

I want a good man -- No You Don't!!!

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March 2016

FADE IN:

INT. CONNIE'S BEDROOM - NIGHT

This room is military neat. The perfume bottles on the dresser are in alphabetical order; the clothes in the closet are arranged from lightest to darkest, with every hanger turned in the same direction.

A HAND writes neatly on a yellow notepad...

Meet CONNIE TRIFE (38). Not a physical flaw in sight. Her smile is endearing but her self-confidence and boldness can be very intimidating.

KYLE (9), enters carrying a book. He hops on the bed, dusts his feet off before they touch her sheets. He's mature, wise and a young romantic. He can hold a conversation with anyone.

KYLE

Hello, mother. What might thou be doing today?

Kyle leans in to read the pad. Connie moves it out of view.

CONNIE

Nosy. It's none of your business.

KYLE

I figured thou would speaketh that reply.

CONNIE

What's with the dialect?

KYLE

(holds up the book)
I'm reading "The Massacre at Paris." Oh, how I adore the Elizabethan era.

He lies back, grabs the remote, and turns on the television.

CONNIE

And what do you think you're doing?

KYLE

Unwinding. School was long. Ain't nuthin' --

She shoots him a look. He laughs.

KYLE

I know, ain't ain't a word but...

CONNIE

No but! Improper English is a big No-No in my book.

KYLE

Yes, Mother, I know.

CONNIE

Now don't get too comfortable in my bed.

KYLE

Mom...

CONNIE

You're too old to still be sleeping with me.

KYLE

I know, but it kills me seeing you lonely.

INT. DEBORA'S HOUSE - LIVING ROOM - NIGHT

A hard and crusty foot is being massaged with Vaseline.

DEBORA SIMS, late forties, homely looking, no sex appeal. She's a STEP and FETCH IT KIND OF GAL and right now she's doing the massaging.

Kicked back on a recliner, enjoying his massage is JAMES POISER. Early fifties; set in his ways. A husky, country bama -- an old school fella'.

JAMES

Baby, get that pinky... and pour summa' that alcohol tween' my toes.

She pours. James grunts his approval.

DEBORA

So I was thinking maybe we can go out this weekend...? Been forever since you've had a weekend fr--

JAMES

We been together too long for you to be asking me to take you out. Real life hadn't set in with you yet now, huh?

DEBORA

No, honey, nothing fancy. You don't have to spend --

JAMES

Ahhh, that feel good. That warm tingling in my toes reminds me of one thing. You know what that is, right? Only one thang make my toes tingle like that there.

He snatches his foot out her hand, slaps her butt and replaces his foot with the other. She starts massaging.

DEBORA

Maybe a movie... dinner? I mean, it is our anniversary.

JAMES

(grunts)
Dinner sounds good.

She smiles, but just that quickly it's wiped away.

JAMES

God dammit, why am I hungry?!

Debora doesn't know whether to answer or stay quiet.

JAMES (CONT'D)

I been working all damn day, Debora. I shouldn't have to beg for food.

DEBORA

James, Dinner is done. I just wanted to finish your feet. I apologize (baby)--

JAMES

(over)
Don't apologize, be sorry. I keep telling ya' ass there's a difference!

Debora slides his feet into his slippers one by one. She heads to the kitchen.

JAMES

I'm trying to teach you how to keep a man. That's women's problem nowadays. Why y'all can't keep a man. But your old ass should know better. I expect more from you. And dinner ain't done til' it's digested!

INT. THE FOSTERS' BEDROOM - NIGHT

In the corner sits storage boxes with the word "Dishes" written on them.

CECIL FOSTER, thirties, a skinny man, wearing shorts and a wife beater, stands in front of a flat screen television, remote in hand. He flips through the channels. Disappointed.

VERONICA FOSTER, thirties, enters wearing only a robe. Very sexy and pretty but her beauty is ONLY skin deep.

CECIL

Veronica, what was the music channel over here?

VERONICA

I don't know. I'm too tired to think.

She plops on the bed. Waits for him to respond.

VERONICA

Do you not care?

CECIL

Weren't you off all this week?
(finds channel)
Here it is.

VERONICA

You don't pay any attention to me. None whatsoever! I told you I was getting my nails and feet done today, a wax and a facial. Can you pay me some attention please?!

CECIL

I'm sorry, honey. You must be exhausted. Come lay down.

She rolls her eyes, then eyes the boxes in the corner.

VERONICA

And then I come home and --
 (bout to raise hell)
 wait you didn't finish unpacking
 the rest of the dishes?! I told you
 to finish while I was in the
 shower!

He ignores her. Gets in the bed.

VERONICA

Cecil. Cecil! Get up. Go put up the
 dishes.

CECIL

Will you stop with the nagging? I
 had a 12-hour day. I wanna sleep.

Veronica sucks her teeth and gets out the bed, mumbling the
 whole time. She throws a T-shirt on. When she turns around we
 see the shirt reads: "No hittin' below the belt."

A rap video comes on the TV.

VERONICA

We will NOT be listening to that
 tonight. And she does not go to
 sleep with the TV on. You know
 that.

