia.
Know that I was hearing you.

PATRICIA

I know.

TEÁ

Ok . . .
(Back to the group) I was going to say that . . .
I um
I like
recognize the fact
that even offering to
um,
"facilitate"?
could feel reductive to you all
at this raw moment
so if you still need a few / more min—

DUSTIN

Gary came.
. . .
. . .

TEÁ

Alright!
Ok.
Yes.
Gary came.
I wasn't sure from just listening, but,
yes,
Gary came.
And
that's amazing.
Let's—

(Teá and Patricia begin a silent "deaf clap.")

PATRICIA

(Scribbling on her iPad) And how did that feel for you Dustin?

(Dustin looks to Gary who is looking down.)

DUSTIN

Ummmm
well
it was
it's
yeah . . .
um,
it was complicated.

GARY

. . .
. . .
. . .

PATRICIA

Complicated is good.

DUSTIN

I guess?

PATRICIA

What specifically felt complicated to you?

DUSTIN

I . . .
ummm . . .
I—

GARY

He didn't like having to be "white."

DUSTIN

Fuck you Gary.

GARY

It's true.

DUSTIN

You were crying.
That's what worried me.
That's the—
you know, fuck you.
You had me doing manual labor
for two hours
before you even looked at me.
Fuck you.
You were crying / as you came.

GARY

/ You wanted to be an indentured servant didn't you?

TEÁ

Let's not engage with "fuck you's" right now partners.
Let's keep this open for now.
There will be time for aggression later.

DUSTIN

He got really into it.
It didn't feel like "fantasy" a lot of the time
it felt like personal?
Or / like . . .

GARY

What?

DUSTIN

You got too into it!

GARY

It takes two to tango baby.

DUSTIN

. . .
. . .

GARY

But, yeah.
I came.
And . . .
yeah.
I um.
I liked it?
I felt it?
I . . .
enjoyed it.

(Gary begins to cry.)

TEÁ

Ok.
Ok.
So we're there.

(Alana reaches over and rubs Gary's back, with a smile.)

PATRICIA

Yes,
exactly.
We're all in that raw, nasty place.
But that's ok.
Anhedonia,
as you all know,

makes it impossible for us to be in any sort of place with
another person . . .
raw, nasty, or otherwise.
So this is a breakthrough.
One worth being proud of because you were able to get to that
place,
/ together.

ALANA

(Standing up) Honestly, it was just hot to me.
Really hot.
And I'm sort of excited for you both
even though—
Yeah.
I don't know?
It's a good thing!
What happened,
isn't it?
The improvisation sort of wound me up
and took over.
And you had said before that um . . .

(She consults her notebook:)

That we should allow the characters we created
to LEAD our improv.
"Don't fear
where the doors your subconscious unlocks with your partner
might lead you . . ."
And Mistress MacGregor unlocked some doors
let me tell you.
Doors that—
And I
well,

I became a woman I've never been before
over there,
you know?
I've never . . .
I don't know that there has ever been a time
when I've known how to tell a man
what I've wanted or have felt free to follow every
embarrassing impulse
I've had
And like . . .
don't . . .
babe?
Was it?
Was it as good for you?
Or did you . . .

(Phillip nods.)

PHILLIP

Totally.

ALANA

Exactly!
Yeah.
Our bodies were talking in ways we haven't been able to . . .
I mean,
and it's been said so I hope I'm not embarrassing you baby . . .
but we were able to navigate around some of the issues that
we've been having with
you know . . .
Phillip's erectile dysfunction?
His "E.D." . . .
Not with a pill but with
um . . .

Well,
our improv . . .
And . . .
I just.
I felt a connection.
A real one.
And I honestly feel like.
If I can speak for the group . . .
I just don't know why we ALL had to stop
because
I honestly feel like
we were getting to a place
as a couple
where if we had been
allowed
to continue?
I feel as though we would've
found a real place of sexual communion
/ and release.

(Jim lets out a laugh.
Alana looks over at him.)

What's funny?

JIM

Nothing.
Keep going.

PATRICIA

No, Jim
I think,
yeah,
I think you just inserted yourself into Alana's space
of direct and honest communication

because you have something you needed to add.
So please.
Add to the conversation.
. . .
Don't retreat.
You know?
Let's, like
. . .
let's build?
You know?
Not tear down.

JIM

. . .
. . .
. . .
. . .

TEÁ

Jim,
I think what I'm sensing
is some . . .
and this is completely from my perception
of how your actions
are impacting me
and me alone at this moment,
but I'm
yeah,
I'm sensing some real hostility.
And something I know from my own training
is that
hostility MUST be unpacked
and processed /
in order for—

JIM

WHAT THE FUCK DID I SAY ABOUT THE WORD "PROCESS"?
This is insane.
This is insane
This.
Is.
Insane.
What is going on here?
I don't even know where to begin.
You all
with your
words
and your
this
this
frankly,
this nonsense is making messes
starting fires
where there were none.
This was supposed to be therapy.
Therapy to
help my wife.
And all I'm seeing is / a bunch . . .

TEÁ

Therapy.
That is what you're seeing:
Antebellum Sexual Performance Therapy.
A RADICAL therapy designed to help black partners reengage intimately with white partners from whom they no longer receive sexual pleasure.
A therapy that, like
you

and your wife
signed up for willingly Jim.
And a therapy that YOU,
Jim,
disrupted today
for not only you and Kaneisha,
but for everyone else
here in this room breaching a contract
and partnership you had made with each of the other
couples here over the last three days.

(A stunned silence.)

PATRICIA

But this is good Jim.
This is the most open you've been in four days.
You're articulating.
You're starting to connect to us.
Even if it's through aggression.
Like we said in the packet,
"Aggression is welcomed into the space
as an accelerant to radical breakthroughs."
When aggression is utilized and manipulated / safely
and—

JIM

"Utilized and manipulated" you people / are in—

KANEISHA

Jim!
Shut up!
Let them speak.
I—

I—
Let them speak.

(Kaneisha breathes. One breath in, one breath out.)

TEÁ

Kaneisha,
this,
um,
this like
feels like a moment when you would like to share
your own
experience.
Yet I do feel like we should allow
you know,
like
Jim to have a moment to continue to articulate his feelings
since
he did stop the Fantasy Play
and obviously felt some sort of trauma that he hasn't
completely worked out.
Is that fair, Jim?

JIM

No.
No it's not.
I—
Do not feel that that is fair at all.
I feel like this whole thing
is traumatizing my wife
my relationship.
She's sitting here
like a rock

she's snapping at me
and / I feel—

PHILLIP

Aren't we supposed to be talking about our own feelings?
Not the
um . . .
The
uh—

GARY

The experiences of others.

DUSTIN

(Whispered) Please stay out of it, Gary.

JIM

I was talking about my experience
My experience of her experience.

GARY

(To Dustin) / Don't dictate to me.

PHILLIP

But also—
Did he—
/ Did you say "Starbucks"?

DUSTIN

Well don't dictate to him!
He was saying what he was saying
and you completely interjected into / the co—

TEÁ

Woah
partners!
Hey
Let's all stand up.
Come on.
Stand up.
Let's
yeah
this is
um
something that we learned when we were studying
in Ghana last summer.
Come on,
get up.

(They all stand.)

Ok,
um so breath in,
deeply,
ok . . .
then bend down like me.
Put your head between your legs as best as you can
and just:

(Teá screams.
They all look at her uncomfortably, then they do it as well. Except Jim who sort of looks around confused then puts his head between his legs before popping back up, perturbed.)

PATRICIA

Ok.
Great.

You can sit.
Do you all feel a bit . . . ?
Better?

(Some nods.)

