Fields of Freedom: An Examination of the Returning Generations Agrarian Preservation

Fields of Freedom: An Examination of the Returning Generations Agrarian Preservation

by

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Under the direction of Dr. Lia T. Bascomb, PhD

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ABSTRACT

The legacy of trauma associated with agriculture in the United States has caused many African Americans to abandon their rich agrarian history and associate agricultural work with its connection to chattel slavery. However, as Black folks are returning to farming, there is little literature highlighting the significance of resistance with this resurgence in Black farming. My thesis will examine how today's Black farmers leverage the resurgence of agrarianism as a contemporary form of resistance. Through a dramaturgical approach, I will use this thesis to focus on farming techniques, educational initiatives, and the cultivation of specific crops to reconnect African Americans with their agrarian roots. I argue that the return to the land will create further avenues for Black people to combat trauma and oppressive agricultural regulations. In conclusion, this project sheds light on the new generation of farmers fighting for justice through heritage preservation.

INDEX WORDS: Agriculture, Resistance, Heritage Preservation, Black Farmers, Historical Trauma

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DEDICATION

I would like to dedicate this work to my family, both biological and chosen. I could not ask for a more supportive group of people to be in my corner. Thank you!

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I would like to acknowledge my amazing committee, the Black agrarians I have met throughout my life, and my artistic community for your support and feedback. I would also like to acknowledge the strength and resilience of the kidnapped Africans and their descendants whose ingenuity is paramount to the agrarian and agricultural work being done today.

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1 INTRODUCTION

Growing up in South Georgia, I often spent many of my weekends and summers at the farm of my great-grandparents, Willie Sr. and Katherine Hill. Large family gatherings were often held at my great-grandparents' farm in Parksville, South Carolina, only a stone's throw away from Clark Hill Lake. My great-grandfather would often be out in the fields tending to the animals and the crops while my great-grandmother spent most of her days on the porch snapping peas, canning, and chewing tobacco. After their deaths in 1999, my family decided to end all farm production on the land. Despite my family's close tie to farming, I would turn my nose at any mention of agricultural work as I often equated toiling in the fields with the trauma of enslavement.

This connection between agriculture and traumatic memory seemed to be a common sentiment among myself, fellow African American historic interpreters, and guests of the Atlanta History Center. For five years, I worked as a historic interpreter for AHC's school tours, public programs, and historic houses. However, my work on the Smith Family Farm would prove to be the most pivotal as my team and I would work to highlight the resilience and resistance efforts of Black folks enslaved in the Southern United States. One of those resistance methods was through the agriculture they tended—specifically the crops indigenous to western Africa, typically found in enslaved gardens—and the methods used to manipulate crops for the benefit of the enslaved.

Despite the trauma many African Americans associate with agriculture in the United States, my qualitative research seeks to explore how Black farmers leverage the resurgence of agrarianism as a contemporary form of resistance. As of 2021, the USDA has determined that Black farmers make up about 1.3% of farmers in the United States. The Atlanta Metro Area is home to more than 150 gardens and 40-50 farms (Becknell, 2023). Black-owned farms like Truly

Living Well, Patchwork City Farms, and Atlanta Harvest are on a mission to provide resources and healthy food to communities battling food insecurity. These large farms are doing extraordinary work feeding under-resourced Atlanta communities. However, other farms are providing education around indigo and tackling the all too real trauma surrounding the crop. I find this work most interesting as I hope to examine how other farms are teaching the Black community about their connection to agriculture outside of enslavement.

The purpose of this study is to examine how the returning generation of Black farmers is using their farms to reconnect with African American farming techniques, lost cultivators, and ancestral practices. This study involves the observation of five Black-owned farms in the state of Georgia. The findings of this study were used to develop a full-length play, in the spirit of the Free Southern Theatre. This piece highlights the work of Black farmers returning to their agrarian roots giving voice to this community and presenting their narratives through a creative lens.

1.1 Problem Statement

For over 400 years African Americans have had their labor exploited by those seeking to gain wealth and power through their agrarian knowledge. Africans kidnapped from their homes were displaced throughout the Americas to fill the pockets of men who ignored their humanity while depending on their agricultural expertise. The pain and degradation experienced by those who were enslaved would continue to impact later generations resulting in Post-Traumatic Slave Syndrome (PTSS). Coined by Dr. Joy Degruy Leary, PTSS is a series of psychological and behavioral patterns that are caused by the legacy of oppression faced by African Americans (2005; McDougal, 2017). Leary notes three categories of behavioral patterns associated with PTSS: vacant esteem, ever-present anger, and racist socialization. The multigenerational trauma

of slavery, and later sharecropping and tenant farming is tied to how many African Americans view agricultural and agrarian work (Alexander & Carter, 2020; Penniman, 2018; Tozeau, 2019; White, 2019; Gripper, 2020; Leibovich, 2021). When the formerly enslaved were given their freedom at the end of the Civil War, many of those Black folks continued working in agriculture. Despite the hardships, African Americans owned more than 16 million acres of farmland in the United States by 1920.

Due to farming's brutal history, many African Americans internalize racism as they associate agriculture work with being less than others. Today Black farmers make up less than 2% of the farming population. Though these numbers have been on the decline for some time due to exploitative banking practices, unfair practices within United States government agencies, and attitudes around agricultural work, that has not stopped a new generation of Black folks from stepping into agricultural careers. This study aims to understand how today's Black farmers are leveraging this rise in young Black agrarians as a form of resistance to dismantle negative stigmas related to agriculture and reconnect with ancestral practices.

1.2 Significance

Upon graduating with my Bachelor of Arts in Theatre and Performance Studies, I began a job as a historical interpreter at the Atlanta History Center. There were many facets to my job with one of them being a costumed interpreter on the Smith Family Farm. When school tours or programs took place on the farm the year was always 1864 and I was portraying Lillian, a 19-year-old enslaved woman, who spent most of her time cooking for the family in the kitchen and garden. When I first started this job, I was provided extensive training by the former Director of Programs & Family Services, Joanna Arrieta, along with a list of readings. One of the most profound pieces of information, I received in my training for the development of my farm

character was the story of Mary Gaffney, an enslaved woman who resisted through her ability to have children. Mary's use of agriculture as a means of resistance when choosing not to have children was inspiring, as I had no understanding of how crucial agriculture was to the resistance work of the enslaved. I chose then to make that a part of Lillian's narrative, like Mary, risking her life to ensure that she would not birth a child into slavery.

Through my work with the Atlanta History Center, I had many conversations with African American guests who had a lot of negative feelings about agriculture due to the history of enslavement. Many guests felt that today's African Americans were above agricultural work and that our ancestors had no say in the crops they were cultivating. Though this was true for the plantation crops, many enslaved communities had their own gardens which provided them with the necessary nutrition. My goal as an interpreter was to focus on the resistance that came with working in the fields and gardens. Through these conversations, I was able to link some of the dishes and vegetables that are staples in soul food and southern cuisine to their connection with Africa. African Americans were and are an integral part of the Agricultural system of the United States, and this study seeks to highlight the resistance work that is being done today that reconnects the Black community with its roots and the rich legacy that brought us here.

1.3 Nature of Study

This study is a qualitative design utilizing a narrative approach. According to Denzin & Lincoln (1994, 2000, 2005, 2011, as cited in Creswell, 2014), "qualitative research is a situated activity that locates the observer in the world…qualitative researchers study things only in their natural settings, attempting to make sense of, or interpret, phenomena in terms of the meaning people bring to them" (p. 73) Creswell further notes that qualitative research starts with an assumption or a series of assumptions along with an interpretive/theoretical frameworks. This

information is used to inform the study of research problems while addressing the meaning individuals or groups ascribe to a social problem (2014). Czarniawska (2004, as cited by Creswell, 2014) defines the narrative approach as "a specific type of qualitative design" in which "narrative is understood as a spoken or written text giving an account of an event/action or series of events/actions, chronologically connected" (p.100). This simply means that a research study consists of studying one or more individuals, collecting their stories, analyzing their individual experiences, and chronologically listing these events to provide context. The types of narrative studies include biographical study (researcher records the experiences of someone else's life), autoethnography (researcher is the subject of their research), life history (researcher portrays an individual's entire life), and oral history (researcher collects personal reflections of an event or events). A narrative approach is the only approach that will work as the researcher seeks to tell the story of how today's farmers are using agriculture as a means of resistance through theatre. She contributes to this research her own experiences with agriculture and performance.

1.4 Research Question

How are Black farmers leveraging the resurgence of agrarianism as a contemporary form of resistance?

Supplemental Questions:

1. *How are Black farmers using their farms to reconnect with African American farming techniques, lost cultivators, and ancestral practices?*
2. *How are the farmers sharing their knowledge with the community?*

1.5 Interpretive Framework: Post Traumatic Slave Syndrome

"The truth is, American chattel slavery was very different from most varieties of enslavement that preceded it. It differed in the manner in which a person became enslaved; it

differed in the treatment of the enslaved…most of all, it differed in the way owners viewed those they enslaved." -Dr. Joy Degruy Leary

Post-Traumatic Slave Syndrome (PTSS) developed by Dr. Joy Degruy Leary "is a theoretical framework designed to explain the pattern of psychological and behavioral adaptations to the legacy of oppression among African Americans" (McDougal, 2017 p. 81). Leary notes three categories of behavioral patterns associated with PTSS: vacant esteem, ever-present anger, and racist socialization. The long traumatic history of slavery is tied to how many African Americans feel about agriculture and agrarian work. As noted by farmer, Leah Penniman, "Hundreds of years of enslavement have devastated our sacred connection to the land and overshadowed thousands of years of our noble, autonomous farming history" (2018, p. 263).

Often African Americans must grapple with how they are perceived by white people and other people of color (POC) in American society. Due to farming's brutal history, many African Americans internalize racism as they associate agricultural work with being less than other forms of employment. However, my study aims to explore how farmers are dismantling this stigma and "facing the black shadow." Marlene Watson (2013, as cited in Penniman, 2018) defines the *Black Shadow* as "the running inner dialogue we have with ourselves all day long about our fears of being inferior as black people" (p. 273). The *Black Shadow* is a symptom of the PTSS behavioral pattern vacant esteem which Leary describes as "the state of believing oneself to have little or no worth, exacerbated by similar pronouncements of inferiority from the personal sphere and larger society" (p. 108). The notions of agriculture being deemed a lesser form of employment or entrepreneurship can be seen throughout history beyond enslavement. Leary emphasizes the work of Booker T. Washington, who felt that African Americans' "appropriate role" in American society was that of tradesmen. This sentiment creates limits on the

opportunities and aspirations of an entire community. Utilizing this framework, as the foundation of my study, I can pinpoint the attitudes African Americans have today regarding agriculture and agricultural work. PTSS can also highlight the attitudes farmers had and have about agrarian work and how their attitudes have changed and how those changes impact the work they do on their farms. This theoretical lens was used as an advocacy perspective that informs how the data is collected and analyzed and provide a call for action or change (Creswell, 2014).

1.6 Definitions

1. Plantation Trauma: for the purpose of this study, plantation trauma is defined as the brutality (i.e. physically, mentally, emotionally) faced by African Americans on farms and plantations owned by white people who either owned or once owned that African American person.
2. Agricultural Resistance: for the purpose of this study, agricultural resistance refers to the strategic use of agricultural knowledge, practices, and resources by oppressed people to resist oppressive forces, assert agency, ensure survival, and find freedom within an exploitative system.
3. Farm: for the purpose of this study, a farm refers to a cultivated space where individuals engage in agricultural practices not only to grow food, but also to preserve heritage, pass down ancestral knowledge, build community, and resist systems of oppression. Some examples of a farm include but are not limited to rural land, an urban plot, the yard of someone’s home, container garden, etc.

1.7 Assumptions

Due to my past and present experience with agriculture through my experiences on my great grandparent's farm and my work with the Atlanta History Center, I have an assumption that

many Black people have negative feelings associated with agriculture that stem from the United States' dark history of enslavement. Considering these negative feelings along with the steady decline of African American farms, I can assume that today's Black farmers are working diligently to preserve African American farming techniques and ancestral practices to educate the community and to ensure that these customs are not lost.

1.8 Limitations

One limitation is that I had trouble setting up formal interviews with farmers. However, I was able to conduct informal conversations with Black-owned farmer in Atlanta, GA. For greater understanding, I could have begun the interview requests during the slower season for a better chance at conducting formal interviews with the farms observed indirectly.

1.9 Chapter 1 Summary

Chapter 1 covers the problem statement which alludes to the negative attitudes many African Americans have towards agriculture and agricultural work. The study seeks to understand how today’s Black farmers are using the current boom in young Black farmers to dispel these attitudes and reconnect the community with their agrarian roots. This chapter also covers the research question, the interpretive framework, the definition of terms used, the researcher's assumptions, and the limitations of the current research.

2 LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1 Plantation Trauma

"The field was the scene of a crime."

-Chris Bolden-Newsome

Representations of the United States often lead to images of the plantation with a large home taking center stage while surrounded by sprawling fields and magnolias, as pointed out by historian Matthew Pratt Guterl (2016). On the other hand, Katherine McKittrick adds the imagery of slave quarters, auction blocks, fields and crops, and transportation leading to and from the plantation (2011). The social order of the plantation system mirrored European feudalism as Black bodies made up the labor force on these properties. This has created a complex agricultural relationship for the descendants of kidnapped Africans brought to the Americas.

The agrarian tradition of African Americans reaches far back for many centuries. Innovative in their techniques, African Americans have long held a deep connection to the land and all that the land produces. The African continent is home to more than two thousand native grains, roots and tubers, fruits, vegetables, legumes, and oil crops. Due to the vast number of crops indigenous to the continent of Africa, the enslaved depended on their ethnobotanical knowledge for nourishment, healing, escape, and collective survival which further illustrates their use of agriculture in their resistance work (Carney & Rosomoff, 2009). This knowledge, passed down from generation to generation can be seen in the work of Black farmers and agrarians today. This knowledge is vital to preserving the tradition of Black agrarianism today, however the trauma of the plantation still influences the way many African Americans engage with agricultural work.

In recent years there has been an increase in young Black folks returning to the land. With this return, there has also been an acknowledgement of the real trauma associated with agricultural labor in the United States. In her extensive guide *Farming While Black: Soul Fire Farm's Practical Guide to Liberation on the Land,* Leah Penniman dedicates an entire chapter to the harm many African Americans feel when confronted with their feelings around agricultural work. Penniman notes that when she asks Black guests of her farm what they associate with farming, the answer is often slavery (2018).

Legalizing the bondage of Black bodies was unlike any other form of enslavement through history, which further complicates the relationship African Americans have with agricultural work. The racial economy of the plantation has created a level of "black placelessness" despite chaining the enslaved to the land (McKittrick, 2011). We see the systems of the plantation in the foundation of politics, economics, healthcare, and all facets that impact the lives of Americans as it is not merely a farm, rather "a complex network of interlaced institutions" (Guterl, 2016 p. 25).

The enslaved of the South faced brutality day in and day out. From wretched living and working conditions, inhumane brutality at the hands of captors, and in the case of many women and young girls, sexual assault. This treatment of the enslaved aligned with what Southern planters considered an adequate management system. The use of corporal punishment as a means of control was pivotal to this system of slave management. To maintain the system, punishment and/or the threat of it was at the core of the relationship between the slaveholder and the enslaved. The use of violence as a means of control had long been debated in plantation business as slaveholders were writing literature on slave management for one another. Much of this

literature inveighed against “excessive’ whipping, whipping for the pleasure of it, whipping ‘from mere passion and malice” (Levine, 2005 p. 33).

Many planters used the decision of Judge Thomas Ruffin in the *State v. John Mann* case to execute brutal punishment to the men, women, and children they held captive. In 1829, Ruffin overturned the conviction of John Mann who was found guilty of shooting Lydia, a leased enslaved woman in Mann’s possession. Ruffin declared, “the power of the master must be absolute to render the submission of his slave perfect” (Green, 2011). This decision gave slaveholders unchecked authority over the bodies of enslaved people in the United States without legal repercussions (Grummitt, 2024). The murder of Lydia is just one of the documented accounts of the brutality faced by the enslaved, which does not account for the many instances of daily brutality suffered by the enslaved. The scar of unchecked brutality is only one facet of the trauma that stems from chattel slavery. Psychoanalyst, Janice Gump notes that there is little about slavery that is not traumatic. She highlights the losses that enslaved people faced (e.g., culture, home, kin, and sense of self). She also notes the destruction of families through the selling of parents, children, and siblings (2010; Graff, 2017). Considering the “slave management” system, these people either experienced or witnessed the physical and sexual abuse of fellow slaves.

This harsh treatment of Black folks on plantations and large farms would continue well after the passing of the thirteenth amendment, which abolished slavery in 1865. Slavery took a new shape as many of the formerly enslaved were forced to continue work at the plantations that held them captive while operating under a conditional sort of freedom. In its effort to reclaim its former state of plantation power, the South, would turn to new forms of labor for those formerly enslaved. In the seventy plus years following the Civil War, hundreds of thousands of African

Americans had no choice but to continue their agricultural work through peonage, sharecropping, convict leasing, or chain gangs (Francis, 2021). The plantation power further criminalized the newly freed as a means of keeping them under the boot of white supremacy. African Americans convicted of a *criminal offense* (e.g., stealing a pig, being without money, whistling at a white woman, vagrancy) were hired out by the law to public and private industries to "work off" their sentences (Baker, 2016). This time would also see an increase in white violence against Black bodies.

The era of Reconstruction followed by Jim Crow were two distinct periods of racial unrest. Southern white mobs terrorized Black citizens as a means of reestablishing white supremacy and further suppressing Black civil rights. The Equal Justice Initiative (EJI) notes that tens of thousands of people were killed in racially motivated massacres, murders, and lynchings during Reconstruction and Jim Crow (2017). Whole communities were slaughtered and destroyed by white domestic terrorists disrupting Black progression in the United States. As the tensions of the South were boiling over in the early twentieth century, World War I was being fought in Europe, which halted Europeans immigrating to the United States.

The early twentieth century saw many African Americans fleeing to the North, Midwest, and West Coast as the first World War gave many African Americans an opportunity to escape the white violence of the South. This would not be the first opportunity for African Americans to make their move, however, World War I offered more folks the chance to succeed in other parts of the country as the European immigrant workforce was limited. In the *Chicago Defender* article "World's Great War a Mighty Blessing," readers are given a glimpse of how many African Americans felt leaving the South for the greater opportunities and "safety" of the North, calling the war a blessing. Away from the threat of Southern white mobs, many newly migrated

Black folks were eager for the opportunity to protect their homes and create new lives for themselves and their families (1916; Reed, 2014). This great migration removed many African Americans from their agrarian roots. As Jim Crow rule and white supremacy became more violent those former Southerners were still left with the scars of their trauma. As for those that stayed, the threat of continued violence and unfair farming practices only hardened their feelings towards agriculture.

2.2 Agricultural Resistance

The definition of resistance is a complex one. As resistance scholarship is becoming more widely available, the understanding of what makes an action resistance creates an intricate web of information. (Butz and Ripmeester, 1999; Malmvig, 2016; Lilja, 2022). Often the resistance of the enslaved is linked to running away from plantations, however, I will use this section to highlight the day-to-day resistance of enslaved people. In Monica M. White's book *Freedom Farmers: Agricultural Resistance and The Black Freedom Movement* she tells the story and history of "collective agency and community resilience" of Black farming folks who use their vast knowledge of agriculture to resist oppression and to further aid in their liberation.

Some of the earliest evidence of Black agricultural resistance took place when African men, women, and children were being snatched from their homeland. The transport of these kidnapped African people also saw the transport of several crops indigenous to Africa. Many crops that have now become staples in the American and Caribbean diet are native to Africa (Carney & Rosomoff, 2009; White 2019). Those who held kidnapped Africans captive, carried produce and livestock on slave ships to feed themselves with the remnants going to those hostages stowed below deck. However, African women sowed the seeds of some of the first acts of resistance using their hair. Noted in Judith A. Carney's *With Grain in Her Hair: Rice in*

Colonial Brazil, a Swiss correspondent, Jean Watt indicates that it was an enslaved woman that first brought rice to Carolina in 1726 (Carney, 2004). This choice to carry seeds braided in the hair is just one example of a survival strategy and resistance for the enslaved.

By 1850, more than three million African Americans were enslaved on Southern plantations, laboring in sunbaked fields for sixteen hours a day, six or seven days a week (Francis, 2021). Despite doing this back breaking work, the enslaved were left with few options for nourishment from plantation owners. In their own slave narratives, Frederick Douglass and Harriett Jacobs speak on the lack of adequate food offered to the enslaved. *High on the Hog* author Jessica B. Harris breaks down the two systems of food distribution found on most plantations of substantial size. The enslaved were either fed from a "centralized kitchen" on the property or they were given scheduled rations to prepare in their own cabins or within their community (Harris, 2013). To supplement their rations many of the enslaved folks tapped into their knowledge of agriculture and leaned heavily on crops indigenous to their homeland to ensure they were getting adequate nutrients.

The formation of slave gardens allowed those held captive a chance at independence and the opportunity to make decisions on their own behalf. Jessica B. Harris notes the use of traps, hunting, and fishing being used as a means of supplementing the diets of the enslaved. As Monica M. White notes, "Most likely working on Saturday or Sunday, those who were enslaved grew crops such as various types of squash, yams, sweet potatoes, various kinds of peas…" (White, 2019). The independent production and maintenance of these gardens allowed for enslaved people to execute their own plans for their gardens without interference from their owners. The slave gardens represented independent production of grounds and can be understood as a strategy of resistance to a corrupt system and an effort to create food security (White, 2019).

Another example of agricultural resistance is related to strategies in workforce. Enslaved farmers understood the importance of their labor on plantations and with this understanding they knew that a lack of productivity en masse would create difficulties for plantation owners. Work slowdowns were a prominent group effort that the enslaved would employ to relieve themselves of strenuous work. Other workforce tactics included feigning illness and acts of self-mutilation to create an injury or to reduce their value to masters (West, 2020). One form of self-mutilation was done by cutting the hands with the barbs from the cotton plant. Doing this would allow for the enslaved to take a short break from their expected work.