CECIL

Well tell she, that he does.

VERONICA

This is exactly what I mean. You
 just --

He turns the volume down, gives her the "fair" look. Leans in
 for a kiss.

She puts her hand in his face and points to her shirt. He
 reads it, shakes his head in disgust.

CECIL

Veronica, I just need to unwind,
 baby. I do a lot around here.

She looks at him, then the boxes, then back at him.

CECIL

First thing in the morning. I
 promise. Now get
 on over here.

VERONICA

Do it now.

He slides closer to her. She stares at him. Dead serious.

VERONICA

Fine. You don't play by my rules
then you won't play at all.

As Veronica turns her back to him, he slides closer. She figured he would, so she turns onto her back -- arms folded across her chest. She puts on her eye mask. It reads: "Do Not Disturb."

Cecil stares a moment. Bobbing his head: okay.

Cecil flips through a few channels and lands on the SPICE network. The moaning is too loud. He lowers the volume.

With a big smile on his face he cuts his eyes over to her.

CECIL

(to himself)

He gon' play, with or without you.

EXT. ROADSIDE - NIGHT

A parked car on the side of the road. The passenger door flies open. There's some tussling. A WOMAN is pushed out. The car speeds off leaving her in its smoke.

SHEREE SIMS (26). A beauty, body sculpted by God himself, dusts herself off and drifts on as best as a drunk woman in heels can.

INT. O'NEAL'S LIVING ROOM - NIGHT

Sheree's swollen ankles lie across the arm of the couch.

O'NEAL (27) walks in with frozen ground beef. He sets it on her ankle; she holds it there. He takes a seat. Stares at her feet.

O'NEAL

That's all the way on the other
side of town. At least two miles.
Why didn't you call a cab?

SHEREE

O'Neal, please! Not tonight. I just
want to relax. Thank you.

O'NEAL
 Whatever, Sheree.

Her cell PHONE RINGS. She looks at it. It says: Ceazer.

O'NEAL
 Go ahead, I won't be jealous.

She won't answer. Her face is filled with fear. Ignores it.

SHEREE
 I'm gonna crash here tonight.
 Something came up.

O'NEAL
 Hell no you won't.

SHEREE
 Oh, would you stop it. We're
 friends --

O'NEAL
 We're friends like "if you die I'd
 go to your funeral" type friends.

Sheree gives him the middle finger.

SHEREE
 Just for tonight. You see me. I
 can't walk, and I know you're not
 gonna give me any money for a cab.

O'NEAL
 Your problems are not mine anymore.

She gives him a look -- a look of desperation -- hopelessness
 -- a girl all out of options...

O'NEAL
 (a beat)
 You gotta get it together,
 Sheree... and soon.

INT. CONNIE'S OFFICE - DAY

Connie types on her computer. There's a KNOCK on the door.

CONNIE
 Come in.

TONY, in all of his flamboyancy, steps in, carrying roses.
 Surprised.

TONY

Hmm, you have an admirer. And whoever it is, he knew your favorites. You didn't tell me you were seeing someone. And we have a card?!

Tony pulls out the card. Connie stops typing. Equally surprised.

TONY

As your assistant, these are things I should know, don't you think? I assist in all areas, even your love life, okay?

CONNIE

Throw them away.

TONY

Ms. Trife... but they're so beautiful.

She resumes typing.

CONNIE

Get rid of them, Tony.

TONY

(pouts)

Fine. But you should be open-minded, Ms. Trife.

CONNIE

Open-minded people usually have their brains fall out.

TONY

They usually fall in love, too.

She stops typing. Takes off her glasses.

CONNIE

If love is in my cards -- which judging by my last two dates, and the married creeps that roam this building, seems very unlikely -- I'd prefer to walk into it, not fall. Two people on the ground have never been any help to each other.

TONY

Well, when you're ready to walk,
let me know so I can PUSH you in
the right direction.

EXT. BUILDING - PARKING LOT/PARKING ATTENDANT BOOTH - DAY

Connie drives up to the parking attendant booth.

DEXTER (26), the parking attendant, a handsome young man full
of ambition and vision, smiles at the very sight of her.

Connie glances at him, casual but appraising. Dexter stares
like a kid meeting his idol.

She holds out the ticket and cash. He takes just the ticket.

DEXTER

I heard The Stylistics is in town.
If you're not doing anything this
weekend --

CONNIE

Are in town.

DEXTER

Huh?

CONNIE

(shakes her head)
Nothing. I'm busy.

DEXTER

That's fine. They'll be here the
next few months.

CONNIE

I'll be busy then, too. Sorry.

DEXTER

Like sorry, "maybe next time," or --

CONNIE

We've been through this for the
past two months.

DEXTER

Not quite. It's been actually,
fifty two days...

Her smile says she's growing impatient.

CONNIE
How much do I owe you?

DEXTER
On the house.

CONNIE
No, I'll pay. I don't want you to
lose your little job. How much?

Dexter lifts the post.

EXT. THE FOSTERS' TOWNHOUSE - DAY

A row of connecting town homes sit on this vast green lawn. Sculpted edges, sprinklers, the works.