JIM

What I was saying was
that
my experience of this whole thing
is
utter confusion.
I feel as though I've stepped into a madhouse
and like you said,
I did so willingly.
I did so because my wife thought that this would help her.
And I don't know how
or why
because you all,
this all
feels so
deeply—
I don't know how we can sit here
and listen as people talk about how "hot"
this was.
. . .
. . .
This was not hot.
You made me call my wife who I love
a "negress"
a . . .
She made me call her a "negress."
And that's—
She's my queen.

KANEISHA

(To herself) Oh god.

JIM

It's true.
You are.
And I see all of you
and
you know
we have you two
(Points to Alana and Phillip)
Who seem to have been on cloud nine
which I just /
I
I
don't understand.

ALANA

Wow . . .
Ok?

TEÁ

Please keep this centered on you and your experience / Jim.

JIM

And
yes it's amazing that YOU came Gary.
It is.
You came and you enjoyed it.
But it doesn't seem like Dustin did.
Does it?
Anybody?
And I know for a fact that I didn't because there's no way
I possibly could.

Everything about this is sickening to me.
It turns my stomach,
and I personally don't find a turnt stomach to be hot.
OR erotic.
Ok?
/ That's how I feel.
That's my "unpacking."
That's where I stand with my "processing."

(Dustin begins to shake his head.)

ALANA

Is this allowed? /
Is he allowed to speak this way?

DUSTIN

I just want to say,
for the record,
that I was—
yes.
I was upset by a lot of what the improv
or like Fantasy Play
brought up for us
and about me.
But like
he did come.
You know?
And he hasn't
with me at least
he hasn't in
months?
Years?
I think,
you said?

Right?
But . . .
yeah my only thing is that like
he got really into it.
And then he cried you know?
Which is confusing.
Fuck!
It wasn't even just a cry
he was shaking,
shivering,
you were hyperventilating babe.
You wouldn't let me touch you . . .
But even then,
we didn't stop it,
I didn't stop it
you all did.
He did.
You stopped the Play.
But like you got SO INTO IT, babe.

GARY

You won't let this up will you?

DUSTIN

No.
I won't.
I can't
I feel
like
. . .
like this???
What you made me do today?
I'm an actor
ok?

I said:
"yes, and . . ."
That's it.
I was letting you lead me down a path
and it was a dark and scary one but I said:
"yes, and . . ."
because you
before we started you said,
"Baby I think I need this." /

GARY

/ I know what I said
I don't . . .

DUSTIN

"—I think I need you to do this."
So I did it.
I've done it.
But I don't know if what I did
is what caused you that release
or if what I did caused you those tears
or if it was some fucked-up combination of both
but I'm just
yeah . . .
I don't know what to do with your tears.
You gotta know
that hurts me too babe.
Like I did something.
Like I got too into it?
Or . . .
yeah.

(Dustin puts his hands on his face, willing tears not to stream down it.)

TEÁ

Ok.
So that's
yeah
we're getting a lot out.
This,
yeah.
Thank you both.
For sharing that.

(Patricia looks over to Kaneisha who is holding on to her sweatpants, plucking at loose strands of cotton.)

PATRICIA

Kaneisha?
We haven't heard anything from you yet.
How are you feeling?
Right now?
What's your immediate response to what we, your partner, and
these partners have expressed these last fifteen minutes?

KANEISHA

. . .
. . .
I don't know that I'm fully articulate right now.
I'd rather hear from other voices.
I think that might be the best way to move forward.
For me.
Right now.
Just.
Yeah.
. . .
. . .
I'm feeling a bit betrayed.

Because . . .
Yeah.
"Starbucks" . . .
. . .
The fact that . . .
The minute I express
what I need from him.
How I need it.
He shut down.
Made a half step . . .
Even after all the prep on Day Two and Day Three
the flash cards,
the vocabulary words,
those fucking movies!
He—
I—
. . .
I made a damn fool of myself
a fool . . .
for me,
for us,
and he . . .
and he couldn't even . . .
he stayed in control.
So I'm trying to come back from that.
Come up for air.
Before I try to
um
before I try to put voice behind my emotions.
Because at this moment I think anything I say will feel
thoughtless.

(Jim sits stunned a bit, shifting uncomfortably. "Betrayed"?)

PATRICIA

I totally hear that.
Um . . .

TEÁ

Should we—
I think it's time that we move
to another communication sphere.
For the moment.
How does that sound?
To everyone?

(Everyone shifts uncomfortably.)

PATRICIA

Yes,
I think,
we've heard a lot of things
and I just want to place those things back into the space
as I heard them
so that perhaps each of your respective partners
can hear them
and pro—
RUMINATE
(She laughs)
on the things you have said from
a space of neutrality.

(Jim begins to furiously rub his face. Kaneisha looks over and shifts uncomfortably.
Patricia and Teá exchange a glance and then both begin scrolling up on their iPads.)

TEÁ

Ok, Gary?
. . .
. . .
. . .

GARY

Yes?

TEÁ

Ok . . .
So,
Dustin wanted to put into the space that
you came.
He wanted to articulate that it felt like a mutual
accomplishment
because
that is a physical response that he hasn't shared with you
in months.
. . .
. . .
He wanted to also express that he felt complicated
about this accomplishment
because you cried.

(Gary sighs.)

He also felt complicated because
in his words: "You got so into it."
He was trying to parse out if
because of your deep immersion into this psychic space
—the Fantasy Play—
if he had misjudged
as both a partner

and as an actor
what you needed from him.
He wanted you to know that when you hurt
he was hurt too.
Now it seems—and this is leading—
but now it seems he's trying to figure out if that hurt was the kind of hurt you needed.

GARY

It was.
It.
Yeah . . .
it was.
. . .
. . .
. . .

(Patricia nods and looks at her iPad.)

PATRICIA

Dustin?

DUSTIN

Yes?

PATRICIA

(Reading) Dustin . . .
Gary,
um,
Gary agreed with you that
he did indeed come.
He said that he liked it
he enjoyed it.
He said that he felt like

you didn't like the experience
or had
some complications with it
because you didn't like having to be
"white."
But most importantly,
Gary said multiple times that he enjoyed the fact that
he met one of his personal goals for this experience . . .
He came.

(Dustin looks to Gary who isn't looking at him.)

DUSTIN

I feel / like . . .

TEÁ

I think before we have responses
we should continue placing back into the room all the things
that have been articulated.
So that everyone hears.

DUSTIN

I—
. . .
. . .

TEÁ

Next,
um
we heard from Alana . . .
Phillip?

PHILLIP

Yes.

TEÁ

Alana expressed
that,
for her,
the experience was:
"Just hot."
She said that the improvisation
sort of wound her up.
That it took her over
and that she became a woman she's never been before
in the Fantasy Play.
Alana felt that you and she had a real connection.
That you two were getting to a place of
"sexual communion."
She expressed she feels that
if the Fantasy Play hadn't been halted
then you would have gotten
somewhere very healthy for the both of you.

PHILLIP

Ok.

ALANA

And yeah . . .
I also just—
I think I would've said more / had I not—

PATRICIA

We know.
There's plenty of time Alana.
But ok,
Alana?

ALANA

Yes?

PATRICIA

(Scrolling up and down her iPad) Ok . . .
Alana,
Phillip agreed with you.
Phillip felt like he too thought it was
"totally" hot.

(A silence. For a few moments.)

TEÁ

Ok . . .
Kaneisha?

KANEISHA

Uh-huh?

TEÁ

Kaneisha,
Jim feels . . .
that this whole thing is insane.
He feels as though we are starting fires
where there weren't any before
and he also feels like he sees you Kaneisha
in a state that is—to articulate in my own words—
a state that is foreign to him at this moment.

