

SCENE 2 - IF I CAN COOK YOU KNOW GOD CAN

*INT. SOOK'S STUDIO*

*Stage includes a bed, kitchen, and bathroom that doubles as a dark room. SOOK develops film in the bathroom, glass of wine in hand. A record player crackles and she sings along. There is a knock at the door. Then a harder one. SOOK opens the door to see HARMONY standing in the doorway, arms loaded with groceries. SOOK welcomes her in with a glass of wine. The sisters start unpacking produce in the kitchen, emptying the bags and adding them to thousands more spilling out from the cabinet under the sink.*

HARMONY

Girl, thank you. And by the way, y'all's elevators broken. Again.

SOOK

Look at Harmony, mad at a free workout!

HARMONY

Sook, I don't need a free workout. I have a job.

SOOK

Ouch. It's good to take a break from work every now and then you know. Relax? You know about that? Our culture is so relentless, constantly producing and consuming and dying and... I am here trying to enjoy the rest.

HARMONY

Ha, rest? (notices the red bathroom light) What is going on in your bathroom?

SOOK

(defensive) Art.

HARMONY

Ah yes the resting working-artist, struggling to define the aesthetics of the big city, of Black brilliance, of ephemera and resilience. Exposing the real, the underbelly, the shadows, the truth. All from a studio apartment in Newark.

SOOK

And here comes the part where she tells me to get a job.

HARMONY

When are you gonna get back out there, Sook? I know the last couple interviews didn't pan out but did you ever meet up with Brandon? The principal? I told you to text him, he's looking for an assistant art teacher-

SOOK

He should keep looking.

HARMONY

You've taught! You've done those workshops and trainings and you loved that, right?

SOOK

What's love got to do with it?

HARMONY

I just want you to be happy.

SOOK

Happy. Yes, me too.

HARMONY

Well you need to try.

SOOK

You think I'm not?

HARMONY

Name one thing you've tried - *recently* - to find a job.

SOOK

Spiritual exploration, reiki, energy transmutation. Using herbs and aromatics to open my third eye, and expand my vision to see myself. Really see myself. Parts of myself I never wanted to see before, that I woulda thrown away if I could. I've been going through my old negatives and redeveloping them. It's ritual for me, healing ritual. I light incense to call the energy in, then I try to redirect it from the work, my archives, into my body. Shadow therapy, get it? I'm recovering what I've lost.

HARMONY

(under her breath) You lost your damn mind.

SOOK

Yes, actually. I have lost my mind, and my job, and I'm trying – see, trying – not to lose my vision. It's gon guide me through the valley of the shadow of death, make me fear no evil! Wherever there is shadow, there is light.

*SOOK finishes putting everything away. She starts chopping vegetables at the cutting board. HARMONY washes her hands.*

SOOK (CONT'D)

And look, thank you for trying to help. But you don't need to take care of me Harmony.

HARMONY

Sometimes I really do, Sook. I don't know how two more different people grew out the same mud.

SOOK

Not so different. Both got our mama's hands. That's a compliment by the way.

*HARMONY gazes at her hands.*

HARMONY

Thank you. Your hands are more like mom's than mine.

*She stands beside SOOK, two pairs of identical hands staring up at them. Palms up.*

SOOK

We both built blocky, in squares and cubes and rectangular prisms. Our hands be brickly, the type you build homes with. Mama's hands.

HARMONY

My scalp holds grudges against those hands I can't unknow.

SOOK

They've shown us a way for joy to lay alongside grief. Beauty with pain.

HARMONY

Yanked me by follicle to anchor braid to skin. Making sure I could hold myself together. Mama's hands.

SOOK

Mm. Always an echo of her, always holding what she carried. Our bodies knew hers first.

HARMONY

I wonder what will last -

SOOK

And what we will let go? These hands have been here before. What they gon put down now that they mine?

HARMONY

What use are broad palms with no weight to bear?