Women also recognized the value of their ability to reproduce, as many Black women were forced to breed to increase the slave population. Black women were finding creative ways to regulate their menstruation through agriculture. According to Marie Jenkins Schwartz:

> They did not think of themselves as inducing abortion, because (like white women) they believed that pregnancy was not the only cause of suppressed menstruation…Ambiguity about why the menses had ceased and when life began allowed a degree of flexibility in controlling fertility without encountering resistance within the slave community (2010).

Enslaved women used teas, herbs, and roots to increase menstruation, which often worked as a form of birth control. Jacqueline Jones writes about Mary Gaffney, an enslaved woman who used cotton root to prevent having children for her owner. Gaffney notes, “Maser was going to raise him a lot more slaves, but still I cheated Maser, I never did have any slaves to grow and Maser he wondered what was the matter. I kept cotton roots and chewed them all the time, but I was careful not to let Maser know or catch me” (2010). This form of resistance allowed for enslaved women to—in essence—control the slave population in the South.

Due to enslaved women's proximity to the slaveholder and his family with their work in the kitchen and planation home, it gave them access to what the family ingested. Understanding what vegetation was harmful, aided enslaved women in their covert mission to gain freedom. As pointed out by Deborah Gray White, it was much harder for women to run away, but to do so many turned to poison as a means of getting out. White notes, "As early as 1755, a Charleston slave woman was burned at the stake for poisoning her master, and in 1769 a special issue of the *South Carolina Gazette* carried the story of a slave woman who had poisoned her master's infant child" (White, 1999). In her published diary, Mary Chestnut details the story of Dr. Keitt's, a family friend's, death. After falling chronically ill it was suggested to Dr. Keitt that his slave may be trying to kill him. When one of his enslaved house servants brought him a cup of tea, a white substance was discovered at the bottom of the cup further fueling suspicions (Chestnut, ed. Woodward, 1981). In doing this, Black women created an opening for other enslaved members of their community to escape to freedom making this the ultimate form of agricultural resistance for the enslaved.

2.3 Farm Ownership

Special Field Order No. 15, issued by Union general William T. Sherman on January 16, 1865, called for the confiscation of a portion of the South Carolina coastline stretching to St. John's River in Florida. These 400,000 acres of land were promised to be redistributed to recently freed Black families in forty-acre segments. This promise would be known as "Forty-acres and a mule." Despite this order, President Andrew Johnson would overturn Sherman's directive and return the land back to the former owners. This would leave 40,000 formerly enslaved Black Americans without a home. After the end of the Civil War, four million African Americans were left to search for ways to make a living, homes, and ways to enter

their new space as citizens of the United States. The end of the Civil War also produced the 13th, 14th, and 15th amendments, also known as the Civil War Amendments. Each of these amendments gave Black folks hope of freedom despite their true intentions (Reid & Bennett, 2012; Penniman, 2018; White, 2019; Francis, 2021).

Despite the hope provided by the Civil War Amendments, African Americans quickly realized that their freedom would not be so easily won. After the assassination of Abraham Lincoln, his successor Andrew Johnson quickly began dismantling the little change that was made in order to appease white Southerners and to uphold the White supremacy he felt. He insisted that providing Black Americans with the same privileges as their oppressors was a form of discrimination against whites (Foner, 1988). In other words, any progress made for the liberation of Black people was viewed in opposition to white people even though nothing was being taken from white people, except their own idea of power and supremacy.

After the end of the Civil War, many newly freed African Americans found themselves stuck on the properties that once saw them captive, yet a great deal of African Americans were able to acquire land and begin building their own farms. According to data collected by University of Illinois Urbana-Champaign, Director of the Gardner Agriculture Policy Program, Jonathan Coppess, Black farmers owned more than 16 million acres of land in the 1920 (2021). Black farmers and agrarians understood the importance of land ownership as many Black famers found themselves deep in debt through sharecropping (Penniman, 2018; White, 2019; Carter & Alexander, 2020; Francis, 2021). When Abraham Lincoln established the USDA in 1862 its purpose was to acquire and diffuse among the people of the United States useful information on subjects connected with agriculture in the most general and comprehensive sense of the word (Office of War Information, 1945: 349). To provide relief

during the Great Depression, Franklin D. Roosevelt's New Deal brought about the USDA farm loan programs, which included the Farm Security Administration. The purpose of the Farm Security Administration was to provide loans to rural Americans. The USDA seemed like a viable option for those land-owning Black farmers and farmers who sought land ownership.

In her article, "Land Inequalities in the United States," sociologist Debbie Becher notes that as the number of African American landowners increased, in the early twentieth century, so did the exploitation of those landowners with banks and real estate industry creating predatory business models to trap Black land and homeowners in a never-ending cycle of debt and property loss (2023). The United States government was in on the scheme to keep African American property owners from reaching the same aspirations as their white counterparts as well. By the end of World War II, congress killed the Farm Security Administration and other similar programs, which left farmers with the Farmers Home Administration Act (FmHA) of 1945. Many farmers used the FmHA as a last-ditch effort to secure funding for their crop season.

Between 1947 and 1995, then the FmHA was the principal federal agency dealing with rural poverty and the traditionally underserved agricultural clients. The inability of African American farmers to obtain credit from this agency because of biased denial and untimely delays led them to file the Pigford suit against the USDA (Grant et al., 2012). To combat the predatory banking system, many rural Black farmers chose to work together by forming cooperative institutions and co-op farms to support each other. Women like Fannie Lou Hamer and Shirley Sherrod were paramount in the development of these farming collectives. Established within a couple of years of each other, Hamer and Sherrod's farms were viewed

as sites of resistance and sovereignty with Sherrod's New Communities amassing 5700 acres in its sixteen-year run (1969-1985).

By 1982 the number of Black farmers dropped significantly. That year the United States Commission of Civil Rights issued a detailed examination of the USDA's failure to provide protections against discrimination. It was founded that the USDA's programming had a longstanding history of discrimination that contributed to the decline in African American farming operations. To successfully operate a farm, Black farmers needed access to adequate amounts of credit at fair terms in a timely manner. Without this credit, Black farmers were left with few options, with many Black farmers turning to USDA lending programs like Farm Service Agency (FSA), previously known as FmHA (Carpenter, 2012).

Due to years of discriminatory practices, the USDA was met with two lawsuits (*Pigford v. Glickman* and *Brewington v. Glickman*) by Black farmers in the summer of 1997. In 1999, the court found the USDA guilty of discriminating against Black farmers from 1983 to 1997. A two track claims process was created for Black farmers impacted by the misdeeds of the USDA. *Track A* was a monetary payout of $50,000 plus debt relief and loan forgiveness. *Track B* was a higher monetary payout requiring substantial and detailed evidence of discrimination. Despite the evidence of USDA's wrongdoings, the approval percentage for these farmers was 69% as many farmers were left denied for not filing their petitions on time. The farmer left out of the *Pigford I* payout filed again under what is known as *Pigford II*. In 2010 *Pigford II* was settled for $1.25 billion with Senate having to pass the Claims Resolution Act of 2010 (Cowan, et al. 2013), further proving the hurdles Black farmers faced when fighting for fair and equitable treatment in the preservation of land.

2.4 The Returning Generation

"We are rebuilding our grandfathers' farmer cooperatives, keeping our elders' foodways alive, and rethinking land ownership based on models that existed pre-colonization."

-Natasha Bowens

The 21st century has seen a steady decline of Black farmers. The downward trend of Black farmers can be seen year after year with the USDA census showing Black famers making up less than 2% of the farming population, totaling 41,807 farmers in 2022. This is a decrease from the 45,508 Black farmers in 2017. Despite African Americans long history with agriculture, negative attitudes towards agricultural work can be cited as one of the many reasons why many African Americans do not consider farming an adequate career choice. Many Black folks often associate farming and agricultural work with the harsh realities of slavery and sharecropping (Alexander & Carter, 2020; Penniman, 2018; Tozeau, 2019; White, 2019; Gripper, 2020; Leibovich, 2021).

As costs rise, food safety and scarcity becoming an increasing concern, and amongst young Black people seeking opportunities to work for themselves there has been a boom in young Black folks turning to agriculture. Soul Fire Farm owner, Leah Penniman calls this group of young farmers the "returning generation" with many of these young farmers taking over family land while others are starting from scratch. By 2017, the population of young Black farmers (farmers under the age of 35) was 2,421. That number has since increased to 2,647 making young producers 6% of the Black farming population (U.S. Department of Agriculture). Though this number is small, there is an increasing trend in Millennial and Gen-Z Farmers.

A major part of the work for many of these farmers is the recognition of their ancestors' trauma on American soil, but through that recognition there is an understanding of resilience. In

Leslie Touzeau's 2019 study examining the lived experiences of Black farmers ages 26-40, there is a consensus of freedom, empowerment, and connection the farmers feel when tapping into the agrarian traditions of their ancestors. Today's agricultural resistance can be seen in the work of young Black farmers fighting to be seen and make change in their communities. As African American farming practices are being erased, this young generation of farmers are not only reconnecting with lost agrarian techniques and cultivators, but they are also using this knowledge to educate a younger generation of agrarians to preserve a rich legacy of working the land (Penniman, 2018; Bowens, 2015). Examples of preservation can be seen through the works of Georgia farmers like Keisha Cameron (High Hog Farms), Matthew Raiford (Gilliard Farms), and Jamila Norman (Patchwork City Farms). Each of these farmers have found a way to connect folks with the traditions of their ancestors, by highlighting textile work, foodways, and farming techniques, respectively.

2.5 Theatre as an Agent of Change

The tradition of Black resistance stretches beyond rallying in the streets through protest or through more modern means like posting on social media. Black folks have long used the arts as a conduit for shedding light on the oppressions they face. Through song, the enslaved in the Southern United States were able to send coded messages to escape through the underground railroad. In their abolition work, the formerly enslaved told their stories through autobiographies. Works from Frederick Douglass, William Wells Brown, and Harriet Jacobs gave white audiences a firsthand account of the oppression faced by the enslaved.

Through these narratives the formerly enslaved spoke at length about the use of performance as a means of resistance. In her memoir *Incidents in the Life of a Slave Girl*, Harriet Jacobs notes the false utopia her owner created by compelling the enslaved to act pleased with

their position. If the enslaved "played nice" they were likely to enjoy the few pleasures, they were afforded through the protection of their owner. At the same time, this type of performance could be used to benefit those who were exhibited for sale. William Wells Brown notes traders forcing the enslaved to sing and dance to increase their chances of being sold. At the same time, the enslaved understood that performing well could boost their marketability, which could allow them the opportunity to have a better station on a different property (Jones, 2014).

Early American theatre featured white actors in Blackface, however Black performers understood the only way they were allowed to perform was through blackface. White actors were highly regarded for their ability to transform into presumed characteristics of Black people. These characteristics, which included exaggerated facial features, cartoonish gestures, and slowed/lazy speech, were far from the realities of Black personhood, yet Black actors knew that to be seen they would have to lean into the stereotypes in hopes to take gain power. In his review of a performance by Gavitt's Original Ethiopian Serenaders, an all-Black minstrel troupe, Frederick Douglass addresses the sociopolitical norms of slavery and white supremacy present in the performance. Despite his ambivalence Douglass does acknowledge that enslaved and free Black folks used performance as a mode of protest and pleasure. He recognized that when Black folks can control their own narratives when they are the center of attention in minstrel performances making this type of performance inherently political (1849; Jones, 2014; Dossett, 2020).

By 1820, black thespians such as James Hewlett and Ira Aldridge sought to shed the burnt-cork mask and legitimize their presence on the American stage (Harrison, 1997). In 1821, playwright and producer, William Alexander Brown opened his pleasure garden theatre the African Company, later known as African Grove Theatre. In an 1822 article from the *Spectator*

journal, it is noted that Black artists were "determined to carry into full practice the doctrine of *liberty* and *equality*, physically by acting plays and mentally by writing them" (1822; Jones, 2014; Dossett, 2020). This is evident as Brown used his theatre to combat the racial exclusivity that was prominent in most American theatres. Standing on the principles of racial inclusivity and equality, African Grove Theatre directly competed with New York's leading theatre with all-Black Shakespearean productions.

Unfortunately for many Black performers, minstrelsy was still the primary form of work for a Black actor. To gain some control in their work, Black actors began to market their performances as a more authentic compared to their white counterparts. In 1896 Bahamian-born, Bert Williams along with his artistic partner George Walker promoted their racial realness for their show "Two Real Coons" drawing large audiences, intrigued at the idea of a blacker blackface experience (Young, 2013). Williams and Walker saw great success on Broadway, and by the end of the 19th century other Black writers and performers saw the same successes. William Marion Cook and librettist Paul Laurence Dunbar had two Broadway productions in a matter of five years with *Clorindy: The Origin of the Cakewalk* (1898) and *In Dahomey* (1903).

During the early decades of the twentieth century Black artists used their theatre to own their history. Lynching dramas were prominently written by Black women and were often produced in colleges and community theatres. These plays often fueled conversations of the day and celebrated the lives of Black heroes like Denmark Vesey, Harriet Tubman, and Frederick Douglass. The mid-1930s saw the formation of the Federal Theatre Project, which allowed for Black dramatists, actors, directors, designers, composers, and technicians to create works that affirmed Black Americans' truths. As Black artists forged their own paths to tell their own stories, white producers and audiences rejected these narratives to uphold white supremacy and

continue controlling the image of African Americans. Black performers persisted in their efforts to continue telling Black stories until theatre began to die off taking a backseat to World War II.

The Civil Rights movement saw a resurgence of theatre from artists creating sociopolitical work. Lorraine Hansberry's *A Raisin in the Sun* (1959) highlights the socio-economic trappings of racism through the context of Chicago's housing rights struggle. Amiri Baraka (then LeRoi Jones) created the Black Arts Repertory Theatre (BART) in 1965. BART was the first Black theatre group with a nationalist perspective. The country saw the organization of several other Black theatres rejecting Western standards and calling out the inhumanity of Western society and the oppression faced by Black people. Playwrights also developed works that sought to celebrate the achievements of Black folks while showcasing African American ritual elements in their productions (Austin, 1988).

This urge for Black artists to take up space and develop works for and by the community would be the basis of the Black Arts Movement (BAM) of the 1960s and 70s. The goals of BAM were the development of a "black aesthetic," the promotion of self-determination, challenge the contradictions of Western society, and reject literature aimed at white audience to focus on works that speak directly to Black people. This movement was prevalent in every major city in the country with a lot of the movement taking place on college campuses (Smethurst, 2005). With playwrights like Baraka and Ed Bullins at the forefront of the movement, the theatrical ideals of their revolutionary works influenced the Black Panther party and the theatrical tactics they used in fighting for liberation (Reed, 2019).

As BAM operated as an arm of the Black Power Movement, The Free Southern Theater (FST), operated as an arm of the Student Non-Violent Coordinating (SNCC) initiative. FST was formed in 1963 by Black students—John O'Neal, Doris Derby, and Gilbert Moses. Operating

alongside other student-led initiatives in the South (ex. Sit-in protests, freedom rides, voter registration initiatives, and marches), FST's goal was to dramatize the messages of Black liberation and resistance in rural areas throughout the South (Fabre, 1983). Situating itself in the heart of the Deep South, FST's first home was in Mississippi during the height of the Civil Rights Movement (Fabre, 1983; Fleming Jr., 2019; Inwood & Alderman, 2021; Wallenberg, 2023). This choice positioned the collective in a space completely devoid of theatre arts. Despite the lack of theatre spaces, FST understood that Black Mississippians would frequently gather at sporting, musical, and religious events, so these were the audiences they used to build their own.

The existence of the Free Southern Theater was inherently political. At its core, the FST connects political activism and theatrical practice. FST used their original plays to highlight racism and empower the community/audience to tell their own stories (Inwood & Alderman, 2021; Wallenberg, 2023). As Genevieve Fabre notes, FST set out to encourage its members to develop their new works that "re-interpret their history, experience, and culture in order to counter white stereotypes and to devise new ways of fighting white oppression" (p. 55). This work to develop Black stories for and by Black people puts the power in the Black audiences' hands as they are centered at every turn of the theatrical process. To ensure that those they were serving always had access to theatre, FST made all performances free of charge. As the founders of the FST focused their intentions, they argued that theatre could "open a new area of protest. One that permits the development of playwrights and actors, one that permits the growth and self-knowledge of a negro audience, one that supplements the present struggle for freedom." They go on to further note that theatre's role is not only "a means of education, but also…[in] the development of human dignity. Theatre demonstrates that reality can be transformed" (Derby et al., 1964 as cited in Wallenberg, 2023).

Setting up operations in Mississippi, especially during this time, further emphasized the political work of the FST. The violence in Mississippi was particularly heinous with the state holding the highest number of recorded lynchings between 1877-1950 (EJI, 2017). The Free Southern Theater found its first home at the historically Black college, Tougaloo College in Jackson, Mississippi. Once the site of the Boddie plantation, Tougaloo College served as the perfect environment for the ambitious endeavor. Doris Derby described the college as a "hotbed of Civil Rights activism" as it was not a state funded institution, which made it free from state legislature control. This allowed for the collective freedom to tell the stories that would best expose the oppression African Americans faced (Wallenberg, 2023).

Creating these opportunities for Black Southerners to tell their stories speaks to the legacy of resistance by African Americans. The use of art to tell stories of oppression and resilience can be seen throughout African American art forms from past to present. The work of centering those most impacted by Southern white oppression creates a space where new artists can find their voices. Serving as the longest-running SNCC initiative, the Free Southern Theater is a testament to the importance of art in revolution.

3 METHODOLOGY

The purpose of a narrative study is to analyze and understand the lived experiences of an individual or group of individuals. The researcher gathers data through the stories, reports, and experiences of these individuals, often done through a mode of storytelling, and chronologically (Creswell, 2014). For the sake of this study, the researcher analyzed the ways today's African American farmers are using their farms to reconnect other African Americans to their agrarian roots.

3.1 Method Summary

A qualitative research method is the most appropriate design to understand how today's African American farmers are using their farms to reconnect other African Americans to their agrarian roots. Qualitative methodology "begins with assumptions and the use of interpretive/theoretical frameworks that inform the study of research problems addressing the meaning individuals or groups ascribe to a social or human problem. The final written report or presentation includes the voices of participants, the reflexivity of the researcher, a complex description and interpretation of the problem, and its contribution to the literature or a call for change" (Creswell, 2014). Creswell also states that we use qualitative research to "empower individuals to share their stories, hear their voices, and minimize the power relationships that often exist between a researcher and the participant in the study" (2014). He further notes that qualitative research is conducted when "we want to write in a literary, flexible style that conveys stories, or theatre, or poems, without the restrictions of formal academic structures of writing" (2014).

Creswell also identifies eight characteristics of qualitative research:

1. *Natural setting.* Researcher are going to the participants and collecting data in the field or at the sites where the participants experiencing the issue or problem are located.
2. *Researcher as key instrument.* Researcher collecting data through examining documents, observing behavior, and interviewing participants. Open-ended research questions are used in interviews and questionnaires.
3. *Multiple methods.* Researcher does not rely on a single data source, but rather uses multiple sources including, but not limited to interviews, observations, and documents.
4. *Complex reasoning through inductive and deductive logic.* Inductive Logic is used to establish patterns, categories, and themes from the "bottom up." The process involves working back and forth between themes and the database until a comprehensive set of themes is established. Deductive Logic establishes themes that are constantly being checked against data.
5. *Participants' meaning.* Researcher keeps the focus on learning about the participant and the problem or issue they have. The researcher is not to bring their own meaning into the process.
6. *Emergent design.* The researcher should prepare for changes and shifts in the research design upon enter the field and collecting data. During the study the questions, form of data, participants, and sites may be changed or altered during the study.
7. *Reflexivity.* Researcher positions themselves and give their insight on the research. Creswell writes, "Our readers have the right to know about us…they want us to know

what prompts our interest in the topics we investigate to whom we are reporting, and what we personally stand to gain for our study (Creswell, p. 76).

8. *Holistic account.* Researcher develops a complex picture of the problem or issue that is not bound by cause-and-effect. The researcher should report multiple perspectives, identify many factors involved in the situation, and paint a larger picture.

After reflecting on the qualifications and characteristics, I deem a qualitative research design as the optimal choice for this study as I seek to understand the relationship today's Black farmers have with their land. The researcher explored the relationship African American farmers have with traditional African American agricultural practices, lost cultivators, and the land. This research seeks to engage several primary and secondary sources, including but not limited to direct observation, document analysis, artifact analysis, audio analysis, video analysis, and case study. Due to the creative nature of this project, the play (theatre) *Sweet Clay Lands* will serve as the intervention to highlight the resistance work being done by today's Black farmers while inspiring individuals to reconnect with the land through agrarianism.

3.2 Sample

The study uses a purposeful sampling approach which means the researcher "will intentionally sample a group of people that can best inform the researcher about the research problem under examination" (Creswell, p. 184). In a narrative study the researcher's job is to reflect on an individual or a number of individuals. This person or persons can be a sample of convenience, meaning they are available to the researcher. They must also have a story to tell as well as an understanding of the research problem and central phenomenon in the study. The researcher must decide who or what will be sampled, how many people or sites will be sampled, and what form of sampling the study will take (Creswell, 2014). Creswell's general rule

regarding sample size is to study a few sites or individuals while collecting extensive details on each site or individual studied. For narrative designs, he notes studies with one or two participants as well as studies with larger participant pools. I focused on a small pool of five Black farms/farmers which should be a viable sample to gather a collective of stories, perspective, and interpretations. The researcher used a combination of primary and secondary sources, including but not limited to direct observation, document analysis, artifact analysis, audio analysis, video analysis, informal conversations, and case study. The researcher is specifically engaging with information from Black farmers and Black-owned farms in the state of Georgia. In terms of selecting farmers to observe, this research considered whether the farmer was accessible, either through direct conversations or through previously recorded interviews, articles, social media, and published literature. The study considers the age and gender of the farmers observed as well as the type of farm being run. The following criteria determines the eligibility of the researcher's sample:

- Black or African American person
- Black or African American own/operated farm, homestead, ranch, or garden
- Located in the state of Georgia

The researcher utilized the USDA Black Farmers Network, social media platforms (Facebook, Instagram, etc.), news reports, and agricultural groups to identify farms for observation.