(Jim places a hand on Kaneisha's thigh, palm up, as though waiting for her to place hers in his as well.
Kaneisha looks at Teá. Her hand does not move.)

Jim feels as though
what has transpired today is inflicting trauma
on not only you, Kaneisha,
but also on your relationship.

He doesn't understand what is to be accomplished by him,
in his words,
having to call his wife who he says he loves
a "negress"
when you, Kaneisha,
are a queen to him.
Everything about this day has turned his stomach.
. . .
. . .
. . .

PATRICIA

Jim?

JIM

Yes?

PATRICIA

Kaneisha feels as though she can't
articulate much at this moment.
But she does feel betrayed
because she in her own words
made a fool of herself
and you, Jim,
stayed in control.

(Silence.
Jim moves his hand.)

KANEISHA

. . .
. . .
Betrayed might be—
I—

. . .
. . .
yeah.

TEÁ

It's ok Kaneisha.
It's—
everything is ok, everybody.
This is good.
This is just where we are right now.
At this moment.

(Patricia stands up and turns off her iPad. She has a bit of an excited smile that she is attempting to swallow back as it grows.)

PATRICIA

Now,
I'd love to just have someone
say to the room,
what they feel they understood
from what we just read.

(Alana raises her hand.)

TEÁ

Alana?

ALANA

I noticed.
That it's sort of startling that
the words that seemed the most at the forefront
of the discourse were those of the
white men in the room.
Which / for me was j—

DUSTIN

I'm not white!
I said that Day One!
I'm not
white!
I'm not.
Please, don't fucking say that.
It's ignorant.
It's erasure and it's—
that's . . .
that's
fucking violent.
And so casual!
A white woman being casually violent,
who would've guessed it!

PHILLIP

/ Hey!

DUSTIN

That's the sort of thing . . .
(He looks to Gary)
You say you deal with shit
that it's overwhelming
that you can't take it
that you feel like you're drowning every day?
That's what you're saying at home all the time . . .
Well this is what the fuck I get.
Every single day
a fucking erasure.
By her.
By him.
By them.
And by you.

GARY

Dustin,
Ha!
I don't even—
No one is erasing / you.

DUSTIN

When our lease ran out and I wanted to move
you / said—

GARY

You still care about that?
/ You—

DUSTIN

Yes!
I do still care
because
when I said that I wanted to move to a nicer area
the argument that flared up
around your PERCEPTION that
that meant a "whiter" neighborhood completely
disregarded the fact that
for me
the world isn't black or white . . .

GARY

Ok so we're pulling out that file?
Here?

DUSTIN

Yes.
Yes we are because
there are shades in between
and perhaps the reason I don't want to live

in East Harlem anymore
has nothing to do with me not wanting to
live near black people
and has everything to do with me wanting to be able to get to an audition on time
without having to walk almost a mile to get to a decent train.
I live with a black person every day
that's not the issue.
I'm not the issue!
If anything the issue is that
living where we live
I'm forced to be just another white gentrifier to my neighbors.
An intruder . . .
Which just isn't true . . .
you're the one who's constantly bathing in every comfort gentrification has to offer in the neighborhood:
"Can't be late for my class at barre method!"
"Did you know that new vintage denim store has kombucha on tap?"
"I love that new bookstore up the street it's just nice to finally have neighbors who read!"
But I'm the "white" one . . .
and
No one knows or cares
or—

(The tears start to stream.
Alana looks over as though she wants to comfort him or do something.)

TEÁ

Ok let it flow.
In this space
A tearless face is just a mask.

ALANA

(To no one in particular) / I'm sorry I wasn't trying to . . .
I wasn't even really talking about him I—

PATRICIA

Exactly
this is not a place for masks
and a lot of masks
the ones we hold up on and over our faces
every day are starting to come off.
And they are heavy.
And when you let that much weight go
a lot of shit comes with it
there are side effects.
(Turning to Dustin) And I just want to say to you
I—
I understand as a person
who identifies with,
has wrestled with,
and who recognizes their own brownness that
this type of work can feel erasing.
Emphasis on feel.
But I can also say that that is a logic of white supremacy.
On Day One when we self-identified
we attempted to foster an open dialogue
around the spectrum of racial identity
but once we began in earnest
we clearly stated that the work we were doing to aid
the black partners in these relationships
benefits from a recognition of not how we see ourselves
but how the world
and by extension
they see those of us here
who are not black identified but exist

somewhere on that spectrum
closer to white than black.

(Dustin just stares at Patricia.
Gary stares at Dustin.)

PHILLIP

All this feels like bullshit to me.
. . .
. . .

TEÁ

Why is that Phillip?

PHILLIP

It,
like,
it just does.
I don't.
Yeah . . .

(There's a long pause as everyone waits for him to speak.)

ALANA

I think what he's saying
is that
baby tell me if I'm off base . . .
but that
You all
You gave us clear instructions about
what this therapy was going to be
you said:
"Antebellum Sexual Performance Therapy
is going to require you
to be with your partners

in ways that may scare
or trigger
you and your partner,"
you know?
Blah blah blah.
And we prepared for that!
For three days,
we prepared because
you said it was going to be hard.
And it was
but it's frustrating having these fights
right now
about what did or didn't happen
who feels what way or not.
Who's white? Who's black?
Who's somewhere in between?
When for some reason
not even halfway through our day
the rug ripped from beneath us
and all this work we'd done
preparing for Day Four
got . . .
just . . .
(Starting to cry)
And some of us just feel like
we . . .
We just wanted to keep doing the work.

DUSTIN

I—

PHILLIP

That,
yeah . . .

PATRICIA

Ok,
I think this is a good place to reorient and refocus
on what brought us here:
Tackling your anhedonia at its source.

TEÁ

Yes,
this therapy,
Antebellum Sexual Performance Therapy,
this process,
has been shaped by the two of us
first at Smith, then at Yale University
over the last five years.

(Teá stands up and joins Patricia.)

PATRICIA

I think it's important that we examine
and name
the dynamic that Alana pointed out a bit ago:
In the aftermath of confronting
and dissecting racial trauma
the people in the room who were the
first to verbalize their experience
of the trauma's confrontation
were those who have the closest proximity
to white supremacy.

(Pause.
Patricia looks around the room and lets her statement live within it.)

TEÁ

So in a sense,
Alana was exactly right.

PATRICIA

Yes,
but also somewhat myopic because
Alana, you didn't see how you yourself
also took up space that your partner didn't at all.

TEÁ

A lot of the / work we've—

PATRICIA

(To Alana) And that myopia,
that positionality
that places a black partner
squarely in the blind spot of their nonblack partner,
is a myopia I've had
and am still actively dismantling
through the work Teá and I developed as our relationship began
to find itself at impasses of communication and empathy
about four years ago.

(This moves through the room . . .
So Teá and Patricia are also a couple . . .
A warmth passes between them and a new energy takes over the room.
They pull out new packets with a lot of information in them.)

TEÁ

A lot of the work
we are doing

and
have been doing
is about shining a light on these dynamics
in order to radically center the black body
in discourses around white supremacy.
A major aspect of both this therapy
and our research
are the ways in which racialized trauma
has not only transfigured the modes
by which minoritarian individuals
conceive of self
but also the mode by which the
minoritarian conceives self
in relation to the other.

PATRICIA

Watching the dynamics
that just unfolded in this
group—uh—
"rumination"
coincided with so much of the work
we have been doing in our thesis.

TEÁ

Completely.
It's incredibly exciting.
And while today, in many ways,
the breakthroughs or the "goals" we were hoping to reach
this week through our Day Four Fantasy Play
were derailed . . .
I must say the unpacking that's taken place here
will have a SIGNIFICANT impact on our research.
This is unparalleled.