SOOK

Maybe being lovely is enough.

HARMONY

Maybe holding a precious face between them is enough.

SOOK & HARMONY

These are hand-me-downs. These have a track record of success. These bout ready to retire.

HARMONY

She could make miracles for lunch.

SOOK

She could make dinner outta thin air.

HARMONY

A little Lawry's, a little Walkerswood, a little more butter to coat your hips. Mama's hands made beds and breakfasts and snacks and quilts and homes and do and -

SOOK

And gardens. Remember her garden, Harmony? She could grow anything.

HARMONY

Oh I remember the garden alright. Pickin' cucumbers always made me itch.

SOOK

You lucky Mama migrated North. You woulda made a sorry farmer. (a long beat) What? Girl, I'm just messin-

HARMONY

Blain sent me an email.

SOOK

Uncle Vernon's son? Haven't heard that name in years.

HARMONY

Mhm. When Mama came up North Uncle Vernon stayed and took care of Granddaddy and his farm in Darlington. Mama never went back though. Last time I saw Blain we musta been seventeen or something? When Uncle Vernon brought him up here to visit some colleges.

SOOK

What he write you about?

HARMONY

Uncle Vernon passed two years ago.

SOOK

Two years? I mean shit...we wasn't close but no funeral announcement or nothing, huh?

HARMONY

I suppose they wanted to keep the service small. From the letter it seems he's having trouble keeping the farm up, financially. He says he can't get a loan from the Department of Agriculture to buy seeds, new tractors, all the operational upgrades they need. The last farmer down the road that Uncle Vernon used to share supplies with just sold their farm.

SOOK

Well shit, why can't he get the loan??

HARMONY

Apparently the deed isn't in his name, OR Uncle Vernon's name. It's in Granddaddys. It's Heir's Property. If Granddaddy didn't explicitly pass down the deed in a will when he died, then the property is split between all his living heirs.

SOOK

Wait, so us? We own the farm?

HARMONY

We each own a quarter of it. Blain owns the other half. It would have been passed down to Mom and Uncle Vernon, then to you, me and Blain when they passed.

SOOK

I can't believe it! Monie, why didn't you tell me this when you walked in the door? I'm a landowner?! A farmer. I got assets now, baby! You think I should sell my share? Or, or go live on it, get away from the constant pressure of the city?

HARMONY

Blain has been living and working on that farm his whole life. It belongs to him.

SOOK

Whose lawyer are you, Monie? Sounds like I have a right to a share, you said it yourself.

HARMONY

The law may give you some right, but it don't decide what's right. You know stewarding land is a huge responsibility. It breaks my heart thinking of Blain trying to do it alone, worried if he reached out to us we'd do exactly as you said - snatch his land up into a court-ordered sale and make off with a little profit. Greedy.

SOOK

Okay, okay, chill. I wasn't bout to gentrify the country so carelessly. I wanna see the land 'fore I decide anything.

HARMONY

Are you seriously thinking to sell it, Sook?

SOOK

I need the money, you know that. This is a gift from Granddaddy, what would he want me to do?

HARMONY

You know he wasn't shit.

SOOK

(laughs dryly) I do. Guess he would probably want me to sell it, then. Well, what you gonna do? Just give it all up?

HARMONY

If we transfer our shares to Blain the land stays in our family. That way we don't give anything up. But before we do anything drastic I'm gonna give him a call and see if I can't help clear a new title with all three of our names on it -

SOOK

Yeah we gon put that degree to work!

HARMONY

That way he can get the loans, we can keep the equity and everyone wins. If that doesn't work then yes, we should transfer him our shares. And you can still go down and visit anytime, I'm sure he'd love to see you.

SOOK

You know what, I'd love that. I really would. Maybe he'd give me a job.

HARMONY

Now what job you think you gonna have? Corn photographer?

*An owl hoots outside. Both sisters look toward the sound. Lights down.*