3.3 Procedures

1. *Sample selection*
2. *Observation*
3. *Analysis*

4. *Theatre intervention- Sweet Clay Lands*

Since the researcher used publicly available information, IRB consent was not needed for the research. The researcher selected five Black farmers or Black owned farms to observe. She observed the farms' family history, crops cultivated, community work, and education opportunities by attending farmers' markets, workshops, and community events. The researcher also monitored farm websites, social media accounts, published interviews, informal conversations with farmers, books, and reports. After adequate information was received, the researcher used this information to guide the story of the two-act play.

The researcher observed the events and programs held at these farms and their intended purposes. The researcher investigated the crops being cultivated on these farms and their connection with African and African American cultivation and culinary practices. The researcher cross-referenced this information with other publicly available information including published interviews or new broadcasts, written reports, social media engagement. This provided the researcher with context on the resistance work being done on these properties, as well as who is benefitting from this information.

3.4 Feedback Process

The feedback process took place over a year and a half, resulting in a staged reading of ACT I and 2 Teams readings of the full play. The recruitment of actors and director took place in 2023 during the Reiser Artist's Lab. Some actors were recast due to scheduling constraints and relocation.

- Obtaining the performance space
    - During early development through the Alliance Theatre Reiser Artist's Lab, the researcher utilized zoom and her living room for informal readings and rehearsals.

    - Formal rehearsals for the Reiser presentation took place at Alliance Theatre for the reading of Act I.
    - For Act II, the researcher used Microsoft Teams. This allowed the researcher to hear the changes and talk through the play with people who were reading and listening to the work.

- Actors
    - Actors for the previous reading were recruited through previous relationships made by the researcher. Actors were contacted via phone call, text, and email.
    - The play has a cast of 6, not including an actor for stage directions. All characters in the play are African American, including stage directions.
    - All actors are older than 18. No maximum age required.
- Script Readings
    - The researcher requested 2 scripts readings. This allowed for her to hear the script, adjust the script, and hear those adjustments.
    - The researcher held a Microsoft Teams call with actors to read the script while she listened and made notes.
    - The reading schedule hinged on the availability of the actors.
    - The first reading consisted of a table read and initial introductions, discussion of the study, script, and questions from the actors and researcher.
    - The researcher took her notes and questions and reworked the previous draft of the script.
    - The second reading allowed the researcher to hear changes that had been made to the play.

- After the second reading the actors and playwright talked about what worked, what resonated, and asked questions.
- The researcher plans to use these notes in further development of the play.
- After the readings, actors were compensated via Zelle, Venmo, Cash App, or Apple Pay.

3.5 The Intervention: Sweet Clay Lands

Sweet Clay Lands is an original two-act play written by the researcher that will be used as a creative component and intervention for this research. The researcher chose to write an original piece that highlights the plight of today's African American farmers, and the ancestral work African American farmers are doing on their properties. The researcher chose to use her background as a playwright to present the narrative for the research she has conducted. Creating this original piece will allow for the researchers work to be accessible to a diverse audience while also giving voice to the experience of African American farmers.

The intervention was started while the researcher was a Reiser artist fellow with Alliance Theatre in Atlanta, GA in 2023. The artist used her $10,000 grant to visit with local farmers and attend workshops with her artistic team. During the early drafting phase, the researcher/playwright held multiple artistic events to listen to the script and discuss the nature of the work. Despite the plight of Black farmers, the playwright wants to use this play to center Black resistance and ancestral connection.

3.6 Data Collection

Due to the difficulty of setting up formal interviews with Georgia farmers, the researcher initially planned to observe the work of Black Georgia farmers through previous recorded or

published interviews, social media, websites, and other published works. To best represent the stories and the perspective of Black farmers when drafting the play, an application for Designation of Not Human Subjects Research was submitted. Based on the information provided, the submission was determined to be not human subjects research. The process for data collection for this narrative study primarily involved direct observation along with informal conversations involving open-ended questions. Five farms/farmers were chosen with the researcher making direct contact with two of the five. This direct contact allowed for the researcher to engage in informal conversation with farmers which provided additional insight into the work of African American agrarians. The first farm was run by an older Jamaican immigrant, who specializes in container gardening. This means that each crop is grown in a bucket or container. The second farm was run by a young girl with help from her parents. Their crops are grown in plots between their front and back yard.

Despite their differing farming methods, both farmers spoke in detail about their family connections to agriculture, and how these ties to agriculture influenced their choices to operate their own farms. I was particularly drawn to these farmers' community work and their excitement for teaching the community how to create their own gardens at home. This community work directly aligns with the resistance tradition of past agrarians by passing down agrarian skills and techniques.

3.7 Observations

Creswell defines observations as "the act of noting a phenomenon in the field setting through (hearing, sight, seeing, smell, and taste), often with an instrument and recording it for scientific purposes" (p. 205). Observations were used in this study to gather information about

the work of the farms/farmers. Outside of informal conversations with two local Black farmers, I observed the practices of three additional farms, two in the Metro-Atlanta area and a third in Brunswick, GA, which is the setting of the creative component of this thesis. Despite not being able to speak directly with these farmers, I was able to observe the community work, programming, and educational content shared by these farmers. This provided insight on how these farms are working to preserve African American farming techniques while educating the larger community on the importance of understanding where the fruits and vegetables they consume come from. When speaking to local farmers, I observed a connection to familial traditions and ancestral practices. I chose to ask open-ended questions to avoid including my own biases in the discussion and allowed me to focus on the observation work.

3.8 Internal Validity

Validation in qualitative research can be described as "an attempt to assess the accuracy of the findings as best described by the researcher and the participant" (Creswell, p. 295). Creswell also notes that validation "has a distinct strength of qualitative research in that the account made through extensive time spent in the field, detailed thick description, and the closeness of the researcher to the participants in the study all add to the value or accuracy of the study" (p. 295). He goes on to list eight validation strategies. For my research, I utilized triangulation, clarifying researcher bias, and peer review or debriefing. Triangulation allows for the researcher to use multiple and different sources, methods, investigators, and theories to provide corroborating evidence. Through triangulation, I utilized the previously recorded interviews, websites, and social media of the participants to assist in validating the information I received from our informal conversations. Clarifying researcher bias allows for the researcher to clarify any past experiences, biases, and prejudices that may shape the researchers approach to the study. Peer

review or debriefing allows for the researcher to task another individual with the task of keeping researcher honest. For this research, I tasked my artistic partner with reviewing my research and the play to ensure the accuracy of the narrative.

3.9 External Validity

External validity refers to generalizing the study's findings to other populations, settings, variables and measurements. My research did not attempt to provide a generalization or a comparison. The purpose of this research is to explore the perspectives and work of a group of experienced Black agrarians and farmers. The use of the creative component does not seek to generalize this group, rather I used the information I gathered to create a fictionalized account of some of the stories I have encountered through the research.

3.10 Researcher Bias

As previously mentioned, I want to provide the reader with an understanding of the researcher's assumption and bias. As the great-granddaughter of farmers, I have a close tie to agricultural work. For five years, I served as a Historic Interpreter for the Atlanta History Center (AHC). As an interpreter for AHC's Smith Family Farm, a lot of my work focused on the enslaved gardens. This work with the enslaved gardens allowed me the opportunity to educate patrons about the resistance efforts the enslaved used through agriculture. The story of *Sweet Clay Lands* was conceptualized in 2019 which has shaped my initial approach to the research. I have observed my own connections to agriculture and how I relate those connections to my own agrarian work. Using my chosen validation strategies, I hope to minimize my bias within the study.

4 RESULTS & ANALYSIS

This chapter will discuss the researcher's findings and draw connections to the final creative component. It will include a detailed analysis of the conversations had with two local farmers. This section will also provide details of the observations the researcher made of three additional farms, specifically highlighting their educational and community work as it relates to reclamation. Using these findings from the research, this chapter also serves as an analysis of the play and how these findings have been used in the featured narrative. The five farms observed are all located in Georgia with two of the farms located in East Point, GA, one in Grayson, GA, another in Ellenwood, GA, and the last in Brunswick, GA.

Inspired by the work of the Free Southern Theatre (FST) and the Black Arts Movement (BAM), the researcher is using theatre as a the medium to give voice to Black farmers. Instead of a traditional academic thesis, the researcher finds theatre is an accessible way to connect many audiences with the research while allowing for creativity. The researcher's personal connection to theatre and farming has put her in a unique position to dramatize the resistance work of today's Black farmers. In the spirit of FST, the researcher used her observations to re-imagine and re-interpret the stories of those Black farmers for Black audiences. In her audience notes, the researcher makes it a point to specify who her work is for while giving the audience permission to react to the work authentically, removing constraints that would keep an audience from experiencing the work with their full self.

4.1 Play Synopsis

In the heart of Georgia's Lowcountry, the fractured Coleman family battles legacies of land, love, and loss as Josie unexpectedly inherits her father's farm, forcing her to confront a

long-standing rift with her brother, Jamie. As she is tasked with her family's legacy, Josie bears the weight of her family's history and the choices that will shape their future. All the while, Jamie is haunted by the ghost of their family's past uncovering the dark tragedy that has shaped their family's fate.

4.2 Participants

The researcher utilized the USDA Black Farmers Network, social media platforms (Facebook, Instagram, etc.), news reports, and agricultural groups to identify farms for observation. Farmer A (Grayson, GA), Farmer B (Ellenwood, GA), and Farmer C (Brunswick, GA) were observed indirectly. The researcher focused on their efforts via social media, their websites, publications and previously recorded interviews. Through these sources, the researcher observed how each farm engaged with their community and audience. This provided insight into the crops they were cultivating, the programs and initiatives they had planned, and the educational components of their farms. Through a farming Facebook group, the researcher signed up for a local farm tour. On this tour, she visited four local farms with two of them being Black owned. The first was the farm of Farmer D (East Point, GA) who specializes in container gardening. The second was the farm of Farmer E (East Point, GA) who operates a farm out of her front and back yard. This tour allowed the researcher the opportunity to ask questions and have informal conversations with local farmers to better understand their work and how they used their farms to dismantle negative stigmas related to agriculture and reconnect with ancestral practices.

During the earliest development of the script, actors were chosen based on the relationships of my director, Damian Lockhart, stage manager, Jasmine Page and myself. As development continued, we recast two actors and added an additional actor to read stage

directions. Rehearsals took place via zoom and my living room while formal rehearsal took place at the Alliance Theatre black box theatre. Since the Reiser presentation of the first act, two of our cast members moved out of state and third was cast in a professional production which made her unavailable. The researcher reached out to local actors in my network to read the second act on Microsoft Teams, so that she may hear the changes. For the purposes of this thesis, the play is in a place to best highlight the work of these farmers. The researcher will continue development of this play during my time in the Columbia University Playwriting MFA program.

4.3 Threats to Farms

The literature revealed the struggles many farmers face when working with banks and the United States government to secure the necessary funding for their farms. During the tour with Farmer D, she informed the group that she was just settling on her new property in East Point, GA. She mentioned that her original farm was in the Pittsburgh neighborhood of South Atlanta. When asked why she moved, she mentioned Atlanta's rapid development being the reason. Unfortunately, due to her not owning her land, development of that Atlanta Beltline forced Farmer D to relocate her farm.

In the play *Sweet Clay Lands* the Coleman family are facing pushback from the banks. Another threat is the ever-looming Zeigler Group, a financial group said to help farmers, but due to high interest rates, the group has seized many Black farms along Southeast Georgia. The family is also facing the decades long intimidation by a rival farm owned by a white family nearby. *Selection A* introduces us to Jamie, fondly known as LJ, venting to his wife about their longtime bank denying them of a crop loan.

Table 4.1 Selection A

ACT I Scene 2 (excerpt)

Elise stares out the window at her father-in-law. Jamie dressed for a day of hard work enters on the phone.

JAMIE
Uh huh…yes, but…Mr. Davenport if I could…yes, sir…well sir with all due respect my family has been working with you all for years…yes…no…I understand. Thank you.

He hangs up the phone and sits at the kitchen table. Elise sits his coffee before him. She rubs his back, and he pulls her onto his lap. They hold each other.

ELISE
That the bank?

JAMIE
Regional Financial…say they're no longer providing crop loans.

ELISE
Since when?

JAMIE
Apparently since now. Smart business folks would've at least let their long-time clients know what's going on before now.

ELISE
They're not the only bank in town.

JAMIE
They might as well be. You know a Black Farmer can't get what he need from First National.

ELISE
You can try the banks over in Jesup.

JAMIE
We been working with the Davenport's since my great granddaddy.

ELISE
Did they say why?

JAMIE
Something about financial risk and liability.

ELISE
That don't make no sense. We've always been in good standing with our loans.

JAMIE

Don't matter now. We gotta do what we gotta do before the season starts. Besides I've got a Farmer of the Year title to defend.

Playfully, she rolls her eyes. He sees this and starts tickling her.

Because Jamie no longer has the security of the bank his family has worked with for four generations, he is tasked with figuring out how he will finance his farm for the year. When another option, First National, is suggested, Jamie mentions that the bank does not give Black farmers loans. Despite his stellar history with Regional Financial, he is forced to work harder to get the crop loan he needs. This speaks to the discrimination Black farmers face and the work it takes for these farmers to secure funding for their farms.

Selection B provides insight into the Ziegler Group, the financial group providing high interest crop loans to local farmers struggling to secure adequate funding for their property. In a previous scene we are introduced to them via a flyer left on Elise's car at the supermarket. Throughout the play there are several advertisements from the Zeigler Group with each providing greater detail of the family behind the organization.

Table 4.2 Selection B

ACT I Scene 4
A TV appears from the sky. It's turned on, static, and then an ad plays. Images of sprawling fields and smiling farmers. The voice of an announcer is heard. **ANNOUNCER** The promise of hope. The promise of a brighter future. The promise of security. With the help of Randy Zeigler and the Zeigler Group that promise is just a call away. *The ad ends with a Black farmer sitting on a porch sipping lemonade in a rocking chair.*

ANNOUNCER

The Zeigler Group committed to serving the Greater Brunswick area since 1974.

Static. The screen goes Black. Lights up on the outside of the house. The sound of an old pick-up truck, brakes, the engine cuts out. The doors open and slam closed. Josie stomps into the space with Jamie on her heels. All the while Elise is folding baby clothes and watching from the window.

ACT I Scene 6

ANNOUNCER

At the Zeigler Group, we know that time is money. Which is why we've made it easier than ever to get a farm loan. Just apply online and get approval super fast. Whether you need new equipment, more employees or capital to expand, The Zeigler Group makes getting a farm loan a breeze. With flexible term options offering you peace of mind. See how The Zeigler Group can help you today.

Jamie turns off the television. He ponders for a moment…then reaches into his pocket pulling out his phone. He can be heard typing. He sighs…he continues. Lights fade.

ACT I Scene 7

Young Mae runs home to warn Hattie. A flash of lightning, another boom. Light out as a television emerges from the sky. An ad with a still from the Bradshaw & Zeigler family.

ANNOUNCER

In 1974, Betty and Thomas Zeigler had a dream to provide resources for farmers in their community. With the help of Betty's father, Mitchell Bradshaw, the Zeigler Group was

founded to give hope, to reinvest, and to provide peace of mind. For 50 years, the Zeigler Group has served the greater Brunswick area, and we hope to see many more. Thank you for trusting our family to take care of yours. *The ad ends. Black out. End of Act I.*

When we are introduced to the Zeigler Group, Jamie mentions that the firm has been snatching up Black farms along the coast. As pointed out in chapter 2, predatory banking systems have made it difficult for many Black farmers to maintain their property because of the significant debt this puts them in. Throughout the play, the audience, like the farmers, are spammed with advertisements from the financial group. These ads are supposed to feel enticing, and each time we encounter a Zeigler Group ad, Jamie is being confronted with the money he doesn't have for the season. Like most predatory banking institutions, the Zeigler group is preying on this desperation and unfortunately, for Jamie he falls into the trap.

Despite the struggles Black farmers face in the United States, the Coleman family has proven to persevere. Yet their success has made them a target for farmers who feel they do not deserve all they've worked hard for. After signing a deal with a corporate entity, George Coleman, Josie and Jamie's grandfather is killed by members of the Bradshaw family. Prior to this the Bradshaw family had been the big farming family in Brunswick. *Selection C* highlights how this direct threat has followed this family for three generations.

Table 4.3 Selection C

ACT I Scene 5
Sweet Clay Land farm 1974. Light up on the vast field with most of the land burned. Smoke still rise from the earth as Young Senior is seen harvesting the small section of the rice fields that's been left intact. He works angrily as he hacks at handfuls of grass.

Hattie emerges in her farm clothes with a large, brimmed hat. She joins in the harvesting effort. They are quiet for some time.

YOUNG SENIOR
Mae almost ready?

HATTIE
Just about.

YOUNG SENIOR
I'll have Charles Miller stay with you.

HATTIE
I'm not staying behind.

YOUNG SENIOR
Mama—

HATTIE
I'm gonna go see my baby off.

YOUNG SENIOR
It ain't safe for us all to be leaving like that.

HATTIE
It ain't safe nowhere. Not long as them crackas over at the Bradshaw Farm runnin free. You not gon keep me here. I'm not gon let my baby be sent off without seein her off myself. Now if you so scared of what may happen, you can stay behind and I'll go.

YOUNG SENIOR
How you gon do that? You can't drive to save ya life.

HATTIE
Don't worry bout me….you get Charles to take us.

YOUNG SENIOR
No. I'll ask him to look out for the house.

He resumes hacking away at the tall blades of grass. Hattie takes in the scene around them. The weight of their surroundings hits her hard.

HATTIE
I told him not to take that damn money.

He looks at her. She's angry.

YOUNG SENIOR
What?

HATTIE
He was greedy. He knew them white folks would be pissed—

YOUNG SENIOR
Stop!

A spell.

YOUNG SENIOR
We need to figure out what's next. We got but a handful of rice left, and that Green Acres deal is gone.

HATTIE
What about the onions…I know they could take some of them sweet potatoes, and the—

YOUNG SENIOR
That wasn't the deal. Daddy specifically signed a deal for rice.

HATTIE
(aside)
Dammit, George. When the insurance folks comin?

YOUNG SENIOR
In a couple of days. You should go check on Mae. We'll be leaving for the train station in a bit.

She goes to say something but stops herself. She exits to the house offstage. Young Senior goes back to his duties until the sound of thunder cracks overhead. He looks up. The lights shift, the sound of thunder, a flash, Young Senior exits.

ACT II Scene 5

Josie's kitchen. LJ peaks out the window, shotgun in hand. Mae and Elise sit at the table as Elise occasionally checks in on Josiah in his carrier. Josie stands at the counter with a notepad and pen, deep in her phone call.

JOSIE
Yes…yes Sherriff, I understand, but…Uh huh…yes, it's Gavin and Preston Bradshaw…sir, this is a credible source…my family has reason to believe that we will be targeted tonight…no…I did not. No…your men were just here over a week ago because my hogs were…if you would just let me…so should I wait for them to come out here and destroy more of my property?...*(scoffs)*…and if they step foot on my property line…no…no…I would prefer for you to send someone out here…yes!...fine, thank you.

She hangs up the phone and lets out a scream. This awakens a newly asleep baby. She immediately feels bad. Elise jumps up to console Josiah.

JOSIE
I am so sorry…I—

ELISE
It's okay. I'm gonna take him upstairs.

MAE
That's a good idea.

Elise exits. Jo sits at the table.

MAE
What he say?

JOSIE
A whole lotta nothing. He said they can't arrest nobody claiming to have done something to the barn. He can only call them in for questioning. As far as any threats about returning are hearsay and the most we can get is a squad car to come check things out.

MAE
Okay, well when will that be?

JOSIE
They're currently on a shift change so anywhere from 2-3 hours.

JAMIE
Piece of shit.

JOSIE
You sure Charles heard right?

JAMIE
He said Doc Brown overheard them talking about it in the supply store. They said they wanted to finish what their grandfather and uncles started.

MAE
Oh lord! Your farm…LJ, what about—

JAMIE
It's alright. A couple of my guys are sticking around to keep a look out. They'll call me if anything happens. But my farm ain't the threat.

Their eyes shoot to Josie.

JOSIE

You were right. I should've just kept my head down and started small. I—

MAE

No! We can't keep shrinking ourselves to make them feel powerful. We ain't never gonna get nowhere with that mentality. You did exactly what you were called to do. How's it looking out there, LJ?

JAMIE

It's all good right now. Could one of y'all go check on Elise for me.

JOSIE

You go. I'll take watch.

She reaches out for the gun. He hands it over. He exits up the stairs. Josie sits by the window continuing the lookout.

The above selections provide insight on the various threats Black farms/farmers face. Throughout the play, the researcher wanted to highlight the resilience of Black farmers. After her farm tour, her social media feed was filled with stories of white farmers venting their frustrations around the lack of government farming subsidies from the current administration. Stitched were some Black farmers sharing how they've never had nearly the number of subsidies as their white counterparts and the ways they have managed their farms over time. The Coleman family like these farmers have had to be creative in the ways the manage and maintain their farms. We see this through Josie's work taking over her father's property.