PATRICIA

The goal of a lot of this work
has been in proving
for not only us but for you all
that your inability to feel things sexually,
your anhedonia,
is directly related to
the fact that black and brown people
after generations of subjugation,
raping,
pillaging,
now only nurture and birth children
who are neurologically atypical
and undiagnosed.
We know this because we watched it manifest in our own relationship
and have been studying it
in the relationships of countless others
as our research has matured and grown
as most of you read in the most recent swelling of press around this work.

TEÁ

Yes.
As you read there:
The black or brown subject
born under the constant psychological warfare
of the white supremacist, heteropatriarchal,
capitalist system
has been stricken
with disorders that have gone unrecognized
because there is no racial
or social lens
on the psyche in our current deeply

conservative practice of psychology and psychoanalysis.
And like,
that's scary you know?
To realize that like
even with all the big work we have to do in the macro,
systemically
there's even bigger work
but in the micro of the mind
that isn't being done at all.

PHILLIP

I'm confused.
So,
like,
are you saying that my—
um—
The reason I can't get it up.
The reason I don't come
is because of—
just like,
racism?

TEÁ

Well,
in a sense,
yes.
But more so,
that the reason you, Gary,
and Kaneisha
were chosen for this therapy
was because you each
showed the most pronounced
symptoms of
what we're calling

in our forthcoming book:
"Racialized Inhibiting Disorder"
or RID.

GARY

And what are the symptoms?

PATRICIA

Well we just saw one of the most pronounced,
alexithymia.
If you turn to page three,
you'll see a list that we've compiled.
Much of this is pure hypothesis and we are still awaiting peer review
but our research in these therapy sessions has shown us a lot.

JIM

Alexi-what?

KANEISHA

Alexithymia is the inability to
describe your own feelings.

TEÁ

(Surprised) Exactly . . .
and while many of you are quite adept at this in certain spaces
I mean,
you're a writer Kaneisha,
so obviously you can articulate feelings on or about things,
yet in this instance we saw it
manifest itself in the way we recognize it most in those
with RID:
None of you were able to
articulate or locate articulation

for your state in the aftermath of our
Fantasy Play with race-based trauma.
We first came upon this in our own lives when we
realized that many of the traumas I was experiencing
and Patricia was witnessing me experience during our time at Yale
had affected our relationship dynamics in ways I couldn't name.

PATRICIA

And because much of my focus has been in cognitive psychology
and epigenetics we began to tease out an understanding of
what was happening between us
first using the language of psychology and then
turning outward towards black feminist
and queer theory which is much of Teá's focus.
We began cataloging other anxiety disorders
that we theorized compounded
to create in Teá and
many of our subjects,
including you three,
the anhedonia you all are suffering from,
that include:
panic attacks (which I think you experienced at the end of your Fantasy Play, Gary),
social anxiety,
and most pronounced in each of you
obsessive-compulsive disorder
with acute musical-obsession disorder.

TEÁ

Which is one of the reasons
this therapy
is situated around prolonged exposure
via Antebellum Sexual Performance Therapy.

(Silence.)

PATRICIA

I know.
This is a lot.

TEÁ

And like,
where we are moving now.
Now that we have
like
laid out the framework for our thinking
we are
well
we would like
to dive deep into
more questions
primarily to the three of you
who have been
relatively silent
to try to
maneuver around your alexithymia
so you can hear yourself
name your feelings
in order to get to a similar place of materiality
with your emotions
free of the Fantasy Play
or the trauma that elicited said materiality.

PATRICIA

But Teá . . .
before we begin to
go down that rabbit hole
I feel like we just dumped a lot of information in their laps . . .

so—
I want to have a moment
to just hear your questions.
Your challenges with our methodology,
if any,
before we move on.

TEÁ

Thank you Patricia . . .
you're right.
. . .
. . .
We want to make sure
we are giving everyone a chance
to take the floor.
In the ways they feel most comfortable.

(Hands go up. Everyone but Jim and Kaneisha seem to have questions.)

PATRICIA

Yes Phillip?

PHILLIP

So,
yeah,
like I don't really have a question per se . . .
Just like,
ummmmmmm,
ok so like
I don't know like half the words you just said.
It,
yeah to me
it all sounds kind of

. . .
. . .
like—
ok,
ale-xyyy-thImia?

TEÁ

Alexithymia.

PHILLIP

Yes.
That.
What makes you think any of us actually have that
or that it's specific
to us at all?
You know?
Because I'm just thinking back
to like, some of the like
some of the girlfriends I've had like
couldn't even
like they didn't even have the ability to like
call me "black."
Or even see me as black.
And like
the thing about people who are close to
like white privilege or whatever?
I mean I'm pretty close.
I mean I'm not white.
But I feel like
people have to will me black
for me to be black
otherwise
I'm just a sort of
like

just a hot guy who's not exactly black
or white.
. . .
. . .
I don't know?
I guess
I'm just
I'm remembering
that
like so in college
I was
. . .
I went to a really white school
like the whitest
a good school
Wake Forest?
You know?
Division 1 soccer.
And like
I was a freshman
but I was good
and like
I remember
like
one time I was kicking this little white boy's ass during a scrimmage
and when we went back
after
like after the scrimmage or whatever
we went back and like . . .
we were showering and
that white kid was like,
"Look at donkey dick over there,
I always forget Phillip's a nigger

till I see that thing swinging
because he definitely doesn't play soccer like a nigger."
. . .
. . .
And like I don't know
yeah . . .
I can't remember his name but this upperclassman
like looked over and was like,
"Phillip isn't a nigger, Phillip's Phillip."
And yeah
I think,
that that's basically what everyone thinks of me.
I'm not black
I'm not white
I'm just Phillip.
And Phillip's like this
superhuman dude
who's beyond,
like,
black and white.
You know?
So I'm just
yeah
I'm confused why I would have
this inability to like
say how I feel about
racial trauma?
Because at this time
I don't have any
like
. . .
I have no memories
of being traumatized
more than like . . .

I don't know? . . .
Or even to the same like . . .
. . .
. . .
Yeah,
to the same scale as some of the other people here?
Does that?
That doesn't make sense does it?

TEÁ

No,
it does.
It completely does
as a fair-skinned black woman
it makes perfect sense to me
that there would be reticence about owning
your traumas
or being able to point to them as such.
Yet, I want to assure you that
you wouldn't be here if we hadn't located
traumas in your briefing interviews
that we perceived as race-based.
. . .
. . .
I also want to say I'm sorry.
What happened in that locker room
was . . .
yeah.
I want you to know that I see you.
. . .
Do you mind if we leave that question in the room
and come back to it later?

(Jim raises his hand.)

JIM

Can I go to the restroom?

PATRICIA

Ummm . . .
well.

TEÁ

Yes, Jim.
No one is keeping you in the room.

JIM

Thank you.

(Jim exits.
Other hands are still raised.)

TEÁ

Yes Gary?

GARY

I think,
yeah
I think I'm just confused
about the
musical-obsession disorder?
What is that?
Is that why you played that
music during our Fantasy Play?

(Patricia looks at Teá knowingly.)

DUSTIN

What music?

GARY

The like,
the song . . .
the song that was playing when we started
wrestling,
right before we . . .

DUSTIN

There wasn't a song playing.

GARY

I—

TEÁ

So ok . . .
We usually talk about this later
but um
the music you heard Gary
what
was it?

GARY

The music?
"Multi-Love"?

TEÁ

Ok.
And do you hear that song very often?

GARY

I guess?
It um,
yeah . . .
it gets stuck in my head a lot.

TEÁ

And what's your relationship to that song in particular?
Do you have one?

