loves. Assistant hurries about, clearing the space, and hands Playwright a tomahawk before exiting. Playwright lip-syncs for a little bit before the lip-syncing turns into something else. Playwright gets lost in the song. Playwright dances. Playwright headbangs. Playwright fancy dances. Playwright stalks his prey before thrashing about with his tomahawk. The thrashing becomes convulsing, the convulsing becomes a shaking, the shaking becomes the music, the music becomes the play. The music ends just as Wahuntee stumbles off, in his full Indian regalia, sloshed and swigging from a bottle, completely unaware of his surroundings.

(I'm just going to say this right now so we can get it over with: I don't know what a real slave sounded like. And neither do you.)

ACT ONE

The plantation Terrebonne, in Louisiana. A branch of the Mississippi is seen winding through the estate. A low-built but extensive planter's dwelling, surrounded with a verandah.

Or not.

(Perhaps it's just a theatre full of cotton.)

Dido and Minnie are discovered. Dido is sweeping laboriously. Minnie is just sort of lying around somewhere, fanning herself.

MINNIE. (Eventually.) Do you need help or...?
DIDO. Naw, girl, I got it. (Beat, while Dido sweeps.)
MINNIE. You know, if you sweep on a diagonal with lighter, faster strokes, it's a little more efficient.
DIDO. Girl, what are you talking about?
MINNIE. Your arms get less tired and you let the air pressure do the work. Here. Let me show you. (Takes the broom and demonstrates.) See? I learned it from Lucretia over in the hayloft before I got transferred to the house.
DIDO. And your arms feel less tired?
MINNIE. Yes, girl. And it takes the stress off your lower back.
Here. (Gives the broom back.) You want a banana?
DIDO. No! Do not get us in trouble!
MINNIE. (Taking a banana.) It's just a banana. Relax! Shit, I picked 'em... (Beat, eating.) So what was working with Mammy like?
DIDO. The worst. I'm kind of glad that old witch finally up and died. I already like you much better.
MINNIE. Yeeuh. I ain't never really knowed her, but she used to be taking care of me when I was little and she was mean as hell.
DIDO. Yeah she was.
MINNIE. She be taking care of you when you was little?
MINNIE. You didn’t?

DIDO. Naw, girl. I grew up at the Sunnyside place on the other side of the mountain. Mas’ Peyton won me in a poker game like ten years ago.

MINNIE. ‘Ohhhhh. Okay. So you know Chris and Darnell and ‘nem?

DIDO. Yeeuh. How you know Chris and Darnell, girl?

MINNIE. Oh, you know, Chris was messin’ with Trisha over in the sugar mill for a lil’ bit an’ I met him and Darnell through her at a slave mixer over by the river before she dumped him because, you know, she couldn’t deal with the long-distance.

DIDO. Okay, okay —

MINNIE. Yeeuh. So. (Beat, sunbathing.) Can you believe that Mas’ Peyton’s been dead for two months?

DIDO. I know, right? Seem like only yesterday.

MINNIE. You really think Mrs. Peyton’s upstairs dying from heartbreak?

DIDO. No. That bitch is dying cuz she’s old as hell.

MINNIE. I know, right? (Beat.) You ever had to fuck him?

DIDO. Who?

MINNIE. Mas’ / Peyton.

DIDO. Oh, naw! You?

MINNIE. Naw, he only like lightskinned-ed girls. But Renee, you know, who was fuckin’ him all the time, she said he had the biggest dick she ever seen.

DIDO. Really?

MINNIE. Yeeuh. Apparently that old-ass man was hung like a horse.

DIDO. That is gross.

MINNIE. I know, right? And now he dead. (Beat.) Whatchu think of the new mas’?

DIDO. Mas’ George?

MINNIE. Yeah.

DIDO. He a’ight. He don’t seem to really know what he doin’ just yet but he’ll figure it out. Having slaves can’t be that hard.

MINNIE. Would you fuck him?

DIDO. No, Minnie! Damn! Would you? (Beat. She would.)

MINNIE. But I kind of get the feeling you don’t really get a say in the matter. (Beat.) Damn it’s hot! (Grace, who is very pregnant, wanders in, carrying something heavy from one place to some other place. The}

women all look at each other. They clearly don’t like each other. Super-nice, super-fake.) Hay, Grace!

GRACE. Hi … (Grace exits. Minnie watches her leave, then rolls her eyes.)

MINNIE. Ugh. I can’t stand her. She is so fake.

DIDO. Right? (Minnie goes back to sunbathing. Beat.)

MINNIE. Hey, Dido.

DIDO. Yeah?

MINNIE. You ever thought of running away?

DIDO. Aw, hell naw. What am I going to look like running through this hot-ass swamp? Uhh.

MINNIE. I know, right? Grace’s ass always talking about running away now that Mas’ dead and I’m like, “Bitch, you need to calm your busybodys ass down.” Haven’t she heard these slave catchers got these new dogs nowadays that can fly and who are trained to fuckin’ drag yo’ ass out of trees and carry you back? And then, even if you can outsmart these flying dogs, once you free, what you gonna do once you free? You just gonna walk up in somebody house and be like, “Hey. I’m a slave. Help me.” That kind of naiveté is how niggas get kiil. I ain’t never met a white person in my life who try’n help you escape from slavery. Like, you know? Grace is such a mess.

DIDO. Why Grace always actin’ like she too good for everything? And I don’t know what white people think they running away to. Ain’t nothing out there but mo’ swamp.

MINNIE. I know, right? Anyway, I’m about to have me another one of these bananas. (Minnie goes to help herself to another banana, just as Pete enters.)

PETE. Hey.

DIDO. Hey, Pete.

MINNIE. Hey Pete.

PETE. I see you finished fruit duty already, Minnie. Good job. You settling in all right?

MINNIE. Almost. I like the new servants’ quarters but I think my room might be a little haunted — (People are heard in the house, coming outside. It’s Dora and George. Upon hearing them, Pete transforms into some sort of folk figure. Dora and George enter. Dora looks distraught. George comforts her half-heartedy.)

PETE. (To Minnie, slapping her hand.) Hay! Hay! Drop dat banana fo’ I murdah you!

MINNIE. (Dropping the banana.) Ow! What the hell?

GEORGE. What’s the matter, nigger Pete?