Like Jamie, Josie starts the season struggling to find a way to fund her farm for the season. Josie quickly realizes she must be creative in the ways she brings in money for the farm. She uses her background in finance to devise a plan to work with a local college, leasing out farmland for their agriculture program. This provides a great deal of funding, resources, and labor for Josie and the Sweet Clay Land Farm. Unfortunately, this makes Josie a target. As she's finding success with her deal, members of the Bradshaw family come to finish the deeds of their

forefathers by slaughtering some of Josie's livestock and ruining their food supply. This serves as a warning for Josie whose family has, once before, dealt with threats after seeing success.

4.4 Community Connection

One consistent takeaway from each farm I observed, both directly and indirectly, is the importance of educating the community. Farmer E is a youth, whose family has helped her spread the importance of farming and agriculture to other young people. Her family provides tours of their farm for individuals and schools furthering their mission of teaching children the importance of agriculture and healthy living. Farmer A works with indigo and livestock. Their farm provides various classes and workshops around dying, shearing, canning and preserving harvests as well as poultry processing. This farm is providing education that connects the community with the lost cultivator, indigo, which is a crop featured in the *Sweet Clay Lands*. Farmer B runs a farmers market providing fresh produce, meats, and teas. I am an avid follower of their Instagram where they provide helpful information around seasonal eating, current grocery store recalls, and health benefits of specific produce.

The education provided by these farmers is an important tool in reconnecting other African Americans to their agrarian roots. *Selection D* emphasizes Josie's efforts to reconnect to her agrarian roots. She proposes a plan to cultivate indigo, a crop their family once cultivated during slavery and would eventually be a crop Aunt Mae wants to reintroduce to her family during her youth.

Table 4.4 Selection D

ACT I Scene 7
Josie grabs the farm journal and turns to a marked page. She gives it back to Mae who reads her words. A beat. JOSIE

I know granddaddy and daddy didn't listen to you, but I think you had a really great idea.

AUNT MAE
That was just one little crop.

JOSIE
But indigo itself is having a renaissance. We can be at the head of that. Reclaiming lost cultivators. This could work, Mae. We'd be ahead of the curve.

AUNT MAE
I learned being ahead of the curve can often lead to trouble.

JOSIE
I'd thought you'd be excited about this. You had a great idea.

AUNT MAE
I done had a whole lotta great ideas in my day. Don't mean they all need to be carried out. You a smart woman, you'll come up with another option.

A beat.

JOSIE
There is no other option. I've already signed a deal with a paint company out of Seattle.

AUNT MAE
What?

JOSIE
I know it's a lot of fast changes, but this is gonna change everything.

ACT I Scene 7

The sound of thunder rumbles in the distance then rain sounds. It sounds as if it's falling in sheets. She opens the farm journal reading her words. A loud boom the lights change. The set falls away as YOUNG MAE can be heard.

YOUNG MAE
Come on Daddy!

She emerges pulling Daddy along with her. He's tickled by her eagerness.

DADDY
Okay. Alright, baby girl. What is it?

She gestures out to the vast lands that lay before them. She flips open the journal pointing out her plans.

YOUNG MAE
Grandma Pearl say she used to plant wildflowers back here. Say the land might be good for a indigo harvest—

DADDY
Mae, indigo might not be right for us—

YOUNG MAE
But daddy, you said the same thing about the rice idea, now look at us. We got that big Green Acres contract, and we're looking to double our harvest. Indigo could really be the next big thing for us. We could work with textile manufacturers and—

DADDY
Whoa, whoa, whoa, baby girl. One thing at a time. Let's get through this season first.

She gasps in excitement. She knows what this means.

DADDY
I didn't say yes.

YOUNG MAE
(hugging him)
But you didn't say no either. Thank you. Thank you! Thank you!

DADDY
(chuckling)
I'll think about it.

YOUNG MAE
That's all I ask.

ACT II Scene 4

Josiah begins to fuss.

AUNT MAE
Oh no. Don't go fussin at ya aunt Mae. Shh…

She puts a little more bounce into her rock and he settles.

AUNT MAE
There you go. That's it. Ain't gon be no fussin today.

She looks out onto the land. She admires landscape. She speaks. While she speaks Young Mae is seen dragging Daddy out to the land. She's explaining her ideas as she points to spots on land they are illuminated. She sees something in the distance that grabs her attention. She runs stops short and then waves Daddy to join her. He waves her on, slowly following

behind. She exits. Daddy turns to see Aunt Mae on the porch. She sees him. He blows her a kiss. She blows one in return. He exits. This sequence should be seen through Mae's next line.

AUNT MAE

Would you look at that. Your auntie Jojo, sho'll done outdid herself. When our family was still on St. Simon's their hands were stained blue from working long hard hours pulling the blue dye outta that little plant out there…hmph…when I was a little girl my grandmama…yo great great grandmama…she make me rub her hands. *(mimicking)* These is workin hands lil girl…that's what she would say…Mm hmm and we gon keep building this land. Those crazy ass Zeigler's ain't taking nothing from us.

Jamie enters from the house.

In this selection, we are provided some background on the Coleman family and their connection to indigo as Mae calms a fussy Josiah. Josie takes inspiration from Aunt Mae's childhood journal where she writes about an indigo crop. Mae's grandmother taught her the story of their family's connection to indigo which inspired her to ask George if they could plant a small patch. As Josie is working to revolutionize Sweet Clay Land, she informs Mae of a resurgence of the lost cultivator and makes plans to begin cultivating indigo to sell to a paint distributor. When their family was still sharecropping, they toiled in indigo fields. Josie is reclaiming the crop as she continues to build the legacy of her farm.

4.5 Entrepreneurial Spirit

An awesome connection between the farmers I observed is the ways they maintain their farms financially. Selling vegetables alone doesn't pay the bills. These folks are true entrepreneurs creating their own lanes while pouring into the community and building connection through agriculture. While running his family's farm with his sister, Farmer C is also a chef, who released a cookbook of Gullah-Geechee recipes. While on tour, Farmer D let us sample her homemade juices, which she sells online and at local farmers markets. Farmer E provides tiered consultations for front and backyard gardens, while Farmer A teaches a myriad of

classes and workshops, and Farmer B runs a successful farmer's market. These examples of enterprise have influenced how the fictional Coleman siblings are reimagining the functions of their farms in the play.

After pushback from the banks, Josie begins working with a local college that is struggling to provide adequate land for their agriculture students to learn. *Selection E* is an excerpt from Act I Scene 7 detailing the deal between Josie and the college. This partnership is a huge deal and provides Josie with the capital to fund her season.

Table 4.5 Selection E

ACT I Scene 7
Lights up on Senior's house. The kitchen looks how we last saw it with the kitchen table still littered with records. Aunt Mae is seen peeking through the window at the commotion outside. She's been spotted and quickly makes her way to the table where she continues hulling peas. Josie enters in her farm gear. She shouts out to the farmers outside. JOSIE Thanks, Dale. I look forward to seeing you all on Monday. Mr. Charles, you mind checking on Mike in the barn? *She closes the door turning to her aunt with a look. Mae continues her task, but she knows Josie's eyes are on her.* AUNT MAE Mighty busy out there. Those clouds sure are rollin in. JOSIE Uh huh. You was just gonna stand in the window like an overseer? *Aunt Mae whips her head in Josie's direction.* JOSIE (CONT.) *(taking off her hat)* Yeah, I said it. Overseer! *Josie goes to wash her hands.* AUNT MAE Shit, you got all them white folks out there. I wanted to know what the hell's going on. JOSIE

(pouring a glass of water)
Hopefully, a solution to our problems. Dale is the president of the agriculture program down at Coastal. Seems they lost a land dispute with the university…some kind of expansion, so the Ag students are left with two 20 by 10 greenhouses to work out of. They need farming land, we need money. The university will lease out a substantial amount of land and we get their resources. A win, win.

The ladies clink glasses. They take a drink. Josie lets out a sigh of relief that turns into a chuckle. A huge grin spreads across her face.

AUNT MAE
Your daddy would be so proud of you, Jo.

JOSIE
I just can't believe I did it…

After spending years away from her family's farm working in corporate America, Josie is using her years of corporate knowledge to transform her father's outdated farming practices while also reaching a hand back to her ancestors through her cultivation of indigo. This seems to be the trend of many Black farmers, especially those coming from farming families. There's a beautiful combination of stepping into the modern world while also maintaining space for ancestral traditions and staples crops like watermelon, soursop, indigo, etc.

4.6 Ancestral Connection

During my observation of the Georgia farmers, ancestral connections were an important part of each of their stories. Farmer E spoke lovingly of her grandmother, who taught her how to plant collard greens while she was a toddler. The love in this young farmer's voice moved the researcher who used to help her grandmother in her garden as a child. Farmer D shared the story of her father who taught her how to farm using containers back home. Farmer A makes their farm a family affair with their spouse and children each having a specialized role on the farm. As a teenager, Farmer B from New York to Georgia for his father to start a farm. Lastly, Farmer C is a sixth-generation farmer, who runs his family's farm with his sister.

Throughout the play, Jamie is haunted in his dreams by a disfigured man. We later discover this man is the ghost of his grandfather, George. When George visits Jamie for a final time in Act II, he leaves him with a message, "The truth is in the land." This truth gives Jamie and Josie some understanding of what happened to their grandfather and how their family has managed this land after all these years. While Jamie is visited by their grandfather's ghost, Josie was left a letter from their father detailing his experience and the tragedy of losing his father. George and Senior operate as ancestral guides for Jamie and Josie as they unveil the secrets of the story. All the while, Aunt Mae is a present guide for the siblings, who works to bring them together to maintain the family's legacy. *Selection F* provides insight into how Josie and Jamie's ancestors are guiding them through their journey as farm owners.

Table 4.6 Selection F 1

Act I Scene 5
Aunt Mae exits. Josie opens the laptop then closes it. She moves it aside. She takes a spoonful of her stew. It is EVERYTHING. She does a dance in her seat as she takes another bite. She spots the small manilla envelope on the table and pulls out the stack of papers and resumes reading. Lights shift. A spot on Josie and a spot on Senior. He speaks as she reads. SENIOR I never heard her scream like that. I was out in the barn changing the goats' hay. By the time I got to the house he was gone. I tried to go after him…lost 'em past Terry Creek. I figured at least if I knew where he was it would give mama some peace of mind. They had him for about a week and a half. She didn't sleep that whole time. Sheriff wasn't shit…said they questioned Bradshaw, and everything checked out. Whole time they had daddy chained up in the storm cellar. Sheriff didn't even look for him. Beat him pretty bad. It was a Thursday when they brought him back…about 3 in the morning. The glow…I ain't never seen a fire so big. Coroner said the smoke was what got 'em. I just hate he had to suffer so long. *She stops reading as Senior fades away. She folds the letter back into its envelope. She pushes her food away. She spies a flyer for Randy Zeigler and the Zeigler group in a stack of mail. She opens her laptop and begins typing. Lights fade.*
Act II Scene 2
MAN IN THE RAIN

This land has been in our family for four generations. Back when my daddy got it, he was sharecroppin for the Zeiglers. Managed to save enough money to buy his first two acres before I was born.

JAMIE
You're—

MAN IN THE RAIN
Yes. I see your father didn't tell y'all too much about how we got here.

JAMIE
You're dead.

MAN IN THE RAIN
Yes.

JAMIE
Am I—

MAN IN THE RAIN
No.

JAMIE
And this isn't a dream?

MAN IN THE RAIN
It isn't.

JAMIE
(an exhale)
So you're not real? I mean—

MAN IN THE RAIN
You've made a grave error.

JAMIE
What?

MAN IN THE RAIN
They're not your friend.

JAMIE
Who?

MAN IN THE RAIN
The truth is in the land.

JAMIE
You said that already. What does that mean?

MAN IN THE RAIN
Two acres turned into five, then eleven, then twenty-five and add another ten.

JAMIE
(a realization)
You said your daddy sharecropped for the Zeiglers?

MAN IN THE RAIN
Walter Zeigler owned about 100 acres of land. Daddy say Zeigler ain't know nothing about it. Couldn't work the land for shit. When he get his two acres, daddy knowed just what to do. Zeigler gave him his little patch run right near the marsh. Daddy know rice gonna be real good in that spot. He make a decent profit…ain't but so many folks on this side working with rice. He gotta make hisself stand out from the fifty other sharecroppas tryna get theirs. For a while we was alright. When my brothers went off to war, I had bad lungs. They wouldn't let me fight, so I stay and help daddy make the money to grow the farm. He let me and your grandmama have a little piece of the property, so he see what I do with it. In a few years time, I expand the land away from the marsh adding another 10 acres. By the time my daddy passed he had almost tripled our size. A Negro with thirty five acres of land in Brunswick…these white folks wasn't gonna accept that. But when them Green Acre folks came my way, I knew I didn't want my chirren to be afraid of wanting more…of doing better. Your daddy had just married your mama and I had just gave them the land around my daddy's farm…the very land you gambling wit right now—

JAMIE
I'm not gamblin—

MAN IN THE RAIN
You are! Your grandmama told me, she say "George, you know these white folks already looking for a reason to destroy what we built. Don't give'em anotha reason." I hate she was right.

Act II Scene 6

Elise and Jamie exit into the house. Mae watches after them. Josie looks out over the land before her and down at the trophy in her hands. Mae turns her attention to her niece. She makes her way off the porch and stares out at the land alongside Josie.

MAE
How you feeling?

George and Senior emerge watching their daughters.

JOSIE
Like I can't believe it.

MAE
You've had one helluva year, lil girl.

JOSIE
HA! That's an understatement. I couldn't have done it without you.

MAE
Nah, you would've always done it cause you're just that good. I'm proud of you.

JOSIE
I'm proud of me too. I just hope I've done him justice.

MAE
I think you've more than exceeded expectations.

JOSIE
Thanks, Mae.

Mae grabs her niece's hand and kisses it. Josie returns the gesture.

MAE
So what can I make you for dinner. Whatever you want, it's yours.

JOSIE
How about we go out for dinner tonight? Maybe go over to St. Simon's.

MAE
You tryna get fancy.

JOSIE
We deserve it.

MAE
(making her way to the stairs)
That we do. I'm gonna go pull out my good wig.

JOSIE
(laughing)
Okay, I'll be in in a minute.

Josie looks back out over the land as her aunt, her father, and grandfather watch after her. A beat. Mae exits into the house. George and Senior stand on either side of Josie. A breath.

JOSIE
Thank you.

Lights out.

Senior and George visiting their descendants from the other side illustrates how the ancestors are ever-present. As for the Coleman siblings, the ancestors are present to piece together the story of the family's history. After they get through a successful season, we are left in the final scene with spirits of George and Senior standing alongside Josie as she takes the family's legacy into the future.

5 CONCLUSION

This narrative study uses a creative component to uncover how Black farmers are using their farms as a form of contemporary resistance. Through direct and indirect observation, we can see how Black farmers are using their knowledge and understanding of agriculture to bring awareness and education to the larger community. The research questions asked:

1. *How are Black farmers leveraging the resurgence of agrarianism as a contemporary form of resistance?*
2. *How are Black farmers using their farms to reconnect with African American farming techniques, lost cultivators, and ancestral practices?*
3. *How are the farmers sharing their knowledge with the community?*

The purpose of this study was generally achieved. There were some aspects of the research that did not go as expected which may have affected the results. The researcher will provide further information about this in the implications for further research section. The results in chapter four provided a specific analysis of the work of the observed which provide answers to the research questions.

5.1 Implications for Further Research

Early in the quest to conduct formal interviews, the researcher noticed that it was difficult to get in contact with farmers, especially during planting and harvest seasons. During the proposal phase, the researcher voiced her frustration with getting farmers to speak with her, either via email or on the phone/zoom. It was proposed that the researcher conduct informal conversations to get a better insight of the work and lives of Black farmers. The farm tour that she attended was a very helpful way to meet with local farmers and have conversations,

however, because she was with other participants and they were on a set schedule, she could not ask all the questions she wanted to ask. If time permitted, she would have loved to conduct a more thorough conversation with both Farmer D and Farmer E. Also, the researcher would have loved the chance to speak with other local farmers about their work.

Due to the play still being early in its development, the researcher feels that a writer's lab would have been helpful in finishing the final act. A lab would have given her dedicated time and a dedicated team to continue fleshing out the story, world, and the characters of *Sweet Clay Lands.* The researcher is interested in the continued development of the play during her fall semester at Columbia University. Having consistent feedback and mentorship while working on the play could provide a richer understanding of the lived experiences of Black farmers today. The work done on this thesis has provided a pivotal launching point for this research and play development.

As the researcher continues development, this play will continue to amplify Black agricultural history and land justice. As many Black farmers are navigating the changes being made with this current presidential administration, this play will continue to center the resilience and creativity of Black farmers. *Sweet Clay Lands* also provides a lens into Black women's roles as cultural preservationists. Mae and Josie are reconnecting their family's story and tapping into the practices their family left behind. The women of the Coleman family also refuse to be quiet about their trauma and mental health struggles. This play prioritizes the mental health of Black women who are often not given the chance to be vulnerable and take off their armor. This play will continue to confront the ills of capitalism while calling out the predatory institutions that force Black farmers off their properties. As the researcher continues developing this work, she hopes to develop relationships with farmers and work the land next to them to gain a richer

understanding of their stories. The researcher looks forward to continuing the Coleman's story and highlighting the resilience of today's Black farmers.

APPENDIX

Appendix A

Sweet Clay Lands

Written By: Anterior Leverett

Character Breakdown

**For the purpose of this reading all characters will be double cast. Subject to change with new draft. **

1. Josie (early 30's)/Young Mae (late teens)
2. Jamie (late 30's) /Young Senior (early 20's)
3. Aunt Mae/Hattie (both women are middle aged)
4. Elise/Dr. Porter (both women are in their mid to late 30's)
5. Senior/Announcer (middle-aged men)
6. Man In The Rain/George (middle-aged men)

Language Breakdown

A moment is to be treated like a pregnant pause. The actors are to sit in this moment and take their time. Revel in silence.

When there is a character break with no lines (example below)

JOSIE

JAMIE

JOSIE

This is a spell. Though there are no lines everything is said through action. It can be as small or as large as the creative team decides is right for the story they are telling.

This language feature adult language.

Time & Place

This play takes place in the here and now…the past…and the sprit realm. The years represented are 2024 and 1974. The place represented is Brunswick, GA.

Audience

This play is for Black folks. The audience is welcome to react in the ways that may be too loud for others, too much for others, or "inappropriate" for others. The writer welcomes her audience to feel and experience in the moments of joy, pain, sadness, etc. So if you need to cackle do it. If you need to shout, do it. Your participation is welcomed.

Scene 1- 1974

The sound of rain and thunder loud in the background. A spot on Hattie and Young Mae crouched under a table. They hold each other as sound of thunder and wind grows in intensity. Hattie's expression stays stoic as she keeps her eye and shot gun aimed at the door. The sound of knocks two slow then three fast. A collective exhale.

HATTIE

That's him.

Lights up on the space as Young Mae and Hattie emerge from the kitchen table. Young Mae, clutching a small journal, runs to the door opening it. In a hurry, Young Senior enters the space, soaking wet. Quickly, he closes the door behind him. Hattie holds the gun out to him. He grabs it and peeps through the window.

HATTIE

They got him.

He says nothing. A moment. The gravity of his silence hits them. Young Mae gasps loudly. Lights shift. They exit.

Scene 2

Lights up on a quaint farm home with some modern flair. The house is surrounded by the land of the Sweet Clay Family Farm. SENIOR enters the kitchen with his cane. He opens the cabinets until he finds the thing he's been in search of…a mug. He places it in the Kureg and starts pressing buttons. He has no idea what any of the buttons do but he is determined to make something happen.

SENIOR

(to himself)

How the hell you work this damn thing?

Desperately, he's trying to work the fancy coffee machine. He's in a fit of rage when his pregnant daughter-in-law, ELISE enters with her backpack and purse on her shoulder.

ELISE

Senior? Senior! What are you doing?

SENIOR

Coffee. Where's the damn coffee?

ELISE

Did you put a cup in?

SENIOR

My mug sittin right here.

ELISE

(smile)

No, daddy. You've gotta put a K-cup in the machine.

SENIOR

A what?

ELISE

(laughing)

This.

She pulls a k-cup out of the cabinet and places it into the coffee machine. It brews. He's fascinated.

SENIOR

Well, I'll be damned. Daughter-in-law, where ya'll get this fancy ass thing from?

ELISE

Target.

She begins pulling out the essentials for coffee; cream, sugar, etc.

SENIOR

(dressing his coffee)

Sho'l 'nuff. You gon have my son all sadity?

ELISE

Come on now…you know I'm still an 8-4-3 girl at heart.

SENIOR

Just don't go changing on me.

ELISE

Never.

Senior stands at the window staring out in a trance. He's quiet. Elise finishes making her coffee and sees him. He sighs and she moves closer to him.

ELISE

How you doing?

SENIOR

Huh?

ELISE

You're sad.

SENIOR
No. Nuh uh…ain't no sadness this way.

ELISE
I know living with us wasn't in your plans—

SENIOR
It's alright. Y'all sure put me in a nice bed and that TV…that's one big ass tv, baby girl.

ELISE
That's your son's purchase.

SENIOR
As long as y'all don't mind me sticking around, I'm gonna sit and enjoy that tv.

ELISE
We love having you. I know LJ don't always show it, but I know he's happy to have you here. You know he wants to be just like you.

SENIOR
(shoots her a look)
You must be talkin bout somebody else's son.

ELISE
Why do you think he works the way he does…that's all you.

SENIOR
I can take credit for a lot of things, but that's Minnie's doing, not mine.

ELISE
I loved me some Minnie, but I think it was you who had the greatest impact.

SENIOR
You're too kind, baby girl. When Jamie was a boy, I had to fight to get him to go out in the fields and help me. I'd be looking for that boy and he'd hide in the storm cellar until I'd give up.

ELISE
(chuckling)
Uh uh.

SENIOR
Oh yeah. Mice and all types of shit be down there, and that fool would stay. Be down there sleep and shit.

ELISE

You lyin!

SENIOR

Nah, I ain't. Down there snoring…mouth all open…droolin!