GARY

Ummm . . .
I don't—
What do you mean by "relationship"?

TEÁ

I mean, that
. . .
for example for almost a
year and a half
I had "Sweet Home Alabama"
stuck in my head.
Just like dully playing in what like the back.
And upon dissecting my relationship to it
I started to remember being a little girl and going to the record store
with my dad and seeing that Lynyrd Skynyrd 7-inch
with the pursed lips kissing a Confederate flag
and feeling like I liked something about the
discomfort I was feeling seeing it. Because my
dad would always turn that 7-inch around.
Hide it away.
So that was my relationship to that song.
. . .
. . .

(A silence.
Patricia looks from Teá to the partners.)

PATRICIA

. . . But you don't need to know
what that relationship is yet, Gary.
Let's dissect that Day Five, as planned.

GARY

But I do, hear it a lot.

PATRICIA

How much is a lot?
Once a day?
Twice a day?

GARY

Like all day?

PATRICIA

You constantly hear it?

GARY

Not constantly
but . . .
yeah . . .
a lot I guess?
It um—
I know it
because they play it at the coffee shop
down from our house
where I'm—
where I go sometimes.

PATRICIA

And did you hear it constantly while you were doing Fantasy Play?

GARY

. . .
. . .
Um,
well . . .
I guess.
No?
Only the once.

KANEISHA

(To Patricia) That's an OCD thing right?

GARY

What is?

KANEISHA

Sometimes
when people have OCD
when they do a more strenuous mental task
they don't find themselves
stricken with
whatever it is that causes them anxiety usually.

TEÁ

Yes,
exactly.

KANEISHA

I um
I was diagnosed with OCD
when I was in middle school.
One of my teachers was really concerned
because
I would um,

I would have panic attacks
or like something like it
something like a mini panic attack?
When she wouldn't erase the board all the way.
I'd start to like shake
and stuff.
It was,
yeah . . .
And there was this one teacher
who didn't care? You know
who
she would say,
"Oh don't worry 'bout Kaneisha
she just a little 'flicted,'"
which I guess meant afflicted?
I don't . . .
But Mrs. Wright she told my parents I should um
I should get a therapist.
My parents didn't believe in therapy
though.
So . . .
Anyway . . .
I googled a lot.
Made sense of it myself.

(Kaneisha looks down, a bit, embarrassed.)

TEÁ

Thank you for sharing that Kaneisha.

GARY

. . .
. . .
But it

like
it didn't sound the way it normally does
it was like
it was amplified or something?
I'm not sure.

PATRICIA

That was the therapy.
You were getting to a very raw place
if you felt as though
it was . . .
. . .
. . .
with exposure
there is an intensification
of all the symptoms of RID,
symptoms that are tethered to anxieties both
racial and mundane.
So for you Gary,
and I'm assuming, you as well Kaneisha,
Phillip
the music you hear
anchors itself to your various anxieties.
The brain—

(Jim walks back into the room as Patricia is mid-thought, his hands in his pockets, and quietly sits back in his seat.)

ALANA

(Her hand raised) Um . . .
. . .
I just—
I was going to ask something else
but I

. . .
Phillip do you have this
um
musical-obsessive disorder
or—
What do you hear?

PHILLIP

. . .

PATRICIA

He plays through it,
but compulsively.
Right, Phillip?

PHILLIP

You mean the Beethoven?

PATRICIA

How often do you play that?

PHILLIP

Um . . .
Like every day?

PATRICIA

How many times?
Always the 4th Movement?

PHILLIP

I can't even—

ALANA

Wow.
Wow, yeah he's—

yeah . . .
wow.

(Kaneisha raises her hand.)

TEÁ

Kaneisha?

KANEISHA

Are you still going to ask us questions?

TEÁ

Would you like us to ask you questions?

KANEISHA

Yes.
I think I would yes.

TEÁ

Why?

KANEISHA

Why?
. . .
um . . .
. . .
. . .
Well because I feel as though
I—
I feel that I haven't used my voice enough.
I feel that I want to scream
and I've already done that so I'd rather just speak.
I feel like I
as though

constantly
subterfuge
is the engine of my subconscious
as though
it's constantly driving the vehicle of my psyche
and so I'm never sure that
I'm truly in control
and earlier
today
when we were in Fantasy Play
I finally felt in control
of that engine.
I felt in control.
Until.
Until everything stopped.

(Kaneisha looks to Jim.
Jim looks down.)

TEÁ

That's—
thank you
Kaneisha.
That's beautiful.
All of it.
Who else felt in control?

GARY

I did.
I think that my experience
very much aligns with yours
um
Kaneisa?

KANEISHA

Kaneisha.

PHILLIP

Mine didn't.

PATRICIA

It didn't?

(Alana looks over, concerned.)

PHILLIP

No, not
yeah
I can't say that I felt
in control
at all.
I mean . . .
yeah I definitely didn't.
I felt like
I felt like a slave.
Literally.
I think.
Yeah I went deep into it.
And I think that
I felt
sort of like
I mean.
. . .
Baby
It was hot,
don't get me wrong.
But like
. . .

. . .
it's not that different from dynamics we've had in the bedroom.

ALANA

What?

(She starts to laugh.)

What are you talking about Phillip?
That—
we've never done anything like that.

PHILLIP

We met on FetLife.

DUSTIN

FetLife?

JIM

It's like Tinder for fetish fiends.

PHILLIP

Yes.

ALANA

Yes,
but I wasn't
we weren't doing ANYTHING like this.

PHILLIP

Your husband had a cucking
fantasy.

ALANA

Yeah and?

PHILLIP

I mean . . .
I didn't
I wasn't thinking about it at the time
but
yeah . . .
I felt like the little nigger boy
you all had invited into the house
to dick you down while he watched in the chair beside us.
While you told him he had a little "wee thing."
That / didn't feel—

ALANA

That had NOTHING to do with race.
That was just what got him off
that was just . . .
that was just his way of . . .

PHILLIP

/ Baby baby, don't freak out I know it felt more complicated for you . . .

(Phillip and Alana continue to whisper-argue.)

ALANA

(Sotto voce) / But that . . . that had nothing to do with me
with us.
Today was about you.
About us.
I—
I—
That was his account.
His!
I—

DUSTIN

I'm sorry I feel like an idiot but
um
what's cucking?

KANEISHA

It's when a white man wants to get off
watching a black man fuck his
white wife.

ALANA

It wasn't racial.
I swear it wasn't.

KANEISHA

Maybe not for you

PHILLIP

(A lot is at the surface of this) It was for me . . .
Fuck!
Woah . . .
Fuck.
Yeah . . .
And it DEFINITELY was for him too.
And it was fine
because
I liked it.
I almost liked that more.
Maybe that's why my dick worked more.
Maybe my dick only works
when I know I'm black.
And it doesn't know I'm black
when I'm fucking you
because you love me too much

you see me too—Phillip!
You see me
too Phillip!
for you
this fantasy
can just be
fantasy
but for your husband.
Fuck.
. . .
Damn.
. . .
How am I just hearing myself think this?
. . .
. . .
But like
maybe for Jonathan
when I was—
when he was watching me on you
I could feel his eyes
seeing me as a nigger
the big ol' nigger
on his wife
on you
and not
as like
"Phillip"?
You know?
And
maybe my dick
likes
LIKED
the idea that I'd finally been forced
into some sort of space where

it knew how it was being desired.
. . .
. . . Yeah . . .
Does that make sense?

(Phillip is obviously emotional, but swallowing it all.)

ALANA

(Tears start slowly, but build) Oh baby,
oh . . .
Listen
look at me
we're going to figure this out.
We—
I left him for a reason.
I
maybe this doesn't help
but I want you to just be my Phillip
my wonderfully
complex and beautiful man
. . .
. . .
you are.
I don't
maybe I'm making things worse.
But—
yeah.
Am I even supposed to be talking?
I—
you said that you—
that—
um?
You said only the black people were supposed to be in control on Day Four.

Did—
Did I mess up? I tried to do everything you said
right.
I just—
I read about this in the *New Yorker*
I—
I wanted to help him.
Did.
Did I . . . did I not give
him enough space to um . . . ?
I just—
This doesn't feel right this doesn't feel.
Is this even a real study?
Is this even—

(Alana stands up and begins to shake.
She bends down and does the screaming thing that they all did before.)

TEÁ

OK!
Partners, partners.
This—
Yes!
This is the work!
This is what you were promised
and this is what you all wanted.
This is what you wanted
Phillip.
That.
That level of illumination?
Recognition?
That's incredibly rare.
Even for this space.

ESPECIALLY ON DAY FOUR!
That's a Day Six illumination.
And I just want us to see that.
To sit with that—
Especially you Alana.
Especially you
. . .
. . .
this, um . . .
I understand why this feels like a moment of crisis?
Maybe?
Like a time when you want to
question and dismiss this whole
experience
because we are getting to the hard part.
But you've been such an excellent and
committed partner this week.
And you have to remember that . . .
Like Patricia and I said
this therapy
IS
for the black partners
to learn how to reengage with
their white partners
but it's also
FOR
the white partners
for white partners to sit
with
their black partners
in this emotionally volatile space.
This WEIGHTED space
and lift that weight together
while processing that volatility together.

We're all processing.
This is all good.
This is getting to the good place.

DUSTIN

I think
if we are all processing
I very much want to process
this,
the why
of all of this
because . . .
. . .
I'm not trying to say that like
I'm more oppressed
by like
white supremacy
or something
but I'm
I've
I've
very much felt like
traumatized
by it.
Deeply.
Even today
I've felt like
so many little
nicks
and cuts
in every moment of this whole
therapy
and I . . .
Like is there even any room for me in this?

like . . .
yeah I'm happy that THEY feel that
you have
some sort of
like
ownership of the racial dynamics in our sex life
Gary but I don't know man . . .
this is just.
I'm not white.
I can't be white
and I still don't understand how your idea of my "whiteness"
is what you need me to acknowledge to / be—

GARY

You always say you're not white
but what are you?

DUSTIN

What?

GARY

What are you
if you're not white
because you never say . . .
you just
you get to exist in this ambiguity of "non-whiteness."

DUSTIN

You know I'm not white.
You know what the fuck I am.

GARY

Well sometimes I forget
and need to be reminded.
Need you to really lay out for me the ways

that you being confused for "white"
is anywhere near as traumatizing for you
as my growing up without a choice to be anything but—
because I'm black
black black
blue black
jet black
raisin black
eerie black
people have seen so much color in me they could make
a new rainbow with the shades but they always go back to black.
Because even with all the shades
they still call me black.
Now I could call you
off white
dark white
eggshell!
But every time I still go back to white with you.
So what are you, if not white?

DUSTIN

I'm not going to dignify that with / any sort—

GARY

Dignify that?
Dignify me!
With just one fucking ATTEMPT AT—!

(Gary kicks a chair with a scream.
Patricia stands up excitedly.)

PATRICIA

You know what?
I think this is a moment, where
it's time to use aggression

as an accelerant to your progress.
There's a lot repressed here
between the two of you
and I think
it's important that now we make space for you
to unlock some of the anger and aggression with which you've had
a push-pull relationship to
this entire process.
So Gary
since you've had less space
to take the floor
and that was one of your goals
I want you to speak . . .
don't feel stifled by niceties.
Speak from the aggressive place
because that feels to be one of the ways that you two know how to move forward.
It worked in your Fantasy Play
let's see if it works here.

(Patricia takes a step back and Teá pulls out her iPad and begins taking more notes.
Gary stares at Dustin. Dustin stares back.)

GARY

. . .
. . .
. . .
. . .

DUSTIN

. . .
She said speak.

GARY

From aggression.
She said speak from aggression.
And I've expelled
all of it.
I'm done.
To speak to you from aggression
would mean to speak to you like I care.
And I don't.
I don't give a fuck anymore.
I don't even know if I like you.
I just know that whatever love I have for you
is the only reason I'm even talking
to you right now.
Because I just want to crawl into myself and disappear for a good little while.
I feel stupid.
"I refuse to dignify that."
How dare you?
"I refuse to dignify that."
I'm so fucking stupid.
So
fucking
stupid.
For almost a decade I've given myself over
to someone who doesn't dignify me
who acts like he's the prize
and I'm the lucky recipient.
No motherfucker I'm the prize.
Always have been, always will be.
Somehow I forgot that.
Or I never knew that.
How could I?
Got so wrapped in you

so wrapped up in your presentation.
That I forgot myself
because when someone presents themselves as a prize
you receive them as one.
And when we met
nobody but my mama had ever told me I was a prize.
And nobody had ever
thought I deserved to receive one.
But then one day there you were
on the train.
Your little beige belly poking out
and your eyes staring at me from behind a script
like you were saying:
"This is a gift just for you if you're willing to take it."
And I did.
And I loved it.
Because we were babies.
And receiving your gift felt like
a type of reciprocation
like you were receiving me as a gift too.
But you weren't.
You never did.

DUSTIN

/ Hey don't say that, why are you saying this?

GARY

I was a comfort object,
placeholder,
a—
a tool by which your difference could finally be seen.
. . .
. . .
right?

Wasn't I?
I think that's what's been at the bottom of all this today.
I finally got to come again because I
was,
finally,
treated like a prize.
And you,
you can't—
your difference from him
or her
is no longer allowed to be defined by your proximity to me.
And you can't stand that.
Because that's all I was worth to you.
That's why you don't need to dignify me.
Because here I don't have any worth to you.
And now that I know that.
. . .
I don't think you have any worth to me either.

(Suddenly Dustin is up and pushing Gary. Who isn't pushing back.)

DUSTIN

What the fuck does that mean?
Huh?
What does that mean?
What are you saying?
SPEAK!
SHE SAID SPEAK!
SPEAK WITH AGGRESSION!
WITH AGGRESSION!
HELP US ACCELERATE TO PROGRESS OR WHATEVER
THE FUCK SHE SAID!

(Patricia and Teá drop their iPads, rush over and separate the two of them.)

TEÁ

PARTNERS!
Woah!
Woah . . .
Ok.
Let's take a breath.
. . .
. . .
. . .
A lot was said just then . . .
a lot was said
but I think we should have a moment
where we don't speak directly to each other.
Where we / just

JIM

I wrote something!
When I was in the bathroom.
That.
Yeah . . . that
I think . . . I just . . .
Can I read it . . .
or?

PATRICIA

Jim . . .
Please / we are trying to . . .

(Jim stands up and pulls out his cell phone, begins to read, over Patricia.)

JIM

"Kaneisha,
I'm not you.
Words are not my strong suit.
Words are not my passion.
Words are not how I understand the world.
I recognize that.
I see that.
I love that you love words.
That you use them like glasses to make the world make more sense—
unblur its sharp edges.
But the words you are now asking me to use
make me see the world in a way that I do not find helpful.
In a way that I find deeply destructive.
Counterintuitive to my own well-being
even
as you say
they are making you more comfortable
in my
. . .
In
my presence.
Kaneisha
I am someone who sees.
This is how I navigate the world.
The world is not blurry to me
I don't need to make sense of it with words
because the world shows me who it is
and I see it.
I capture what I see.
I retain it.
Yet,
the last month with you

all I have seen is you looking
at me
as though I were some type of virus.
As though my presence is sickening.
As though the love you once had for me has mutated.
And I don't know what to do with that.
I don't know if I should begin mourning
and move on,
if I should fight and find a way to stay.
Or if I should write a letter every day
showing you in words what it is I see
so that you won't need to make sense of it
with words that do not represent us."