ELISE

What about Josie…I swear you used to have to drag her kickin and screamin to help out in the field.

SENIOR

Yeah. I guess it was bound to happen. When she was little she used to love it.

ELISE

Say what?

SENIOR

Yeah. Would be up earlier than me…talking bout some *"daddy you lettin the day get away."*

He chuckles.

ELISE

What happened?

SENIOR

Who knows, but she's making the big bucks now, so I sho'll won't complain. But if she ever decided to come back to farming there'd always be a place right here.

ELISE

You'd think she'd do it?

SENIOR

Don't know, but it'd sho'll be nice.

She smiles at him.

ELISE

You never give yourself enough credit.

SENIOR

Probably not, but that's alright.

He knocks back the rest of his coffee.

SENIOR

I think Imma go outside for a bit.

ELISE

You sure?

SENIOR

Oh yeah. Gon work out these old joints before me and Charles start work on that old plow y'all got back there.

ELISE

Now Senior, Dr. Shaw said you needed to slow down on the heavy liftin.

SENIOR

You worry too much.

ELISE

And you don't worry enough. You come back in if you start to get tired.

SENIOR

Ah, please. Ain't nothing I can't handle.

ELISE

If you say so…don't make me have to come out there and check up on you.

SENIOR

What you mean…I don't feel a day over twenty-one.

ELISE

Alright, twenty-one.

With a smile he grabs his cane and makes his way outside. She follows behind him staying in the doorway.

ELISE

You be careful.

Elise stares out the window at her father-in-law. Jamie dressed for a day of hard work enters on the phone.

JAMIE

Uh huh…yes, but…Mr. Davenport if I could…yes, sir…well sir with all due respect my family has been working with you all for years…yes…no…I understand. Thank you.

He hangs up the phone and sits at the kitchen table. Elise sits his coffee before him. She rubs his back, and he pulls her onto his lap. They hold each other.

ELISE

That the bank?

JAMIE

Regional Financial…say they're no longer providing crop loans.

ELISE

Since when?

JAMIE

Apparently since now. Smart business folks would've at least let their long-time clients know what's going on before now.

ELISE

They're not the only bank in town.

JAMIE

They might as well be. You know a Black Farmer can't get what he need from First National.

ELISE

You can try the banks over in Jesup.

JAMIE

We been working with the Davenport's since my great-granddaddy.

ELISE

Did they say why?

JAMIE

Something about financial risk and liability.

ELISE

That don't make no sense. We've always been in good standing with our loans.

JAMIE

Don't matter now. We gotta do what we gotta do before the season starts. Besides I've got a Farmer of the Year title to defend.

Playfully, she rolls her eyes. He sees this and starts tickling her.

ELISE

(giggling)

Stop it! Jamie, you betta stop before I pee on you.

He stops and squeezes her. She hops off his lap.

ELISE (cont.)

You play too much.

He yawns loudly.

ELISE (cont.)
You tired?

JAMIE
It's nothing.

ELISE
Let me look at you.

She holds his face in her hands. Her hands move to the back of head where she begins to massage.

ELISE (CONT.)
Still having the storm dream?

JAMIE
There's this man now…like he tryna tell me something.

ELISE
You know who he is? What he say?

JAMIE
I don't know. I can't make out his face. His mouth be moving but nothing.

ELISE
Wanna talk about it?

JAMIE
It's alright. I'm sure it'll pass.

ELISE
I don't know, Jamie.

JAMIE
It's fine. I promise.

ELISE
(reluctantly)
Okay.

He take his mug to the door and stares out. She tidies up the kitchen.

JAMIE
How long has he been out there?

ELISE

Not long…your sister called and checked on him this morning.

JAMIE

Hmph…

ELISE

Don't be like that. Josie's got a lot goin on.

JAMIE

Too much to come see her own daddy?

ELISE

Everybody can't just pick up at a moment's notice. Some people need time.

JAMIE

It's been six months since the stroke.

ELISE

I'm sure it's not easy for her. *(A beat.)* She offered to help with the medical bills.

JAMIE

She sho'll know how to throw some money around.

ELISE

It'll help.

JAMIE

Whose side you on?

ELISE

Senior's.

JAMIE

(sigh)

With all the sacrifices mama and daddy made, you'd think she'd bring her ass down here more than once a year.

ELISE

You should call her.

He shoots her a look and she shoots one back.

ELISE

Y'all been at each other's throats as long as I've known you. Talk to her.

JAMIE

Some things don't get fixed in one conversation, Elise.

ELISE
Then you have several.

He walked right into that. He chuckles to himself. She embraces him.

ELISE
You can't be so hard on your sister. She tries her best. She worked hard for the life she has…can't be mad at that.

JAMIE
(a moment)
I'll think about it.

ELISE
That's all I ask. You should see if Senior wants to go to Jesup with you. I'm sure he'd like that.

JAMIE
I'll see.

He notices a flyer on the table.

JAMIE
What's this?

ELISE
What? *(she sees it)* …it was on my windshield at the grocery store.

He reads.

JAMIE
Hmph.

ELISE
What's it say?

JAMIE
This Randy Zeigler dude…been buying up farmland all along the coast.

ELISE
He a farmer?

JAMIE
Nah…Mr. Charles called him a slimy muhfucka outta Savannah. Said he's going after struggling farmers with these promises of a huge pay day and then snatching they land right from under 'em.

ELISE
Well, we ain't got to worry about him.

Elise takes the flyer and throws it in the trash. Jamie drinks the rest of his coffee.

JAMIE
I hope not. Imm get on outta here…see if Pops wanna take a ride.

Elise holds out her hand and takes the mug. Jamie grabs his jacket off the back of the kitchen chair and looks out the door for his father.

JAMIE
Where'd he go?

ELISE
He was just out there.

JAMIE
(calling out)
Hey Dad. Dad!

Elise joins Jamie at the door.

ELISE
(calling out)
Senior?

No answer. Elise and Jamie exit to find Senior. The lights change. The sound of the ensemble humming and the sound of rain.

SCENE 3

A procession led by Aunt Mae. It's slow…black umbrellas fill the space. Aunt Mae sings.

AUNT MAE
Hold on just a little while longer
Hold on just a little while longer
Hold on just a little while longer
Everything will be alright.
Hold on just a little while longer
Hold on just a little while longer
Hold on just a little while longer

ALL
Everything will be alright.

The procession hums and enters the house, leaving Jamie, Elise, and Josie on the porch. The rain stops. Elise gives them both a hug she starts to leave then looks after them. She joins the guests in the house. Josie stands staring out at the land as Jamie sits in the rocking chair. He loosens his tie, leans his head back and closes his eyes. A moment.

JOSIE
He looked good.

JAMIE
That was a sharp suit you picked out.

JOSIE
Elise did a good job on the program.

JAMIE
She found some good pictures.

JOSIE
I'm glad Mr. Charles could make it down.

JAMIE
Reverend James did a good job with the eulogy.

JOSIE
I'm surprised Aunt Mae behaved herself.

JAMIE
(opening one eye)
The day ain't done yet. We still gotta get through the repass.

JOSIE
Remember Uncle Nate's funeral?

JAMIE
(chuckling to himself)
She almost got lowered in the ground with him…all the hootin and hollerin.

JOSIE
(laughing)
And when her wig fell in the casket.

They laugh.

JAMIE
It took everything in me not to fall out on the floor.

JOSIE

I was in the back pew fighting for my life.

Their laughs fade and they're left with an awkward silence.

JOSIE
Elise'll be ready to drop that baby soon, huh?

JAMIE
We still got a few months.

JOSIE
I'm really happy for you two. I still don't know why Elise chose you though.

JAMIE
Hey! I'm a catch. Got my own land…runnin my own farm. And I mean look at me.

She bursts out laughing.

JOSIE
You just grew into your ears last year.

He goes to object as Aunt Mae enters from the house. The sounds from inside the house fill the space.

AUNT MAE
(yelling into the house)
Now yall make sure to save something to eat for Josie and LJ…Shantell, you hear that baby cryin. Go check on 'em! Aht..little boy stop all that runnin in this house. Where ya mama? Go get her…and Charles, you bet not touch no more of my liquor…Elise, sweetie? Cut me a piece of that pound cake, hear?

She closes the door then shoos Jamie out of his chair. He perches on the rail. She sighs like she just rested the weight of the world on the ground beneath her. She rocks in the chair and takes a look at her niece and nephew.

AUNT MAE
Y'all mama and daddy would sho'll be proud of y'all.

JOSIE/JAMIE
Thanks, Aunt Mae.

AUNT MAE
How y'all farin?

They look at each other.

JAMIE
We alright.

AUNT MAE
Lawd, my brother sho'll know how to draw a crowd. I ain't never seen so many folks in Mount Moriah in all my life.

JOSIE
He had a whole lotta farming buddies over the years.

JAMIE
And fishing buddies too.

AUNT MAE
Mmm mm mm. I hate he couldn't meet his grandbaby.

JAMIE
Me too.

AUNT MAE
He was goin on something terrible a few weeks ago.

Jamie gives her a small smile and she reaches for his hand. She squeezes.

AUNT MAE
I know y'all will keep him and ya mama's memory alive.

JAMIE
Yes, ma'am. Imma go check on everybody.

AUNT MAE
Alright, suga. Make sure Elise sit down somewhere…she don't need to be on her feet like that with that baby.

He nods and exits into the house. A beat.

AUNT MAE
How you doin Miss Jo?

JOSIE
I'm okay.

AUNT MAE
You real quiet, girl. When you goin back to Atlanta?

JOSIE

Tomorrow.

AUNT MAE
Can't *never* keep yo ass here.

JOSIE
What you mean?

AUNT MAE
You need to spend some time with your brother. You bout to be an auntie soon. When was the last time y'all saw each other?

JOSIE
I got business to tend to back home, auntie.

AUNT MAE
Girl, that lil job will be there when you get back. You just buried your father.

JOSIE
I know, but I—

AUNT MAE
Ain't no buts. You got business here.

JOSIE
I'm sure Jamie's got it all under control. Ain't nothin I can do here.

AUNT MAE
Girl, wutchu talkin bout. This your home.

JOSIE
I've already got a home, and a life…that's not here.

Aunt Mae reaches into the pocket of her apron and brandishes a small manilla envelope addressed to Josie and hands it over.

AUNT MAE
This your home, girl.

JOSIE
What's this?

AUNT MAE
From your daddy.

JOSIE

When did he—

AUNT MAE
Don't worry about all dat.

Reluctantly, Josie rips open the envelop and pulls out a thick stack of folded pages. She begins reading. She stops.

JOSIE
Did you know he was doin this? Does Jamie know he—

AUNT MAE
Your brother's a good farmer, but he's got his own land to manage.

JOSIE
No…no. No…no. I can't run the farm.

AUNT MAE
Why you can't? Yo city sensibilities got the best of ya?

JOSIE
Aunt Mae, I'm being serious. I have a career I worked damned hard for.

Aunt Mae shoots her a look. I know she ain't cussing at her elders like that.

JOSIE
I got a career I've worked hard for…I can't do this.

AUNT MAE
Why not?

JOSIE
What Jamie say?

A beat. A realization.

JOSIE
He don't know? Oh my god, he didn't tell him!

AUNT MAE
Stop using the Lord's name in vain, girl. You know better than that.

JOSIE
He made this huge decision and didn't tell him…didn't tell me!

AUNT MAE

He thought he had time.

JOSIE
I don't want it.

AUNT MAE
You better get it together lil girl. My daddy fought for this land…died for this land. And my brother worked hard to keep it, so you better get it together and fast. You know your daddy don't make no decisions half-assed. Now if he put you in charge there's a reason, so you better get your affairs in order and figure out how Sweet Clay continues on.

JOSIE
What I'm supposed to tell LJ?

AUNT MAE
The truth.

JOSIE
It ain't that simple.

AUNT MAE
Hell, I ain't ever say it was.

Josie sits with the weight of her family's legacy slammed on her shoulders.

AUNT MAE
You'll do what's right.

Aunt Mae gives her a squeeze and exits. The lights change. Josie steps out onto the land. All traces of the house fall away as her eyes race across the page. She takes in a sharp breath as the space around her changes. A therapist's office. Dr. Porter is seated on a bright colored chair across from an equally colorful couch and coffee table.

JOSIE
(sitting)
He knew I would hate this. I haven't dealt with the farm in…ten…fifteen years.

DR. PORTER
Matters of family business can be tricky. Maybe he thought you would do what was best for the property.

JOSIE
You don't know my dad.

DR. PORTER
Yes, but it seems he felt you were cut out for the job.

JOSIE
I know I'm cut out, but…

DR. PORTER
But?

JOSIE
My brother hates me.

DR. PORTER
What makes you say that?

JOSIE
He stormed out of the will reading.

DR. PORTER
Hate is a strong accusation.

JOSIE
This is *his* dream…owning the farm. Following in my dad's footsteps…my granddad's footsteps.

DR. PORTER
You said he owns his own property.

JOSIE
But it's not the same.

DR. PORTER
Have you talked to him?

JOSIE
I don't have to. He didn't even want to take me to the airport…my poor sister-in-law had to take me instead.

DR. PORTER
It could help to give him some space.

JOSIE
I kinda don't have a choice

DR. PORTER
You say you haven't dealt with your family's business in some time. Maybe try asking your brother for his advice. Sometimes in matters like this people just want to feel included.

JOSIE
I don't know about all that.

DR. PORTER
Can't hurt to try.

JOSIE
(beat.)
What if I mess it up?

DR. PORTER
Is that a fear of yours?

JOSIE
Senior worked so hard to rebuild that farm after my granddad was…you know…

DR. PORTER
(she understands)
Yes.

JOSIE
It's a lot of pressure.

DR. PORTER
That makes sense. Set small goals for yourself and the farm. Talk to your brother. He may be more willing to help you than you think. *(A beat.)* Last week we talked about revisiting the incident with your job.

Josie looks away from her.

JOSIE
I haven't told my family.

DR. PORTER
Why is that?

JOSIE
I don't know…never feels like the right time.

DR. PORTER
Unfortunately, there is no such thing. Something is always bound to come up. It's a symptom of life. *(A beat.)* Is there anybody you lean on in your family? Somebody you're particularly close with?

JOSIE
(smiling)
My aunt.

DR. PORTER
Is this Mavis?

JOSIE
Yeah, but we just call her Mae. She hates being called Mavis. She once told me it made her sound old and I was like yeah, girl cause you are old.

She laughs.

DR. PORTER
You seem to have a very open relationship with Mae.

JOSIE
Since our mom died, she's kinda been the closest thing we've had.

DR. PORTER
That's understandable. Since you have such a close bond with your aunt maybe start there. She might be able to help you mend that bridge with Jamie.

JOSIE
I guess.

DR. PORTER
Well…consider it.

JOSIE
I'll try.

DR. PORTER
Fair enough. I trust you'll be pretty busy packing, and since I know how you feel about moving back home, I'll ask you to try remembering what you love about home. This change might be good for you.

Josie takes in her words. She nods. Lights shift. Josie, Dr. Porter, and Dr. Porter's office fade away.

SCENE 4

A TV appears from the sky. It's turned on, static, and then an ad plays. Images of sprawling fields and smiling farmers. The voice of an announcer is heard.

ANNOUNCER
The promise of hope. The promise of a brighter future. The promise of security. With the help of Randy Zeigler and the Zeigler Group that promise is just a call away.

The ad ends with a Black farmer sitting on a porch sipping lemonade in a rocking chair.

ANNOUNCER
The Zeigler Group committed to serving the Greater Brunswick area since 1974.

Static. The screen goes Black. Lights up on the outside of the house. The sound of an old pick-up truck, brakes, the engine cuts out. The doors open and slam closed. Josie stomps into the space with Jamie on her heels. All the while Elise is folding baby clothes and watching from the window.

JOSIE
All you had to do was let me do the talkin!

JAMIE
That's all you did. You didn't let me get a word in edge wise.

JOSIE
You just couldn't put your ego aside for 30 minutes.

JAMIE
Who do you think has been doing this work for the past fifteen years?

JOSIE
Hopefully not the same person whose been keeping the books.

JAMIE
You got a problem with the way I keep records?

JOSIE
I've got a problem with you hemorrhaging money. Last season you spent fifty thousand dollars on a new tractor when you could've fixed the old one for half the price.

JAMIE
That damn thing was beyond repair. We needed the new one.

JOSIE
You could've easily gotten another seven years out of that tractor, but per usual you jumped the gun.

JAMIE
Dad and I agreed that replacing the old—

JOSIE
How were you just letting Dad make decisions? He was barely holding on last season.

JAMIE
It's his farm. He had a right to make the best decision for *his* farm.

JOSIE
It was *your* job to help him with this stuff. And the fact that you thought he was sound enough to make that kind of decision is asinine.

JAMIE
What's asinine is you coming in here throwing your weight around like you've been here. Since you wanna throw around SAT words.

JOSIE
Was that too big for you? How about jackass?

The two begin bickering loudly. Elise emerges, waddling from the house to break things up.

ELISE
Hey! Hey! What is going on out here?

JAMIE
The usual, my little sister thinking that she's knows everything when she's just as clueless as they come.

JOSIE
If you knew everything then your poor decisions wouldn't have left me with a mess to clean up.

JAMIE
You know what you are a—

ELISE
Aht! Jamie, stop.

JOSIE
Nah! Say it.

ELISE
Don't you dare. Jo, stop! You both are too grown for this.

They look at her. They take another look at each other. A flash of anger then Jamie stalks into the house, slamming the door behind him. A heated Josie is left with an exhausted Elise looking after her husband.

JOSIE
(loudly)
Ugh!!

ELISE
What the hell is going on with you two?

Josie sighs and makes her way to the porch steps. She sits putting her face in her hands. Elise watches her. A beat. Josie lifts her face staring out at the land.

JOSIE
This is the third bank and it's the same thing. I knew it was gonna be tricky now that the Davenport's stopped handling crop loans, but I didn't expect any of this. We need $500,000 to run the farm and First National is talking about 75,000. That won't even cover the cost of seed for the season. They act like the farm hasn't been a profitable farm for over fifty years. Daddy worked his ass off to keep this farm in the black.

ELISE
Jamie said that it would be hard.

JOSIE
Yeah, well don't matter now. The season starts in a month, and we need a credit line.

ELISE
What if you can't?

JOSIE
That's not an option.

ELISE
I know, but what if?

JOSIE
That is not an option.

A beat.

ELISE
I think Senior wanted to make sure it stayed in the family.

JOSIE

ELISE
He knew how much Jamie wanted to build his own farm and he has, but it's a lot of work…as you know. Senior always had his reasons.

JOSIE
Does he hate me?

ELISE
No.

Josie scoffs.

ELISE
He doesn't hate you. He's disappointed. He really wanted to have a say in Sweet Clay. You know after Senior's stroke, Jamie had to pull double duty managing our farm and Senior's. He thought that he proved himself.

JOSIE
Proved himself?

ELISE
He wanted your dad to be proud. His plan was to combine Sweet Clay Lands and the Coleman Ranch to operate as a full homestead. He and Senior talked about his plans, but I don't think he expected to be left out of the equation.

JOSIE
He's not left out. I ask for his help all the time.

Elise shoots her a look that says "girl."

ELISE
Girl!

JOSIE
(laughing)
What? I do.

ELISE
Now you and I, both, know better than that.

JOSIE
I ask him. He just has a bad habit of overstepping. He acts like I don't know how the season runs.

ELISE
It's been a while…things have changed.

JOSIE
Not that much.

ELISE
(holding her stomach)
Ooh.

Josie sees this. She watches. Elise sees.

JOSIE

He's kicking?

ELISE

Yeah.

She grabs Josie's hand and places on her belly. Josie gasps then smiles.

JOSIE

(gasp)

Oh man. Does he do that a lot?

ELISE

Yeah. Aunt Mae claims he must love her cooking cause anytime she makes dinner he starts dancing in there.

JOSIE

(laughing)

One thing about Mae, she's gonna make it about her.

ELISE

(laughing)

Always.

JOSIE

Y'all pick a name yet?

ELISE

(shaking her head)

I wanted to keep the line going…Jamie Elijah Coleman the third, but your father—

JOSIE

Oh, dad hated his name. For years we had to hear about how mom snuck LJ's name on the birth certificate.

ELISE

I've never seen someone so hell bent against their own name.

JOSIE

He said he felt more like a Luther or a Keith.

ELISE

So, he saw himself as an R&B singer?

JOSIE

Look, I don't question these things.

They laugh.

JOSIE
What does Jamie say?

ELISE
He agreed with Senior.

JOSIE
Makes sense.

ELISE
We've narrowed it down to Josiah Ellis or Jabari Elias.

JOSIE
I like Josiah.

ELISE
Me too…he feels like a Josiah.

A moment.

ELISE
How have you been?

JOSIE
Hmm?

ELISE
I'm sure this can't be easy…uprooting you from your life…job.

Josie flinches. It's a small reaction but Elise notices.

JOSIE
I'm fine…just a little stressed. I'm gonna get ready to—

ELISE
Yeah, I should go check on Jamie…see if he's cooled down.

JOSIE
That's smart.

ELISE
We're going to figure this out, okay.

JOSIE
Jamie's not gonna—

ELISE
Jamie will do what I tell him to. He's just being stubborn right now, but he'll come around. I'll make sure of that, but you have to give him grace. This is a big change for him too.

Josie sucks her teeth. Is she really pouting right now?

JOSIE
Yeah. Tell him I'll call him later.

ELISE
I will.

Josie exits. Elise takes in a breath. Her little one is moving and she's delighting in the moment. Jamie appears through the screen of the door. She can feel him.

JAMIE
She gone?

ELISE
(chuckling)
How bout you check for ya'self.

Jamie come out the house looking for any traces of his sister.

JAMIE
(sitting)
Ooh that girl get on my nerves.

ELISE
What happened today?