(Jim lowers the phone and looks at Kaneisha.)

TEÁ

. . .
. . .

JIM

. . .
. . .

PATRICIA

Jim now that you've gotten that out.
I think it's important
that you attempt to / reengage with the program—

KANEISHA

(To herself) You're a virus.

TEÁ

Kaneisha . . . we aren't talking directly to our / partners.

JIM

What?

KANEISHA

(Laughing) You're a virus!
That's—
hahaha.
That's why—
You're THE virus.
(To Jim) Baby,
do you know
when you lie on top of me now
all I see is the sickness you carry within you.
And I don't know if I can unlearn that.
Your presence IS sickening.
Virus!
Baby,
I . . .
I didn't have a word,
I thought . . . they said RID.
And I thought that was it
before
—that it was me—
but VIRUS,
it's so simple.
So good.
Virus.
You're a virus.
You're THE virus.
(Pointing to Alana) You know what Alana?
You were right.
They got it wrong.
They got it so so so wrong.

This is a real study
but these girls don't know half of what they're / talking about.

PATRICIA

Kaneisha I know a lot has
happened today.
And you're in a raw place
but please engage.

TEÁ

I've given multiple
opportunities for our
methodologies to be challenged.
But this is not the way that
one does that.
This is not the way!
We are scientists!

KANEISHA

(To Jim) There's no way
now
I can unknow
as you wipe your
dick
across my lips
that when your people landed on this land
a third of the indigenous population of the entire continent
died of disease.
Not disease you actively gave them.
Your mere presence was biological warfare.
VIRUS.
You're a virus.
You're the virus.
That's why I look at you as though
you are infected.
That's why
I—
. . .
It's a not a pathogen,

a disorder with some new name
an anagram, an acronym
some UNDIAGNOSED
UNDIAGNOSABLE thing in ME.
It's an undiagnosed, undiagnosable thing in you
and you . . . and
And
And
And
And—

(Suddenly, from above, Rihanna's "Work" begins to play. Kaneisha puts her hands over her ears.)

AHHHHHHH!!!!

(Everyone moves toward Kaneisha as:)

END OF ACT 2

ACT 3

"Exorcise"

Lights fade up on a modern bedroom somewhere in the bowels of the MacGregor Plantation.

Rihanna's "Work" plays on repeat from above as the evening light of Virginia dances through the window and onto the bed where Kaneisha is lying in between two opened suitcases with clothes spilling in and out of them.

There is a knock at the door.

And another.

KANEISHA

(Not moving) Yes?

(The door opens slightly.)

JIM

(From behind the door) Can,
um . . .
can I come in?

KANEISHA

. . .
. . .
. . .
Do what you wanna do.

(Jim walks in. He looks from the bags to her.
He sees the chair next to the bed.
He sits. Silently.
They are here for a while.
Kaneisha sits up and looks at him.)

What do you want?

JIM

. . .
. . .
. . .

KANEISHA

Jim?

JIM

I think I've said all I can say today.
I just want to listen.
I'm going to sit here
and listen.
Whether you're speaking or not.
I'm going to listen.

KANEISHA

. . .

JIM

. . .

(Kaneisha gets up from the bed and begins to pack.)

Wasn't that what all this was about?
Us learning to listen to each other better?

KANEISHA

No.
No it wasn't
it was about you listening to me.
Listening to me
and my body
and what I need,
what it needs.
That's what this was about.
Not
. . .
. . .
"listening to each other"
always feels like it's just
listening to you with
asides from me.

JIM

That's not fair.

KANEISHA

Like that!
I'm tired of you dictating what is and isn't fair.

Can't you just take my word on it being fair to me?
Can't you just listen
before defending?
Before you start telling me
why my feelings are not fair to you?
That's—
that,
that . . .
fuck.
I can't, um . . .
I can't think straight.
Too much going on
in my head
too much
for me to make sense of
you
and me and you.
And, fuck.

(Kaneisha sits back down and holds her head.
Jim slides onto the bed and grabs her hand and begins massaging and squeezing her palm and the top of her hand tightly.
"Work" decreases in volume.
Jim squeezes harder.
Kaneisha looks at Jim.)

"You made me call my wife, who I love, a 'negress.'"
. . .
I meant it.
When I said it:
"You're a virus,"
I've been trying for . . .
God!
For the last three years.

To figure out what this feeling
brewing
within me
this sort of fog
that's been blurring your face
revealing you
for a moment
before obscuring you
for three years
I've sat
wondering
what it was.
And it was the virus
your virus.
You aggravate my—
my OCD
I know that
. . .
I knew that
before they
even—
. . .
. . .
they didn't have to tell me
. . .
. . .
I wonder when I contracted it?
I—

(Jim keeps massaging her hand.
Harder.)

I remember how you looked at me
that night

at the bar
when we first met,
how it felt
when I first tasted your eyes on me
because your eyes had a taste
(maybe that was the virus?)
your eyes tasted dry but rich
like my favorite
chardonnay.
The Kongsgaard?
Do you remember
how that was my nickname for you back then?
Kongsgaard?
It—
yeah . . .
That's why.
Did I ever . . .
I never told you that did I?
I . . .
yeah,
maybe that was where I first
contracted
the virus
your virus
as I tasted your eyes
devouring my smile from across that bar
on Orchard.
. . .
. . .
. . .
But it was probably when you opened your mouth
because
that
yeah . . .

when you said,
"Not to be terribly rude . . ."
and you were so Oxbridge
so . . .
so foreign!
And I—
my gut sort of fell
into my vagina
or something,
I felt like
my lower half engorge
with your,
"Not to be terribly rude."
I didn't—
I had never really been with a white man
before you.
. . .
. . .
You know I used to take field trips
to plantations?
We never came to the MacGregor
but every child
who grows up in Virginia
they get a plantation tour.
Three, Four, Five.
"They're fun,
aint they fun Kaneisha?"
I remember they said that to me
when I was little.
The only black girl
and I would wear the same uniform
to every plantation field trip
. . .
. . .

my mama would put these little
pink and blue ribbons in my hair
on my pigtailed cornrows
and I'd wear this white dress
and she'd say,
"You wear this with your head held high today
because you want to look proud
for your elders
you want them
seeing you
walking through the devil's house
unafraid of the demons that live in the walls.
You wear this with your head held high
and they'll come out and hold your hand
so none of the greasy-haired,
wild-eyed children of them demons
will come pawing at you
in front of them.
Don't let yourself be disgraced in front of the elders—
they've already suffered enough."
And when I'd walk through
whenever we were there
I'd always feel
the little tingle
in the back of my neck
that bit of electricity
telling me they wanted to hold my hand
and protect me from the demons
in the walls
and in the ground.
And because I would walk
with two hands out
smiling
and looking up at elders

nobody else could see
the wild-eyed
greasy-haired children of the demons
who were also on the class trip with me stayed away
so I never had those formative moments of
making out beneath the lynching tree
or being fingered behind the cotton gin
like the other girls did
in sixth and seventh grade.
And never felt a need to
be touched by a white boy
. . .
. . .
till you.
You were different
so
foreign.
Un-American.
Not a demon.
. . .
. . .
But you do still have the virus.