JAMIE
Same thing as any other day. Girl can't keep her mouth shut. We go down there to Waycross. The man tell us what he's willing to do. He says 75, she gives him a forty-five minute lecture on the farm's history with charts and shit.

ELISE
(laughing)
Isn't that what you're supposed to do?

JAMIE
You're not hearin me…she went through the entire history…from great-granddaddy til now.

ELISE
(still laughing)
Give her some credit. She *is* trying.

JAMIE
Yeah, well we're almost outta options.

ELISE
You should ask Aunt Mae or maybe Mr. Charles. They might have some insight.

He thinks about it. A beat.

JAMIE
What you cook?

Disbelief. I know he didn't just ask her that.

ELISE
I know you didn't just ask me that. Do you see the condition I'm in? I should be asking you what you're making me. You're lucky to get a bowl of cereal at this rate.

JAMIE
Damn, not even a bowl of grits?

ELISE
Mm mmm…too much work.

JAMIE
(laughing)
Tell me what you want.

ELISE
It's not about what I want, it's about what the baby wants.

JAMIE
Okay…what does the baby want?

ELISE
Shrimp alfredo, buffalo wings, a garlic pickle, and a Cesar salad.

He laughs loudly.

ELISE
Jamie, don't laugh at me. Your son is very hungry. Stop laughing!

JAMIE
(still laughing)
Okay…okay. Anything else?

ELISE
(reluctantly, almost a whisper)

A cookies and cream milkshake.

JAMIE
What was that?

ELISE
(swatting his arm)
You heard me!

They laugh. He pulls her into him. She rests her head on his shoulder, and he rubs her belly. Their eyes are closed, and they breathe, almost in unison.

JAMIE
This is nice.

ELISE
Mm hmm.

She looks at him.

ELISE
We're gonna figure it out.

He looks down at her. Kissing her on her forehead.

JAMIE
We're gonna figure it out. Now let's feed my boy.

He stands then helps her up.

ELISE
(chanting)
We about to eat some pasta. And we bout to eat some wings. And I'm gonna have a pickle. I might poke at that salad. Then we gon have some ice cream.

Jamie chuckles as they ascend the stairs and exit into the house. The house glides away as the lights shift.

SCENE 5

Sweet Clay Land farm 1974. Light up on the vast field with most of the land burned. Smoke still rise from the earth as Young Senior is seen harvesting the small section of the rice fields that's been left intact. He works angrily as he hacks at handfuls of grass. Hattie emerges in her farm clothes with a large, brimmed hat. She joins in the harvesting effort. They are quiet for some time.

YOUNG SENIOR
Mae almost ready?

HATTIE
Just about.

YOUNG SENIOR
I'll have Charles Miller stay with you.

HATTIE
I'm not staying behind.

YOUNG SENIOR
Mama—

HATTIE
I'm gonna go see my baby off.

YOUNG SENIOR
It ain't safe for us all to be leaving like that.

HATTIE
It ain't safe nowhere. Not long as them crackas over at the Bradshaw Farm runnin free. You not gon keep me here. I'm not gon let my baby be sent off without seein her off myself. Now if you so scared of what may happen, you can stay behind and I'll go.

YOUNG SENIOR
How you gon do that? You can't drive to save ya life.

HATTIE
Don't worry bout me….you get Charles to take us.

YOUNG SENIOR
No. I'll ask him to look out for the house.

He resumes hacking away at the tall blades of grass. Hattie takes in the scene around them. The weight of their surroundings hits her hard.

HATTIE
I told him not to take that damn money.

He looks at her. She's angry.

YOUNG SENIOR
What?

HATTIE
He was greedy. He knew them white folks would be pissed—

YOUNG SENIOR
Stop!

A spell.

YOUNG SENIOR
We need to figure out what's next. We got but a handful of rice left, and that Green Acres deal is gone.

HATTIE
What about the onions…I know they could take some of them sweet potatoes, and the—

YOUNG SENIOR
That wasn't the deal. Daddy specifically signed a deal for rice.

HATTIE
(aside)
Dammit, George. When the insurance folks comin?

YOUNG SENIOR
In a couple of days. You should go check on Mae. We'll be leaving for the train station in a bit.

She goes to say something but stops herself. She exits to the house offstage. Young Senior goes back to his duties until the sound of thunder cracks overhead. He looks up. The lights shift, the sound of thunder, a flash, Young Senior exits. We are thrust in the present. Josie and Jamie's childhood home, the modest home from Scene 1 reappears with some modern flair. Josie sits at the kitchen table with files and papers covering every surface of the table and chairs. All around the house are boxes partially unpacked. She types furiously on her laptop, only stopping to take a long sip of wine. She empties her glass and then refills it. A sip then a sigh. She lies her head on the table. On the stove there is a stew while cornbread cooks in the oven. The smell invades the space. Aunt Mae emerges in a house coat and slippers making a beeline for the oven mitts on the counter.

AUNT MAE
Girl! You don't smell that cornbread burnin?

JOSIE
Sorry Aunt Mae.

AUNT MAE
Ain't never been no help in the kitchen.

They laugh. Mae spoons some stew into a bowl. She places a slice of cornbread on top.

JOSIE
That's not my ministry. I'm a takeout kinda girl.

AUNT MAE
Hmph. Chile, you'll starve. How you yo mama's child and can't manage to boil water without burning the house down?

JOSIE
Must've skipped a generation.

AUNT MAE
Had to. *(Seeing the mess on the table)* Ooh chile! What you got goin on here?

JOSIE
Farm records.

Aunt Mae makes her way to the table and sets the stew in front of Josie. She picks up a document with her handwriting. She takes in a sharp breath. A smile hovers over her lips.

JOSIE
What is it?

AUNT MAE
Daddy was a terrible record keeper. How he managed to keep this farm running is still a mystery to me…when I was about ten I realized he was keeping notes on a bunch of scrap pieces of paper…drove me crazy.

JOSIE
That would drive me crazy too.

AUNT MAE
I know. One day I was like "daddy, why you don't use a notebook?" And he goes "cause you use 'em all for your stories." He wasn't wrong cause every time mama bought me a new notebook I was bound to fill it up within a couple of weeks. Then he says, "since you so worried bout my records how bout you keep track of 'em."

JOSIE
Didn't you say you were ten?
AUNT MAE
Yeah, but he trusted me. *(A beat.)* You talk to LJ?

Josie rolls her eyes. Aunt Mae sees this and pinches her in the arm.

JOSIE

Ow! What you do that for?

AUNT MAE
You ain't too old to be popped lil girl.

JOSIE
(rubbing her arm)
You stay pinching somebody.

AUNT MAE
And I'll do it again too if I catch you rolling ya eyes at me.

JOSIE
We only talk when it pertains to the farm.

AUNT MAE
That's a shame. I see Imma have to get some straightenin around here.

JOSIE
It's fine, Mae.

AUNT MAE
It ain't.
Josie lets out a long sigh…it ain't fine.

JOSIE
It is. We're grown. We'll figure it out.

AUNT MAE
You betta.

Josie goes back to typing on her laptop. Aunt Mae takes notice of all the boxes, pulling a ceramic bowl. Aunt Mae holds it up a look of confusion etched across her face. Josie sees this without her eyes leaving the computer screen. She keeps her focus on the screen until she doesn't.

JOSIE
It's a gift from a client.

AUNT MAE
Huh.

A spell.

AUNT MAE
You never told me how your job took it when you left.

Josie shrugs.

AUNT MAE
I mean you up and moved within the matter of a few weeks…seems kinda fast is all.

JOSIE
If I recall you were the main one telling me, I needed to get back home.

AUNT MAE
Yeah—

JOSIE
Yeah, well I'm back home…just like you asked.

AUNT MAE
It ain't about what I want.

JOSIE
Since when?

AUNT MAE
If you got better things to do in Atlanta, we can manage down here.

JOSIE
Where is this coming from?

AUNT MAE
I'm just looking for a little truth.

Josie is taken aback. She closes her laptop and looks at her aunt who is staring right back. A moment.

AUNT MAE
When was you gonna tell us you got fired?

JOSIE

AUNT MAE
JOSIE
How you know dat?

AUNT MAE
Heard you on the phone with ya therapist lady.

JOSIE
You was just listening to my phone call?

AUNT MAE
The walls ain't thick in here. You know that.

JOSIE
I didn't get fired…I got put on leave.

AUNT MAE
From the sound of yo conversation sounds like you got fired. You can't just go cussing folks out…just like yo daddy.

JOSIE
How much did you hear?

AUNT MAE

A spell.

JOSIE
I snapped, Mae. I've worked so hard. I've gone above and beyond time and time again and it doesn't matter. They tell you that you have to work twice as hard to get half as much, but half as much of what? Half the pay…half the opportunity…half the respect. I did everything I was supposed to do, I kept my head down, did my job, and I was amazing at it. Then one day I spoke up. We were having this big meeting about this merger, and I simply asked if we were adopting the other companies DEI model. There is so much more I could've said, but that question really ruffled some feathers. Then it was like why? Is our DEI model not enough? Do you not feel the diversity, equity, and inclusion? And that was all it took for HR to be all in my face. They had me documenting my workdays…I would fill out an excel sheet everyday notating every single thing I'd worked on. That was it. I was on their radar, and they did not let up. It was always something…after years of perfection, everything I did after that moment was always up for ridicule. I would get pages of notes on assignments, and I would change everything then when I would present again one of my white colleagues would present my original idea and get nothing but praise. And you know what's worse than that? Having to work on that project with somebody else in charge while they look for you to do it all. But then I started pushing back. Now suddenly I'm difficult, unyielding to change, a bully. After a while it was all too much.

Mae holds her hand out Josie grabs it. A squeeze.

AUNT MAE
You did what you had to do. It ain't right for them folks to treat you like that. I've got half a mind to go up there and tear that office up.

JOSIE

(chuckles)
No need. I did enough damage on my way out.

Mae shoots her a look.

JOSIE

I might've gone on a rampage with a golf club.

AUNT MAE

My girl.

They high five as Aunt Mae laughs.

AUNT MAE

You yo daddy's child sho'll nuff. And they ain't haul yo ass off to jail?

JOSIE

Don't worry. When I was keeping track of my tasks, I was also keeping track of them. I sent my lawyer the very large file of noted incidents leading back two years, a few email threads, some meeting transcripts, and a very scathing recording. She made some things happen and I managed to get out with no charges and a decent severance, barring that I go away forever.

AUNT MAE

(A realization)
Severance?

JOSIE

That's how I was able to help LJ and Elise with the bills.

AUNT MAE

Oh, baby girl. Why you ain't tell nobody you was going through all dat?

JOSIE

Cause I thought I could handle it. Cause I didn't want nobody to know that I couldn't.

AUNT MAE

We would've understood. You think we don't know how trifling these white folks can be?

JOSIE

It's different, Mae.

AUNT MAE

It ain't. White folks gon always try to find a way to make you mind 'em. Try to put you under them, but we God's chirren. We gon always prevail.

JOSIE
Yes ma'am.

AUNT MAE
I'm glad you're home.

JOSIE
Surprisingly, me too.

AUNT MAE
You better eat that stew fore it gets cold.

JOSIE
I will. I just need to finish this.

She gestures to the files around her.

AUNT MAE
(*Rising from her seat)*
Imma go get ready.

JOSIE
I know you ain't going to bed.

AUNT MAE
Charles takin me over to Red's.

JOSIE
Uh uh…you and Mr. Charles sho'll spendin a lot of time together.

AUNT MAE
You mind yo business chile.

JOSIE
Not after you was all in mine.

AUNT MAE
Since you so nosey, Charles and I have been friends for a very long time and we're going out as friends.

JOSIE
Friends? That's what they call it?

AUNT MAE
Good night, lil girl.

JOSIE

(laughing)
Good night!

Aunt Mae exits. Josie opens the laptop then closes it. She moves it aside. She takes a spoonful of her stew. It is EVERYTHING. She does a dance in her seat as she takes another bite. She spots the small manilla envelope on the table and pulls out the stack of papers and resumes reading. Lights shift. A spot on Josie and a spot on Senior. He speaks as she reads.

SENIOR

I never heard her scream like that. I was out in the barn changing the goats' hay. By the time I got to the house he was gone. I tried to go after him…lost 'em past Terry Creek. I figured at least if I knew where he was it would give mama some peace of mind. They had him for about a week and a half. She didn't sleep that whole time. Sheriff wasn't shit…said they questioned Bradshaw, and everything checked out. Whole time they had daddy chained up in the storm cellar. Sheriff didn't even look for him. Beat him pretty bad. It was a Thursday when they brought him back…about 3 in the morning. The glow…I ain't never seen a fire so big. Coroner said the smoke was what got 'em. I just hate he had to suffer so long.

She stops reading as Senior fades away. She folds the letter back into its envelope. She pushes her food away. She spies a flyer for Randy Zeigler and the Zeigler group in a stack of mail. She opens her laptop and begins typing. Lights fade.

Scene 6

The set is bare except for Jamie seated in a recliner and an end table with a half empty beer bottle. He's asleep. A haze creeps around him as rain fall around him. It's the hard rain that frequents a Georgia summer. The crack of thunder is heard and lightning flashes. He tosses in his chair. A spot rises on Hattie. She reaches out to Jamie. Her mouth is distorted. Spot out. Spot up on Young Mae. She is closer to Jamie still sleeping in the recliner. She screams but no sound is heard. Spot out. A sound of chains rattling another spot on the MAN IN THE RAIN. He mouths a message to Jamie, but we can't hear it. A crack of thunder as the spot cuts out. We finally hear Young Mae scream. Jamie startles awake. His home is in view as the he is illuminated by the flicker of the television. A news report about Black farmers in debt can be heard. Elise enters in a robe, clearly ready for bed. She approaches Jamie and rubs his shoulders.

ELISE

Coming to bed? Were you sleepin?

JAMIE

Just dozed off for a minute.

ELISE

(A realization)
It was the man wasn't it?

JAMIE
He was with a girl and a woman.

She pulls her phone from her robe pocket.

JAMIE
Whatchu doin?

ELISE
I'm looking it up. My grandma say dreams like that only come when the spirits got something to say. Somebody tryna tell you sumthin.

JAMIE
Leave it alone, Elise.

ELISE
I'm not. You walk around here half dead cause you can't get no sleep at night. This baby is on the way, and I can't have you walking round like no zombie knowing we've got to be up to take care of this child when he needs it. I'm not doing this by myself. So, we need to figure out what's going on while we can still rest.

JAMIE
Okay.

ELISE
Okay. *(A beat.)* It says dreams about storms symbolize chaos, discord, and tensions in your environment. This could be external or negative feelings you've bottled-up.

A moment.

ELISE
You should talk to somebody.

JAMIE
I don't need to talk—

ELISE
(scoffs)
You sure about that? Cause you've closed me out. You don't laugh like you used to. You're angry all the time. And I know it's been a hard season but let me help you. Let me do that. We're partners, right?

JAMIE

ELISE

Right?

JAMIE

Yeah.

ELISE

Then let me help.

JAMIE

There's nothing you can do right now with the baby—

ELISE

I talked to Dr. Pratt, and he said—

JAMIE

No—

ELISE

The community college could use some help this summer.

JAMIE

Elise—

ELISE

They'd bring me on as adjunct.

JAMIE

What about the baby?

ELISE

It's just some directed readings. All I have to do is provide a syllabus to my students and have the occasional check in…virtually.

JAMIE

I don't know…you'll be on maternity leave and—

ELISE

Coastal's only giving me six weeks, and you can't get the loan you need for the season. We have to do what we have to do.

JAMIE

I can't let you.

ELISE

That's not how this works. We need the money. And I know talking to Josie is the last thing you want to do, so I'm not going to force you, but this is my family too. This house, this land, it's mine too. We are partners. That's what we said, so I'm helping you.

A moment. He looks everywhere but at her. Trying to stop the tears that keep emerging. He fights to wipe them away. She sees him. She pulls him out of the chair, folding him into an embrace. He cries into her neck. She soothes him, rubbing his back.

ELISE
It's okay. We're okay. You're okay.

He nods. They hold each other's gaze. He offers a small smile. She kisses him.

ELISE
We'll figure it out. You should come to bed.

JAMIE
Give me a minute.

She exits. He knocks back his beer. Something catches his eye on the television. He turns up the volume.

ANNOUNCER
At the Zeigler Group, we know that time is money. Which is why we've made it easier than ever to get a farm loan. Just apply online and get approval super fast. Whether you need new equipment, more employees or capital to expand, The Zeigler Group makes getting a farm loan a breeze. With flexible term options offering you peace of mind. See how The Zeigler Group can help you today.

Jamie turns off the television. He ponders for a moment…then reaches into his pocket pulling out his phone. He can be heard typing. He sighs…he continues. Lights fade.

Scene 7-Present Day

Lights up on Senior's house. The kitchen looks how we last saw it with the kitchen table still littered with records. Aunt Mae is seen peeking through the window at the commotion outside. She's been spotted and quickly makes her way to the table where she continues hulling peas. Josie enters in her farm gear. She shouts out to the farmers outside.

JOSIE
Thanks, Dale. I look forward to seeing you all on Monday. Mr. Charles, you mind checking on Mike in the barn?

She closes the door turning to her aunt with a look. Mae continues her task, but she knows Josie's eyes are on her.

AUNT MAE
Mighty busy out there. Those clouds sure are rollin in.

JOSIE

Uh huh. You was just gonna stand in the window like an overseer?

Aunt Mae whips her head in Josie's direction.

JOSIE (CONT.)
(taking off her hat)
Yeah, I said it. Overseer!
Josie goes to wash her hands.

AUNT MAE
Shit, you got all them white folks out there. I wanted to know what the hell's going on.

JOSIE
(pouring a glass of water)
Hopefully, a solution to our problems. Dale is the president of the agriculture program down at Coastal. Seems they lost a land dispute with the university…some kind of expansion, so the Ag students are left with two 20 by 10 greenhouses to work out of. They need farming land, we need money. The university will lease out a substantial amount of land and we get their resources. A win, win.

The ladies clink glasses. They take a drink. Josie lets out a sigh of relief that turns into a chuckle. A huge grin spreads across her face.

AUNT MAE
Your daddy would be so proud of you, Jo.

JOSIE
I just can't believe I did it…

AUNT MAE
Shit if anybody could do it, it's you. I told you. Your daddy knew what he was doing.

JOSIE
Yeah, well it's been a long three months is all I'm gonna say.

AUNT MAE
You've worked hard.

Josie sits with her accomplishment.

JOSIE
This deal is gonna allow me to do some really great stuff with the farm.

AUNT MAE
What else you got planned?

She pulls a farm journal from one of the stacks.

JOSIE
Look familiar?

Josie passes the journal over to Mae. Mae studies the cover…she recognizes her 12-year-old self's handwriting. Her face changes.

AUNT MAE
Where'd you find this?

JOSIE
The hoard of records in the attic. This whole time my daddy was setting up a fire trap up there. I'm hoping to get an intern to digitize things—

AUNT MAE
(overwhelmed)
An intern? You just got this school here.

JOSIE
Well yeah, Mae. That's the point. We've gotta catch this farm up to the times.

AUNT MAE
I don't know about all that. It just seems like too much. You can't just do one thing at a time?

JOSIE
I thought you'd be excited.

AUNT MAE
You makin a lot of quick changes now…you just got started.

JOSIE
I don't know no other way. Either we get things in order now or we'll always be playing catch up.

AUNT MAE
I don't know about this, Jo.

JOSIE
I hear you but can I tell you my plan?

Josie grabs the farm journal and turns to a marked page. She gives it back to Mae who reads her words. A beat.

JOSIE
I know granddaddy and daddy didn't listen to you, but I think you had a really great idea.

AUNT MAE
That was just one little crop.

JOSIE
But indigo itself is having a renaissance. We can be at the head of that. Reclaiming lost cultivators. This could work, Mae. We'd be ahead of the curve.

AUNT MAE
I learned being ahead of the curve can often lead to trouble.

JOSIE
I'd thought you'd be excited about this. You had a great idea.

AUNT MAE
I done had a whole lotta great ideas in my day. Don't mean they all need to be carried out. You a smart woman, you'll come up with another option.

A beat.

JOSIE
There is no other option. I've already signed a deal with a paint company out of Seattle.

AUNT MAE
What?

JOSIE
I know it's a lot of fast changes, but this is gonna change everything.

A moment.

AUNT MAE
I trust you, and if you say this could work then I believe it.

JOSIE
Yeah?

AUNT MAE
Mm hmm.

Mae holds her hand out to Josie, who grabs it. Mae squeezes and Josie kisses her aunt's hand. Jamie enters stomping dirt off his boots.

JAMIE
Y'all having a lil sister's circle moment?

AUNT MAE

Hush, boy! Your sister was just talking about her plans for the farm.

JAMIE

You sho'll had a bunch of folks out here. You better not be selling off none of daddy's land.

JOSIE

Ain't nobody sellin nothin! I know what I'm doing, LJ.

JAMIE

Mmm hmm…

JOSIE

(To Mae)

I'm gonna go see how the planting's going. Try to get everything squared away before the rain comes.

AUNT MAE

(In a too sweet voice)

Okay, suga. I'll have dinner ready by the time yall done out there. Make sure you tell Mike I'll have some for his grandmama.

Josie nods, pushing past her brother. She exits. Jamie scoffs, grabbing an apple from the counter. Aunt Mae continues hulling peas.

JAMIE

How she doin?

AUNT MAE

She's figuring it out.

JAMIE

Leasin the land out, huh?

AUNT MAE

I think it's smart.

JAMIE

Yeah, well we'll see how long it lasts.

AUNT MAE

What's wrong with you boy? That's your sister. You wanna see her fail?

JAMIE

No ma'am.

AUNT MAE

Then act like it! That girl can't breathe without you having something to say.

JAMIE
It's called criticism. All y'all do is baby her. She's grown.

Aunt Mae stands with her bowl of hulled peas. Jamie pulls out a chair and sits. On the stove, a pot is boiling with smoked meat. Mae pours the peas into the pot, giving them a stir. She opens the cupboard and pulls out an array of spices. She begins seasoning her peas. She speaks while she does this.