(Jim, still massaging, opens his mouth as though to object, before placing her hand deep into his mouth. He sucks on her fingers and the flat of her hand as she continues:)

(She likes the way this feels but is fighting it)
. . .
. . .
I loved the way people would look at us
at the movies
out shopping
sitting on our terrace for brunch.

There was always an intake of breath
and a triple take.
A look to you
then to me
then to you again
as though making sure they had to do the calculations
on what you look like in contrast to me
twice just to check their work.
Yet they always seemed so pleased
with their result.
You became this sort of champion
and I became Helen of Troy.
Beyonce.
"So beautiful."
They have so many ways
to tell you
that you weren't at all
what they were expecting.
And our sex was good
it was so good.
I remember being nervous
so afraid to see your dick
all pink
and shriveled.
A naked mole rat
swimming in hair
is what I imagined.
Or like a cucumaria—
that weird ocean thing
that like sea caterpillar—
imagined that but pink.
But your dick was perfect.
So rigid and right
and we fit.

Nicely.
And the sex was good.
Very good.
Till three years ago.
That's when everything got bad.
. . .
. . .
Then it—
well it . . .
when I told my friends
they said,
"That happens. That's every couple
just give it a few weeks.
A few months. DON'T CHEAT.
Just take some time . . .
Or see if he's into being open?
Are either of you tied to monogamy?
Maybe invite someone in?
Are you into women?
Have you tried choking?
A little rape play?
How are you spicing things up?
Fantasy is important."

(Jim begins to slowly take off Kaneisha's shirt.
"Work" by Rihanna begins to play loud again.)

And I remember one day
I felt that electricity
on the back of my neck
and I woke up
and I screamed.
I woke you up.
Do you remember that?

I woke you up.
And I had screamed because I looked at you
and . . .
that fog again . . .
it sort of lifted
or shifted
the fog,
it sort of distorted
and I saw your face
and for the first time
you weren't foreign
you were just
you were white
a flesh-and-blood white
a demon
that I didn't know
and I was scared.
I was scared for my life.
But I was turned on.
Because it was like a stranger was in my bed.
And I remember you were all freaked out
and you rolled over to hug me and I tensed
because I felt your erection against my side
and I . . .
it felt like a violation.
And then the fog shifted
and you were you again.
You.
With your accent
and your hands
touching me
with familiarity.
And I was me.
And so I put it away

that moment before
and it became something
fraught and erotic . . .
like this little secret
tucked away in the back of my mind
that gradually crystallized into
a hidden jewel I've coveted in my psychic space
for two years.
Two years . . .
because I didn't know what it meant.
Now I do.
That was . . .
The reason I was so attracted to this
Antebellum Sexual Performance Therapy
was because it gave me that electricity
on the back of my neck again
The minute I read about it.
and the electricity
always calmed my OCD
always.
And earlier today
it was calmed and I was feeling
naturally
as we were engaging in that Fantasy Play.
Because, baby,
I realized,
the elders watching me.
They are watching me lay in bed
every night with a demon
who thinks he's a saint.
And the elders don't care that you
are a demon,
they lay with them too . . .
they just want you to know it.

And me to know it.
So I can lie with grace.
So I can lie with their blessing
and if I don't have their blessing
this
. . .
. . .
I don't see a way for this to continue how it's been going.
'Cause / you don't seem to—

(Jim pushes Kaneisha face first into the bed.)

JIM

Shut up you dirty negress.

KANEISHA

Jim?
What the / hell are you—

(Jim rips Kaneisha's shirt and stuffs her mouth closed. "Work" abruptly stops.)

JIM

I said
shut up,
you dirty
negress.

(Jim begins to pull the rest of Kaneisha's clothes off. While also undoing his shirt and pants.)

You're a nasty little bed-wench who's been asking for this all day aintcha?

(Kaneisha makes a muffled sound.
Suddenly Jim has a whip and slams it on the bedpost.)

What the hell did I say wench?

(Jim takes off all his clothes and climbs on top of Kaneisha. He begins to lick her from her buttocks to the back of her head. Then he spits on her.)

Taste like dirt.
That's bout all y'all can taste of.
which is a shame
'cause chocolates are my favorite dessert.
But you don't know no nothing bout that now do you?
Now listen up negress.
You been running your mouth for a good little time now
but when I look round this
damn room
I don't see nothing done
from a day's work
but a suitcase that's half packed
and a bed that's unmade.
Which leaves me thinking that you thought you could run away somewhere.
Is that what you thought?

(Kaneisha begins.)

How many times do I have to tell you negress you don't get to talk
till I tell you to talk.

(Jim lifts the whip high in the air, Kaneisha screams.
Jim begins to laugh hysterically.)

You real black heifers are so dumb.
You think I'd put welts on ya
BEFORE I get up in ya?
You done lost your mind I reckon . . .
No I'm gonna take my time with you
give you what you need
get what I need
and then . . .
you'll get the beatin you've been waiting on.
Ya hear?
You can nod your head.

(Kaneisha and Jim stare at each other in a weighted silence. Slowly she nods her head in the affirmative. He nods as well. She nods again.)

Ok . . .
now . . .
bite down real hard
because I'm about to hurtcha
negress!

(Suddenly Jim forcefully flips Kaneisha over, spreads her legs, and plunges forward. He's clutching her throat and pushing her face against the pillow.
Kaneisha begins to fumble and fight as Jim thrusts in and out of her repeatedly.
Kaneisha's arms flail this way and that, looking for something, anything, to help her, when she remembers that her nails are sharp and his chest is exposed. She begins to claw angrily at his chest, blood spewing everywhere till finally he's off!
Kaneisha lets out a scream that sends the gag falling out of her mouth and her body shivering from groin to skull.)

KANEISHA

Starbucks!
Starbucks!
Starbucks!

(Kaneisha falls off the bed and begins to cry. It is a full-bodied, all-hands-on-deck type of cry.
Jim looks at Kaneisha, not sure what came over him, not sure why he did what he did, as the last light of the Virginia dusk begins to fade away, and a slight breeze knocks their window against the pane.
Jim begins to crawl over to Kaneisha slowly when suddenly the all-hands-on-deck cry becomes a guttural laugh. Kaneisha is overcome.
She rolls out of her spot next to the bed and crawls over to Jim where she reaches over and kisses him. Tears begin to stream again, but this time from Jim.
It is an ocean of tears with waves, convulsions, and from its depths escapes a wail, warbling out from tumultuous guts.
Kaneisha slowly moves away from him, pulling herself to her feet. And then . . .
And then . . .
And then . . .
The actress palying Kaneisha does whatever she feels is right before she looks at him.)

Thank you, baby.
Thank you for listening.

END OF PLAY

ANDRE D. WAGNER

Jeremy O. Harris's full-length plays include: *Slave Play* (New York Theatre Workshop, *New York Times* Critics' Pick, Winner of the 2018 Kennedy Center Rosa Parks Playwriting Award, the Lorraine Hansberry Playwriting Award, and the Lotos Foundation Prize in the Arts and Sciences); *"Daddy"* (Vineyard Theatre/The New Group); *Xander Xyst*, *Dragon: 1*; and *WATER SPORTS; or insignificant white boys* (published by 53rd State Press). His work has been presented or developed by Pieter Space, JACK, Ars Nova, The New Group, NYTW, Performance Space New York, and Playwrights Horizons. In 2018, Jeremy co-wrote A24's upcoming film *Zola* with director Janicza Bravo. He is the recipient of the Vineyard Theatre's Paula Vogel Playwrighting Award, a 2016 MacDowell Colony Fellow, an Orchard Project Greenhouse artist, a resident playwright with Colt Coeur, and is under commission from Lincoln Center Theater, Playwrights Horizons, and Scott Rudin Productions. Jeremy recently completed his final year at the Yale School of Drama.