AUNT MAE
She told me how many banks y'all went to. What she say…five? Yeah. Seems like Waycross the only place she could get a decent line of credit. Still ain't enough though. I thought she was crazy when she told me she was talking to the president of the college. I was like "girl, what they gon do"? But she had a plan. Seems like it'll help her out a lot around here.

JAMIE
You sayin I couldn't come up with that?

AUNT MAE
Not sayin that at all. I guess it just struck me that your farm is doing quite alright.

JAMIE
I been doing this a long time, Mae.

AUNT MAE
I know…I just wonder how you managed to secure the loan you needed is all.

JAMIE
What you saying?

AUNT MAE
I already said it.

A spell.

JAMIE
We talked for years about my plans. I had this whole farm to table concept…he said he loved it. Expanding the legacy. That's the goal. Why he let me go on if he wasn't even gonna leave me a piece of it?

AUNT MAE
Oh LJ…talk to your sister, baby. It's been months!

JAMIE
I don't want to. I'm mad, Mae. And if I don't produce this season…that's it. Everything's gone.

AUNT MAE

Please don't tell me you made a deal with that man. All of it?

JAMIE
I had to do what I had to do.

AUNT MAE
LJ! Why would you do that? You should have talked to us. We could've helped you figure this out.

JAMIE
I don't want your help…I don't need your help.

AUNT MAE
What did Elise say?

A moment.

AUNT MAE
She don't know. So, you just made this decision without talking to anybody?

JAMIE
I did what I had to do.

AUNT MAE
That's a lie and you know it. You had other options, and you chose to be stupid…all cause of yo foolish pride!

JAMIE

AUNT MAE

JAMIE

Jamie's phone rings breaking the silence. It takes him a moment. He answers. Aunt Mae looks away from him.

JAMIE
Hey babe. Yeah…okay…okay. I'll be right over.

He hangs up the phone.

JAMIE
Elise's water just broke. I'll call you from the hospital.

She looks at him. He pulls himself up from the table.

AUNT MAE
You be careful.

He kisses the top of her head. She grabs his hand and squeezes. He goes to the door and stops. He looks back to Mae. She smiles and nods.

AUNT MAE
Go meet your son, baby.

He nods and exits. She lets out a heavy sigh, rubbing her brows. The sound of thunder rumbles in the distance then rain sounds. It sounds as if it's falling in sheets. She opens the farm journal reading her words. A loud boom the lights change. The set falls away as YOUNG MAE can be heard.

YOUNG MAE
Come on Daddy!

She emerges pulling GEORGE along with her. He's tickled by her eagerness.

GEORGE
Okay. Alright, baby girl. What is it?

She gestures out to the vast lands that lay before them. She flips open the journal pointing out her plans.

YOUNG MAE
Grandma Pearl say she used to plant wildflowers back here. Say the land might be good for a indigo harvest—

GEORGE
Mae, indigo might not be right for us—

YOUNG MAE
But daddy, you said the same thing about the rice idea, now look at us. We got that big Green Acres contract, and we're looking to double our harvest. Indigo could really be the next big thing for us. We could work with textile manufacturers and—

GEORGE
Whoa, whoa, whoa, baby girl. One thing at a time. Let's get through this season first.

She gasps in excitement. She knows what this means.

GEORGE
I didn't say yes.

YOUNG MAE

(hugging him)

But you didn't say no either. Thank you. Thank you! Thank you!

GEORGE

(chuckling)

I'll think about it.

YOUNG MAE

That's all I ask.

Bright headlights beam towards George and Young Mae. George sees.

GEORGE

Mae, go in the house.

YOUNG MAE

Why—

She stops abruptly. She sees.

GEORGE

Get in the house and lock that door behind you.

He runs off.

YOUNG MAE/AUNT MAE

Daddy wait!

Young Mae runs home to warn Hattie. A flash of lightning, another boom. Light out as a television emerges from the sky. An ad with a still from the Bradshaw & Zeigler family.

ANNOUNCER

In 1974, Betty and Thomas Zeigler had a dream to provide resources for farmers in their community. With the help of Betty's father, Mitchell Bradshaw, the Zeigler Group was founded to give hope, to reinvest, and to provide peace of mind. For 50 years, the Zeigler Group has served the greater Brunswick area, and we hope to see many more. Thank you for trusting our family to take care of yours.

The ad ends. Black out. End of Act I.

ACT II

Scene 1- Three Months Later

Lights up on Josie's home. In the time she's been in her parents' house, she has slowly made it her own and it shows. She sits at the kitchen table with her laptop opened before her. The piles of records that once littered the space now have a home in a file cabinet in

another room. She's on a call with Dr. Porter. Josie toys with a small notebook on the table as Dr. Porter is stationed on another part of the stage with her own laptop opened before her.

DR. PORTER
How has the journaling been going?

JOSIE
(making a face)
It's been fine…I'm not sure if I'm doing it right.

DR. PORTER
What do you mean?

JOSIE
Like am I writing what you want me to.

DR. PORTER
Do you think there is only one way to do the assignment?

JOSIE
I don't know…maybe…I just feel like I should be digging deeper.

DR. PORTER
Is there more that you want to write that you're not writing?

JOSIE
I guess. Right now, everything is about the farm. Shouldn't I write about Daddy or…things with LJ?

DR. PORTER
Do you want to write about those things?

JOSIE

DR. PORTER
What makes you think what you're currently doing is wrong? You're talking about the farm. That makes sense. It's been a huge part of your life for the past few months. So, if your journal entries are plans for the season, that's alright. At least those ideas aren't buried away in your mind. You have an outlet for them.

JOSIE
I guess…

DR. PORTER
I'd like to circle back…to your father and brother.

JOSIE

DR. PORTER
Can you think of any reason why you don't write about them in your entries.

A beat.

JOSIE
It's easier.

DR. PORTER
In what way?

JOSIE
I'm being the bigger person…keeping the peace.

DR. PORTER
What do you think will happen if you confront the feelings you have about your brother?

JOSIE
Writing about my brother means dealing with the fact that he has fucked us over.

DR. PORTER
The agreement with the banker?

JOSIE
I'm working overtime trying to keep this farm running and helping him stay afloat. You know he hasn't told his wife? And I feel like an asshole because I love Elise and we're all just lying to her face because he was too stupid to ask for my help in the beginning. He was too much of an asshole to listen to me when I knew there were better options. He did all this to show me up and now I have to clean it up.

DR. PORTER
Jamie is an adult who made his own decisions. Why are you in charge of taking care of his mistake?

JOSIE

DR. PORTER
Is Jamie asking you for your help?

JOSIE

DR. PORTER
Other external pressures?

JOSIE

DR. PORTER
I understand. *(checks her time)* Our session is coming to a close, but I want you to think about the boundaries you set up moving forward. You haven't lived around your family in quite some time. Distance often plays a role in the ways in which we create or ignore our familial boundaries. Think about the boundaries you need to create for yourself as you navigate this new life you're creating.

JOSIE
Sure…thank you.

DR. PORTER
If you're up for it, I would like to hear some of what you're writing in our next session. Just to better understand where your head is at.

JOSIE
See you next week.

DR. PORTER
See you next week.

They log off. Black out on Dr. Porter. She exits. Lights up on the rest of the stage. Josie closes her laptop and leans back in her chair. She sighs, heavily, as she looks up at the ceiling. Mae enters clearly feeling a way. Josie doesn't notice her.

AUNT MAE
(pouring a cup of coffee)
I only asked that you look out for your brother…I wasn't tryna pressure you.

JOSIE
(still looking at the ceiling)
Daddy always said a hit dog gon holla.

Mae throws a dish towel at her niece.

JOSIE
(laughing)
Don't be mad at me.

AUNT MAE
Why you ain't say no?

JOSIE

How was I supposed to say "no"? *(imitating her aunt)* Oh, Jo! Your brother done gone out there and got his self into some mess with these Zeigler folks. You know he got that baby…we can't just let him lose his land. Our family worked too hard to let these white folks take what's ours.

AUNT MAE

(Sitting at the table)

I ain't say it like that.

JOSIE

Don't matter now. I just hope we make the profit we need to get him out this hole.

A knock. Elise enters looking a bit disheveled with a baby bag on her back and holding a baby carrier. She looks like she's been in the same clothes for days. The other women notice immediately. Josie moves to let Elise take her place. She makes a cup of coffee for her sister-in-law.

AUNT MAE

Well, look who done made their way out the house. Let me take a look at this handsome little face. He sleep?

Mae peaks at baby Josiah.

ELISE

Yes, ma'am…finally.

AUNT MAE

Looking just like his daddy.

ELISE

Yes, ma'am. You think all the work I'd done I'd get something…a nose, a cheekbone…something.

AUNT MAE

He got your ears.

ELISE

(laughing)

I don't see it.

JOSIE

(passing Elise coffee)

You look like you've had a night.

ELISE

Yeah, we're still trying to figure things out.

AUNT MAE
LJ getting up with you, ain't he?

ELISE
(heavy sigh)
Sometimes…we're figuring it out.

AUNT MAE
Mm hmm…tell that boy I said he betta get it together. And quick! You hungry? I can make you something.

ELISE
No…don't worry about me. I can eat when I get back home. It's okay.

AUNT MAE
(standing)
Little girl, I heard your stomach before you even walked in here. Let me fix you some grits and eggs.

JOSIE
You know better than to turn this one down.

ELISE
You right.

JOSIE
Oh my goodness. Look at this sweet boy. Mama and daddy would be losing their minds if they were here to see this. Senior used to carry a baby picture of LJ lookin just like this.

ELISE
I know the one you talkin bout. They had him lookin like a little cherub.

JOSIE
Mm hmm…with them big old cheeks and all that curly hair.

A spell.

JOSIE
You okay?

ELISE
Hmm? Yeah…just tired.

AUNT MAE
If you need to take you a little nap just let me know. You can rest a little while.

ELISE
I appreciate that, Mae. Thank you.

JOSIE
(notices time)
Oh shoot! I gotta get outta here.

AUNT MAE
Where you going?

JOSIE
Gonna help Mike with the goats and hogs. I'll be back after a while.

AUNT MAE
I'll be sure to have some lunch for y'all.

JOSIE
Appreciate ya. See y'all later.

Josie exits. There's a silence that falls in the space. Elise drinks her coffee as the baby makes sounds. She shushes him and rocks the carrier, praying he stays asleep. Mae watches her. Mae sets a pasta bowl of grits and eggs on the table in front of Elise who eats throughout.

ELISE
This is nice.

AUNT MAE
That girl don't own nothing but bowls. I came down here one day and all the plates were missing. There's a bowl for everything and here I am longing for a plate.

ELISE
(laughing)
You know Jo.

AUNT MAE
Bougie as hell when she wanna be.

ELISE
Exactly.

AUNT MAE
What you got going on today?

ELISE
Just needed to get out the house.

AUNT MAE
How everything going over there?

ELISE

AUNT MAE
When I was over there the other day seemed like yall on the outs.

ELISE
It's just rough right now…we, uh…we'll be fine.

AUNT MAE
I know yall will. *(A beat.)* How your medicine treating you?

ELISE
Some days are better than others.

AUNT MAE
You had us worried.

ELISE
I know. I'd always wanted to be a mama and when he wouldn't latch…he was screaming and I just…I feel like a failure sometimes. My baby needed me and the only thing I could do was run away. What kinda mother leaves her new baby like that—

AUNT MAE
Now don't you do that. You are a good mama and when you needed help, you got it. And you act like you up and skipped town. You went to the beach…looking crazy as hell, but it was just a few a miles away…nothing to beat yourself up about.

ELISE
I *was* looking crazy, wasn't I?

AUNT MAE
Mm hmm…worse than what you look right now. What's going on with you, Elise?

ELISE
Nothi—

AUNT MAE
And don't say "nothing."

ELISE

(sigh)
Something's up with LJ.

AUNT MAE

ELISE
I keep tellin him if he ain't gonna talk to me then he needs to talk to somebody. For months he been having these dreams and they ain't getting no better, so he don't sleep. And when he do…there's no peace for the rest of us. For two weeks I've had to wake up with my screaming baby and my screaming husband, and I can't do it no more, Mae.

AUNT MAE
Why you ain't say nothing before now? Lord, I could've come over there and gave you a chance to rest.

ELISE
It's fine.

AUNT MAE
No, it ain't. Where LJ now?

ELISE
Home. He's got a bad cold, so hopefully he's resting. Doctor gave him something that's supposed to help with sleep…Lord knows I hope it works.

Baby starts stirring and Elise goes to move, but Mae stops her. Mae reaches into the carrier and grabs Josiah. She begins bouncing and rocking with him.

ELISE
He'll be ready to eat in a little bit.

AUNT MAE
Hand me the bottle. I can make it.

ELISE
Thank you, Mae.

AUNT MAE
You eat…I got him.
A spell.

ELISE
I think he's keeping something from me.

AUNT MAE
(looking away from Elise)
Like what?

ELISE
I don't know, but I know Jamie…and I know when he's lyin.

AUNT MAE
What do you think it could be?

ELISE
I don't know…but it's something.

AUNT MAE
You want me to talk to him?

ELISE
No ma'am. My mama always told me if it's something going on with ya man, it's up to you to get to the bottom of it. Ain't no place for family and friends to do it for you.

AUNT MAE
(clearing Elise's dishes)
She ain't wrong. How bout you go on upstairs to LJ's old room and take yourself a little nap.

ELISE
I appreciate that Mae, but I'm alright.

AUNT MAE
Well then go on in that living room and turn on that TV so me and you can catch up *General Hospital.*

ELISE
(laughing)
Yes ma'am.

Elise exits into the other room as Mae looks after her. Josiah begins fussing. Mae bounces him trying to console them both as the worry creeps across her face.

AUNT MAE
(To the baby)
I sho'll hope your daddy gets his stuff together. Lord knows I'm too old for all these secrets.
The sound of sirens can be heard in the distance, getting close. The faint blue and red lights illuminate from outside the house. Mae peers out window as Elise enters the kitchen.

ELISE
Mae, is that the police? What's going on?

AUNT MAE

Oh lord! Josie!

They rush out the door. Lights fade.

Scene 2

The glow of a television which plays an advertisement. LJ tosses and turns in his sleep as a haze creeps around him. The sound of rain can be heard.

ANNOUNCER (VO)

No one knows better than you about farming. When you farm and raise your cattle you realize all the patience and long days are worth it in the end. Put your trust in a family that knows firsthand the work required to operate and maintain today's farms. The Zeigler Group offers financing for all your operation, machinery, livestock, and agricultural needs. The Zeigler Group, Brunswick's trusted family friend since 1974.

Television static. The sound of the rain grows harder in intensity when there's a flash of lightning and thunder, Jamie is startled awake and the MAN IN THE RAIN is lit with a spot behind Jamie.

MAN IN THE RAIN

The truth is in the land.

Jamie is startled at the sight of the man, wet and bloody in tattered clothes. He cowers to the other side of the room grabbing a baseball bat as the man's eyes are trained on him. This is not a dream.

JAMIE

You…you're the…the man…

MAN says nothing

JAMIE

This isn't real. You're not real!

MAN IN THE RAIN

I'm very real.

JAMIE

Who are you? What do you want?

MAN IN THE RAIN

This land has been in our family for four generations. Back when my daddy got it, he was sharecroppin for the Zeiglers. Managed to save enough money to buy his first two acres before I was born.

JAMIE

You're—

MAN IN THE RAIN
Yes. I see your father didn't tell y'all too much about how we got here.

JAMIE
You're dead.

MAN IN THE RAIN
Yes.

JAMIE
Am I—

MAN IN THE RAIN
No.

JAMIE
And this isn't a dream?

MAN IN THE RAIN
It isn't.

JAMIE
(an exhale)
So you're not real? I mean—

MAN IN THE RAIN
You've made a grave error.

JAMIE
What?

MAN IN THE RAIN
They're not your friend.

JAMIE
Who?

MAN IN THE RAIN
The truth is in the land.

JAMIE
You said that already. What does that mean?

MAN IN THE RAIN

Two acres turned into five, then eleven, then twenty-five and add another ten.

JAMIE

(a realization)

You said your daddy sharecropped for the Zeiglers?

MAN IN THE RAIN

Walter Zeigler owned about 100 acres of land. Daddy say Zeigler ain't know nothing about it. Couldn't work the land for shit. When he get his two acres, daddy knowed just what to do. Zeigler gave him his little patch run right near the marsh. Daddy know rice gonna be real good in that spot. He make a decent profit…ain't but so many folks on this side working with rice. He gotta make hisself stand out from the fifty other sharecroppas tryna get theirs. For a while we was alright. When my brothers went off to war, I had bad lungs. They wouldn't let me fight, so I stay and help daddy make the money to grow the farm. He let me and your grandmama have a little piece of the property, so he see what I do with it. In a few years time, I expand the land away from the marsh adding another 10 acres. By the time my daddy passed he had almost tripled our size. A Negro with thirty five acres of land in Brunswick…these white folks wasn't gonna accept that. But when them Green Acre folks came my way, I knew I didn't want my chirren to be afraid of wanting more…of doing better. Your daddy had just married your mama and I had just gave them the land around my daddy's farm…the very land you gambling wit right now—

JAMIE

I'm not gamblin—

MAN IN THE RAIN

You are! Your grandmama told me, she say "George, you know these white folks already looking for a reason to destroy what we built. Don't give'em anotha reason." I hate she was right.

JAMIE

Daddy always said it was the Bradshaws—

MAN IN THE RAIN

Boy, don't you know they the same. The Bradshaws and the Zeiglers are people through marriage. Zeigler was the biggest producer in the county until…

JAMIE

You.

MAN IN THE RAIN

Rice let this family expand. *(beat.)* After everything that happened, yo daddy made sure to keep his head down. Maintain what we had and not get too ahead of himself. And they just been waiting…waiting to take back what they thank is theirs.

JAMIE

(hit with the gravity of his decision)

Shit.

MAN IN THE RAIN
Any threat to their empire gets handled.

JAMIE
(another realization)
Josie.

The sound of a National Weather Service alert. The spot on Man in the Rain cuts out. He exits. The distorted voice sounds naming Glynn County along with several surrounding counties. Jamie grabs his sneakers and exits in a haste. Lights down.

Scene 3

Lights up on Josie's kitchen. The sound of rain in the distance. She's seated in the center, holding a glass of bourbon to her temple. Mae and Elise, also seated at the kitchen table, study her. Josiah begins to stir, breaking the silence. Their attention shifts to him.

ELISE
I should get him home. You gonna be okay, Jo?

JOSIE
(a slight nod)
Yeah.

Elise begins to gather her and Josiah's things. Aunt Mae helps.

ELISE
I'll call and check on y'all later.

AUNT MAE
We appreciate you for sticking around.

ELISE
Of course. Let me know if y'all need anything.

AUNT MAE
We will.

Elise and Mae embrace. Suddenly, Jamie bursts through the door.

ELISE
Jamie? What's wrong? Why aren't you resting?

JAMIE

They're coming after us.

AUNT MAE
Who? Did Charles tell you what happened?

JAMIE
What…what happened?

Josie knocks back the rest of her bourbon and stands to exit out the house.

AUNT MAE
Where you going?

JOSIE
To clean the pigs blood off the barn walls.

AUNT MAE
Take a minute. You're still worked up.

JAMIE
You need to listen to Mae. You don't hear that storm out there?

JOSIE
(ignoring Jamie.)
I don't have a minute, Mae. I gotta get the barn cleaned, replace all the hay that's been doused in ammonia, dispose of the two pigs that were slaughtered, so someone could call me a Black Bitch. That's my focus right now, Mae.

JAMIE
That can wait.

AUNT MAE
At least let Charles and Mike help you.

JOSIE
Poor Mike…that baby is traumatized. I sent him and Charles home when the police left.

AUNT MAE
Is this gonna jeopardize things with the school?

JOSIE
I don't know…luckily this doesn't impact the work they're doing, but I'm sure they'll be concerned about the safety of their students if we have people threatening us.

JAMIE
It ain't just people. It's the Bradshaws

The women all turn their attention to Jamie.

ELISE
Baby what are you talking about? You still runnin a fever?

She goes to feel his forehead and he swats her hand.

JAMIE
I'm fine.

JOSIE
What the hell are you talking about Jamie? Ain't no'mo Bradshaws in Glynn county.

He goes to answer but is interrupted.

AUNT MAE
Yeah, it is. *(To Jamie)* That man you made that deal with.

ELISE
Man? What man?

JAMIE
(To Mae)
Yeah.

AUNT MAE
(To Josie)
Ain't no farming Bradshaws cause they all Zieglers now, but it's still some left.

ELISE
You made a deal with that man?

JAMIE

AUNT MAE
Jo, how about we take the baby in the other room.

Mae goes to grab the baby's carrier when…

ELISE
Yall knew about this?

JOSIE
Yall should talk.

Mae and Josie exit with the baby to the living room.

A moment.

ELISE
That's what you been hiding. Had me out here losing my mind cause you done went off and played with our future—

JAMIE
It ain't like that—

ELISE
It is like that! When was you gonna tell me? Huh? When the muthafucka came to collect?

JAMIE
You were pregnant and—

ELISE
How long?

JAMIE

ELISE
How long, Jamie?

JAMIE
(A beat.)
Six months ago.

She says nothing. Only taking in the words he's just said. A beat. She scoffs.

ELISE
And here it is, this whole time I thought you finally got something worked out with Regional. At least that's what you said.

JAMIE
I tried, but—

ELISE
You lied! So that's what you been hiding. I've been driving myself crazy trying to figure out what's wrong with you…That's why you can't sleep, ain't it?

JAMIE

ELISE
Yeah…that's what's been plaguing you.

She stares daggers into him. He reaches for her, but she moves away from him. The rain fades.

ELISE

(Calling out)

Mae? Can I have my baby now?

Mae emerges with Josiah.

AUNT MAE

Elise, suga, I think you should wait out the storm a bit.

ELISE

Rain's slowed up. I'll be alright.

AUNT MAE

But I don't think—

ELISE

Mae. I'm going home now. *(To Jamie)* As for you, you can find somewhere else to be.

JAMIE

Elise, at least let me—

She holds up her hand to stop him.

ELISE

I'm done listening to you. *(To Mae)* Good night. I'll call you when we make it to the house.

Elise hugs Mae. Exits with Josiah. They stare after her. Jamie lets out a heavy sigh. Mae rubs his back.

AUNT MAE

It's gonna be alright suga. She needs some space…she'll come around when she's ready to talk. Imma go make up your old bedroom.

Mae goes to exit as Jamie sits at the table. After a moment Mae exits off leaving Jamie in a spot light left to feel the consequences of his actions.

JAMIE

Fuck!

Lights fade.

Scene 4

Lights up on the outside of Josie's house. Mae sits on the porch rocking Josiah. She hums a tune, a lullaby, maybe we recognize it, maybe we don't. She looks out onto the land. The land before her is covered in indigo. She looks down at Josiah, a smile spreading across her face.

AUNT MAE

I sho'll wish my brother was here. I just know your granddaddy would've had you ruint. When yo mama and daddy told him, that fool called and couldn't wait to brag about it. You wasn't no bigger than a peanut and he had ya whole life planned out. Talkin bout some, alright Mae, you know he gon be my fishing buddy. And I say how you know it's a boy, what if it's a girl? And he say, well then she gon be my fishing buddy. Ya mama and daddy were so worried. They had some losses along the way, but I think we all knew this time was gon be different. I just hate you come here in all this chaos.

Josiah begins to fuss.

AUNT MAE

Oh no. Don't go fussin at ya aunt Mae. Shh…

She puts a little more bounce into her rock and he settles.

AUNT MAE

There you go. That's it. Ain't gon be no fussin today.

She looks out onto the land. She admires landscape. She speaks. While she speaks Young Mae is seen dragging Daddy out to the land. She's explaining her ideas as she points to spots on land they are illuminated. She sees something in the distance that grabs her attention. She runs stops short and then waves Daddy to join her. He waves her on, slowly following behind. She exits. Daddy turns to see Aunt Mae on the porch. She sees him. He blows her a kiss. She blows one in return. He exits. This sequence should be seen through Mae's next line.

AUNT MAE

Would you look at that. Your auntie Jojo, sho'll done outdid herself. When our family was still on St. Simon's their hands were stained blue from working long hard hours pulling the blue dye outta that little plant out there…hmph…when I was a little girl my grandmama…yo great great grandmama…she make me rub her hands. *(mimicking)* These is workin hands lil girl…that's what she would say…Mm hmm and we gon keep building this land. Those crazy ass Zeiglers ain't taking nothing from us.

Jamie enters from the house.

JAMIE

Hey Mae.

AUNT MAE

I wasn't expecting you back this early. Hard day at work?

JAMIE
It's alright. Watermelon's coming in really nice.

AUNT MAE
You let me know when they're ready. Imma come over there and grab me a couple. *(A beat.)* You done for the day?

JAMIE
Not quite. Got the guys tending to the harvest. I wanted to come by and check on my little man.

AUNT MAE
Well he doin just fine. Almost called himself trying to fuss at Aunt Mae, but we calmed that down. Here.

He sits in the chair next to her. She passes him the baby. He smiles down at his son. She notices.

AUNT MAE
How Elise doin today? Yall talk?

He doesn't look at her, but he can feel her eyes on him.

JAMIE
She told me not to call her while she's at work…or after work…or when she's getting ready in the morning…said she'd call me when she's ready to talk.

AUNT MAE
That girl know she stubborn.

JAMIE
(aside)
Who you tellin.

She catches that and pinches him.

JAMIE
Ow! What you do that for?

AUNT MAE
It's yo fault. You don't get to call her stubborn.

JAMIE
Mae, if she would just listen—

AUNT MAE

No—

JAMIE

Mae—

AUNT MAE

Jamie. You know you shoulda talked to her first. I don't know how you thought you was gonna get outta this without her finding out. And then on top of that having me and ya sista keep ya little secret. Boy have you lost your damn mind?

JAMIE

No ma'am.

AUNT MAE

You sure?

JAMIE

I'm sure, Aunt Mae.

AUNT MAE

Mm hmm…you better fix it boy. That girl loves your hardheaded ass. Don't you do no shit like this again.

JAMIE

I won't.

AUNT MAE

And when you gon talk to Jo?

A spell.

JAMIE

I mean you've seen how she's treated me since I've been staying here. She don't want to talk to me either.

AUNT MAE

Hell, boy! I know that. What you gon do about it?

He shrugs. She shoots a look at him.

JAMIE

I guess I'll talk to her.

AUNT MAE

And there's no time like the present.

Josie emerges from the field in her farm clothes and a large straw hat on her head.

JOSIE
Hey, Mae? We got anymore of that peach tea left.

AUNT MAE
(getting out of her seat and grabbing the baby)
Uh huh. I'll go get you some. Your brother got something he wanna tell you.

JAMIE
What—

AUNT MAE
Uh huh.

Mae exits, Jamie looks after her, Josie looks at Jamie.

JOSIE
If you need more help with the ranch, talk to Charles.

She starts for the stairs, but he stands and blocks her.

JAMIE
No, it's…

A moment. He doesn't know what to say…he doesn't know how to apologize…has he ever apologized?

JOSIE
I've got work to do so can we—

JAMIE
Right! I know…me too. What I wanna say is…this is great. What you doing with the land…I commend you. You know? It's a lot of work.

JOSIE
I know.

JAMIE
Right…and the deal with the school…it was smart…genius.

JOSIE
(reluctantly)
Thank you?

JAMIE
Yeah, I don't think I could've ever come up with that idea. Daddy would be proud—

JOSIE
Stop—

JAMIE
But Josie, I—

JOSIE
No.

JAMIE
Come on. Let me just talk to you.

She walks around him and to the door.

JAMIE
Jo—

JOSIE
I don't want to hear it. When I wanted to talk, you couldn't make time to have not even one conversation with me. You literally left me hanging and mocked my decisions for the farm.

JAMIE
I know—

JOSIE
And to add insult to injury you had me out here covering for your fuck up.

JAMIE
And that's why I'm trying to apologize. And I understand if you don't want to hear. I don't blame you at all…if shit was reversed, I might do the same, but please. You gotta believe me.

A moment. She doesn't leave, but she's not completely sold yet.

JOSIE
Why would you do that? Why would you work so hard to prove me wrong?

JAMIE
I let my pride get me caught up, and I was an ass.

JOSIE
I wanted to do this together and you literally ran to the enemy for help. How is that supposed to make me feel? My own brother, the one person I should be able to count on.

JAMIE
I was hurt…I am hurt that Senior left you the farm. Before he died, we talked so much about what the farm could do…what it would look like.

JOSIE
I was just as confused as you. I didn't know why he left me the farm, but I at least thought I could have your support when it came time to start the season.

JAMIE
You didn't need me. Look at this place.

JOSIE
I don't know…I just figured it would've been better if we could've done it together…like Daddy wanted. He left it to me so I'd have my name on something, so I could build me a legacy of my own…and we'd support each other…build together. He knew you had enough stress with your own land, and a baby on the way…I think he didn't want you to get too overwhelmed.

JAMIE
(feigning insulted)
What you talking about? I'm the epitome of cool.

Josie pulls her cellphone out of her pocket and opens a document. Elise emerges in the doorframe. She sees their exchange. Josie hands her phone over to Jamie. Jamie looks to her, a question in his eyes.

JOSIE
Before he died he left Mae a letter to give me. I scanned it into my phone…you know I hate all that paper. It was a history on how we got here. He talked about—

JAMIE
That night?

JOSIE
How did you know?

JAMIE
My dreams…I kept seeing him…wrapped in chains…bloody…mouth all twisted. He was trying to warn me.

JOSIE
The man in the rain.
He looks at her in surprise.

JOSIE
He's been coming to me too.

JAMIE

(relief)
He's our grandfather.

JOSIE
Oh my god…is that…is that what they did to him?

JAMIE

(nods)
Yeah. He says the truth is in the land.

JOSIE

JAMIE
We weren't supposed to have this…if the Bradshaws and Zeiglers had it their way, we wouldn't have none of this. I know I messed up signing that deal, but I'm not letting them take everything this family has worked for.

JOSIE
We not letting them take everything this family's worked for.

JAMIE
We.

They end up sitting next to each other on the porch steps. She bumps into him.

JOSIE
You know…now that we're talking again, I do have to tell you, that is one cute baby you got in there.

JAMIE
Just like his daddy.

They laugh.

JOSIE
You just had to do it, didn't you.

JAMIE
Don't be mad at the genetics.

JOSIE
We got the same genes fool!

Their laughter continues.

JAMIE
I just hope his mother can forgive me.

JOSIE
I've known Elise for a long time and if I know anything she loves you. She's hurt.

JAMIE
I know, but if she would just let me—

JOSIE
It's not about you right now. You've had months to tell her, now when it works for you, it's an urgent matter…it don't work that way, LJ.

JAMIE
Yeah…

JOSIE
For what it's worth, I do hope she comes around soon. I'm ready for you to get outta my house.

JAMIE
Damn, it's like that?

JOSIE
Hell yeah. You're a terrible houseguest. If I find one more rogue spoon in my sink instead of the dish washer where it belongs, I'm shoving it down your throat.

JAMIE
Look, I can be up outcha house. Just say the word.

JOSIE
Is that a threat? You ain't gotta threaten me!

They laugh and playfully shove each other. A spell.

JAMIE
I'm sorry. Love you, kid.

JOSIE
Me too.

Elise opens the door and steps out. They turn to see her.

JOSIE
Hey girl.

ELISE

Hey Josie, would you mind if me and LJ—

JOSIE

(springing up)

Nope, I don't mind at all.

Jamie stands. He tries to reach out to her, but she avoids his touch, taking Josie's spot on the stairs. Slowly, he sits next to her. His eyes are trained on her, while she looks out onto the land. A moment.

JAMIE

How long were you…

ELISE

Long enough. Why didn't you tell me what was going on?

JAMIE

I was scared.

She looks at him.

JAMIE

It was too much change at once. Between Daddy, the bank, the baby, Jo…When it looked like we weren't gonna get the money we needed, this seemed like the only way. I didn't want to worry you.

ELISE

(scoffs)

You know me better than that. All I do is worry. For months, I've been killing myself trying to figure out what's wrong with you. You weren't sleeping…barely eating…waking up screaming…fighting your demons and closing me out in the process. How could I not be worried? We always said we would tell each other the truth—

JAMIE

I know—

ELISE

You hid things from me, and you stopped talking to me. What makes it worse is that after I had Josiah…when I needed you most. You vanished…you were here physically, but your mind. And I feel like such a bad mother because despite knowing you weren't here I left my baby to sit and cry on the beach.

He's no longer looking at her, but she looks at him. His eyes trained on his feet. After a moment, he looks at her.

JAMIE

You're not a bad mom.

ELISE
It sure does feel like it.

JAMIE
I'm so sorry I made you feel that way. You're right about me. You were right about all of it. I should've talked to Josie sooner. I should've told you what was going on. And I should've been there when you were crying out for help. I hate that I can't take that moment back. I would give anything to take that moment back.

ELISE
(nods)
I'm still mad at you.

JAMIE
(a small smile)
I know…you should be. *(A moment)* I talked to the man…in my dreams. 'Cept when I talked to him, he wasn't a dream.

ELISE
He came to you?

JAMIE
He was gon make me listen one way or another.

ELISE
I'm glad someone did.

JAMIE
Me too.

ELISE
What are we gonna do?

He grabs her hand. She lets him take it. Their fingers lace. He pulls her hand to him which makes her scoot closer. They look at each other.

JAMIE
We've weathered hard times before. This ain't no different. We're not losing our home. Okay?

ELISE
Okay. Thank you for telling me.

They lean into each other. He kisses her forehead. They sit in silence for the briefest moment. A notification sounds out. A text.

JAMIE
(reaching for phone)
It's probably the guys.

He reads…it's not the guys. He shifts…panic is etched on his face. She notices.

ELISE
What is it? What's wrong?

He gets up, pulling him with her.

JAMIE
Get in the house.

ELISE
What?

JAMIE
(sternly)
Get in the house.

Elise goes into the house. Jamie surveys the land; he ducks into the house closing the door behind him.

Scene 5

Josie's kitchen. LJ peaks out the window, shotgun in hand. Mae and Elise sit at the table as Elise occasionally checks in on Josiah in his carrier. Josie stands at the counter with a notepad and pen, deep in her phone call.

JOSIE
Yes…yes Sherriff, I understand, but…Uh huh…yes, it's Gavin and Preston Bradshaw…sir, this is a credible source…my family has reason to believe that we will be targeted tonight…no…I did not. No…your men were just here over a week ago because my hogs were…if you would just let me…so should I wait for them to come out here and destroy more of my property?...*(scoffs)*…and if they step foot on my property line…no…no…I would prefer for you to send someone out here…yes!...fine, thank you.

She hangs up the phone and lets out a scream. This awakens a newly asleep baby. She immediately feels bad. Elise jumps up to console Josiah.

JOSIE
I am so sorry…I—

ELISE
It's okay. I'm gonna take him upstairs.

MAE
That's a good idea.

Elise exits. Jo sits at the table.

MAE
What he say?

JOSIE
A whole lotta nothing. He said they can't arrest nobody claiming to have done something to the barn. He can only call them in for questioning. As far as any threats about returning are hearsay and the most we can get is a squad car to come check things out.

MAE
Okay, well when will that be?

JOSIE
They're currently on a shift change so anywhere from 2-3 hours.

JAMIE
Piece of shit.

JOSIE
You sure Charles heard right?

JAMIE
He said Doc Brown overheard them talking about it in the supply store. They said they wanted to finish what their grandfather and uncles started.

MAE
Oh lord! Your farm…LJ, what about—

JAMIE
It's alright. A couple of my guys are sticking around to keep a look out. They'll call me if anything happens. But my farm ain't the threat.

Their eyes shoot to Josie.

JOSIE
You were right. I should've just kept my head down and started small. I—

MAE

No! We can't keep shrinking ourselves to make them feel powerful. We ain't never gonna get nowhere with that mentality. You did exactly what you were called to do. How's it looking out there, LJ?

JAMIE
It's all good right now. Could one of y'all go check on Elise for me.

JOSIE
You go. I'll take watch.

She reaches out for the gun. He hands it over. He exits up the stairs. Josie sits by the window continuing the lookout.

MAE
I bet you gon have a whole lot to tell ya therapist.

JOSIE
(chuckles)
I'm surprised she's not having me meet her more regularly.

MAE
How often yall talking now?

JOSIE
Once a week.

MAE
I'm sure the stress of running things doesn't help.

JOSIE
When I first started, it used to be more than that especially when I was still at my old job.

MAE
I wish we could've been closer to you. That way you would've had some family nearby…somebody to talk to.

JOSIE
I had somebody to talk to…Dr. Porter.

MAE
You know what I mean.

JOSIE
I appreciate the sentiment, but there's no guarantee that even if family was nearby that I'd talk to them about what was going on. Ya'll have dealt with far more racism than I have…it feels small in comparison. On top of all that, everyone was so proud. I didn't want to be seen as a failure.

MAE
You've got every right to be angry when these white folks show their asses.

JOSIE
It isn't even always anger…frustration is the biggest one. I've worked hard all my life, and we know we've gotta work twice as hard, but then you factor in the fact that I'm a Black woman doing this…the same Black woman who hasn't farmed in almost two decades…it was only a matter of time 'fore the good old boys got threatened.

MAE
And I don't know what for…them Bradshaws ain't seen success 08, but you know we can't have shit.

JOSIE
You right about that.

A spell.

MAE
I think I might talk to somebody.

JOSIE
Like a therapist?

MAE
Yeah, like a therapist.

JOSIE
Huh.

MAE
Huh? What's that supposed to mean?

JOSIE
Nothing! I'm just surprised you wanna go to therapy.

MAE
I think it's time. I've got sixty years of stuff to talk about and sixty years of stuff to work out.

JOSIE
I can help you…find somebody. If you'd like.

MAE
That'd be nice.

They smile. Abruptly the unmistakable sound of a truck engine revving. Josie looks out the window. She sees them. She runs out the house holding the shotgun.

MAE

Josie! Jo!

The sound of a Molotov cocktail and flames. Jamie runs in from the upstairs. Mae frantically tries to stop him from running out the door. She fails. He exits. The glow of the flames can be seen. She runs for the phone and dials.

OPERATOR (V.O)

9-1-1. What's your emergency?

A shot rings out. Lights out. All we're left with is the flame. The sound and lights of the fire fades.

Scene 6-Three Months later

Mae seated on Josie's porch. She looks out…studying something, but we don't know yet what it is. Elise enters from the house holding two glasses of sweet tea. She sips from one and hands the other to Mae. She looks out to study what Mae's been watching.

ELISE

They still out there arguing?

MAE

Chile…ain't stopped since they started.

ELISE

(sitting)

How long you think it'll be before they drag us into it?

MAE

Not long.

Elise laughs.

MAE

How my suga doin in there?

ELISE

Finally down. I think he's got some teeth coming in…he's been so fussy.

MAE

That's alright. I got some whiskey you can rub on his gums.

ELISE

I think we're all good, Mae.

MAE
Don't knock the old remedies. It'll knock that pain out and put him right to sleep.

ELISE
Yeah cause he'll be drunk. I'll stick to what we're doing.

MAE
If you say so.

ELISE
How's that doctor treating you?

MAE
All she do is sit there taking notes. I thought she was supposed to be giving me advice.

ELISE
That's a part of it, but she's probably just trying to get a sense of who you are.

MAE
Mm hmm…she could at least say something. I'd like to know a little bit about the people I'm telling my business to.

ELISE
Speaking of business, I saw Mr. Charles sneaking up outta here in early hours. What yall got going on?

MAE
None of your business, nosey. You bout as bad as Josie.

ELISE
Oop let me find out you and Charles shackin up.

MAE
Hush girl! Shackin up would mean he sleeps here.

ELISE
So yall don't sleep.

MAE
You think if Charles got the chance to spend the night with me, he'd wanna spend it asleep.

She smirks and Elise catches it, and she is shocked. This can't be the Mae she's always known.

ELISE
I know that's right!

MAE
You betta ask somebody.

ELISE
(laughing)
Uh oh…here they come.

MAE
Oh lord! They need to keep that mess out there.

ELISE
Any news on the idiots that almost burned down the barn.

MAE
They go to trial in a few months. And they've been in there singing like canaries. Say they got proof about what their people did to daddy. Sherriff say there's all these pictures of what they done to him.

Mae begins to get emotional.

ELISE
Oh, Mae.

MAE
No, it's fine. We deserve to finally put an end to this. We can finally let daddy rest.

ELISE
How's Jo been?

MAE
She's making do…it kinda spooked her a little bit, but she's alright. That fool was almost convinced she killed one of them boys, and I was like girl, you just shot him in the ass. He'll be alright.

ELISE
You think she'll be alright?

MAE
She's not the one I'm worried about.
ELISE
We're alright…I'm alright.

MAE

You sure?

ELISE

Yes ma'am.

Josie and Jamie emerge with Josie holding a Farmer of the Year trophy.

JOSIE

You need to work with other farmers and artisans. The produce and meats are fine but if you've got other shelf stable items it could be a draw for the market.

MAE

Ya'll ain't done bickering.

JAMIE

No—

JOSIE

I'm just trying to give my brother some insight as this year's Farmer of the Year.

JAMIE

They should've never gave you that trophy.

JOSIE

You're just a hater.

JAMIE

Yeah, whatever. She thinks I should add to the market's inventory, and as I told my sister we're still a new farmer's market. Let's just give it time.

ELISE

I think it could be a good idea. We're always canning, and you've always talked about beekeeping. Honey always makes a killing.

JOSIE

Told you.

JAMIE

We're doing good. I don't wanna add too much to what we got going on.

They all look at him. He rolls his eyes.

JAMIE

I'll think about it.

JOSIE/ELISE

That's all I ask/Makes sense.

They share a look.

JAMIE
We should get back home.

MAE
Already?

ELISE
Yeah. My parents are coming in town for a few days and we've gotta finish getting this house together. Now that ya boy has his new market up and running, our house is overrun with documents, signage, you name it.

MAE
Oh lord.

ELISE
It's madness.

JAMIE
It's fine.

They all exchange embraces.

ELISE
I'm gonna go grab the baby.

JAMIE
I'll grab his stuff.

Elise and Jamie exit into the house. Mae watches after them. Josie looks out over the land before her and down at the trophy in her hands. Mae turns her attention to her niece. She makes her way off the porch and stares out at the land alongside Josie.

MAE
How you feeling?

George and Senior emerge watching their daughters.

JOSIE
Like I can't believe it.

MAE
You've had one helluva year, lil girl.

JOSIE
HA! That's an understatement. I couldn't have done it without you.

MAE
Nah, you would've always done it cause you're just that good. I'm proud of you.

JOSIE
I'm proud of me too. I just hope I've done him justice.

MAE
I think you've more than exceeded expectations.

JOSIE
Thanks, Mae.

Mae grabs her niece's hand and kisses it. Josie returns the gesture.

MAE
So what can I make you for dinner. Whatever you want, it's yours.

JOSIE
How about we go out for dinner tonight? Maybe go over to St. Simon's.

MAE
You tryna get fancy.

JOSIE
We deserve it.

MAE
(making her way to the stairs)
That we do. I'm gonna go pull out my good wig.

JOSIE
(laughing)
Okay, I'll be in in a minute.

Josie looks back out over the land as her aunt, her father, and grandfather watch after her. A beat. Mae exits into the house. George and Senior stand on either side of Josie. A breath.

JOSIE
Thank you.

Lights out.

END OF PLAY

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