INT. THE FOSTERS' LIVING ROOM - DAY

A few unpacked boxes. Veronica sorts through some things. She pulls out a framed picture of her and Cecil. She puts it to the side. Pulls out more pictures of them smiling at each other.

As she pulls out the last, her face turns to stone -- eyes squinting. It's a picture of Cecil and his one year-old son (at the time), JEFFERSON.

INT. THE FOSTERS' BEDROOM - NIGHT

Cecil stands at the door in his Department of Sanitation uniform. Veronica lies asleep in bed.

CECIL
Thank God...

He gazes down at his boots, they're caked with dried mud. He debates leaving them on.

Just as his butt touches the bed, Veronica leaps up like a fish out of water. BUSTED!

VERONICA
Why would you sit on MY bed with
your nasty ass uniform on? You know
how I feel about that!

She glances over and sees footprints on the floor.

VERONICA

And you walked in here with your shoes on?! What the hell is wrong with you? No respect. None!

CECIL

Just go back to bed. I'm tired.

VERONICA

I work just like you, Cecil. I'm tired, too.

CECIL

Three days a week, five hours tops... right.

VERONICA

I contribute just as much to this household.

CECIL

This is turning into something else. I'm sorry. Let's kill this, honey.

VERONICA

No, no, no. We gon' talk! So, you complain that I'm working, but didn't you want me to stay home? Huh? What the hell I look like?! If you made more, then I might consider it but seventy-five thousand ain't gonna do nothing for me.

CECIL

My salary got us this home. My salary bought everything in this home. So my little seventy-five thousand does everything for US!!

INT. CONNIE'S JOB - BOARDROOM - DAY

A room full of MEN -- mostly white -- sit at the executive table. On a projector screen is a pie chart. Connie's wrapping up a presentation.

CONNIE

At the end of this fiscal year, stocks should be up by 11 percent.

OLD WHITE MAN #1

Give us the worst case scenario.

CONNIE
(smiling)
Eleven percent is the worst case,
Sir.

They're elated. Connie basks in the moment.

INT. BOARDROOM - SHORT WHILE LATER

As everyone exits, Connie's left talking to ROB JOHNSON, the president of the company.

ROB
If this goes anyway like you
promise it will, that promotion is yours.

CONNIE
Mr. Johnson, thank you. In that
case, let's pray it does.

ROB
You better. You like boats -- the
water?
(she nods)
Come with me to Napa.

CONNIE
Mr. Johnson --

ROB
It's Rob.

Off his look, she glances at his left ring finger which sports a gold band..

CONNIE
I don't think that would be
appropriate, sir.

A beat as Rob smiles at her...

ROB
Ehhh, God dammit! My wife was
right. She said you wouldn't go for
it. She swears you're not like the
others.

She's unsure how to take it but her smile hides the questions in her head. Rob leaves.

All are gone except BART, thirties, a dapper man with a deep roaring voice.

He watches her from across the room as she gathers her folders. He walks towards her, clapping his hands.

BART
Bravo. Great job. You held it down.

CONNIE
Thank you, Bart.

BART
What happened? You never got back to me about dinner. Doesn't have to be romantic. I am your colleague --

CONNIE
My married colleague.

BART
No, your soon to be divorced, been separated for over a year, colleague.

CONNIE
And is the separation due to your mistress? You know, the 24 year old you brought to the Christmas party.

Bart doesn't know how she gets her information, but he does his best to save face.

BART
(a beat)
I don't know what's wrong with you, but whatever it is, maybe we can talk about it over dinner.

He winks. Quite gutsy of him after all the info she has.

BART (CONT'D)
Give it fair thought.

CONNIE
(dry)
Right.
(Correcting him)
Some thought.

He looks at her. Perplexed.

Connie shakes her head and walks out. Leaving him there alone to figure it out.

INT. CONNIE'S KITCHEN - DAY

Connie and Kyle sit across from each other at the table.
Having dinner.

KYLE

I got an A on my math test, but for
some reason, I ain't get an A on my
English.

CONNIE

Watch your language.

KYLE

Mom, lighten up. I'm just joshing.

He plays with his spaghetti. Something's on his mind.

KYLE

(hesitant)

Remember Abigail? She asked me to
be her valentine.

Connie restrains her smile.

CONNIE

God, you're growing up too fast. So
what did you say?

KYLE

Told her I would talk it over with
you first.

Connie's eyes widen. Honored.

CONNIE

That's right. Mama comes first.

KYLE

Sike! I said yeah -- I mean yes. I
said yes, Mom.

They laugh. Kyle MOUTHS these words as Connie says them:

CONNIE

How are her grades? Is she polite?

KYLE

Smartest girl in her class. So, can
you help me out?

CONNIE

Her class? There's only one fourth grade. So what grade is the girl in?

KYLE

Sixth.

CONNIE

Oh, no. You're only in fourth.

KYLE

Yes, but I read on an eighth grade level, so technically, when you factor in the two year age difference, then divide it by my reading level, we're brain appropriate.

Connie holds back her laugh. Just shakes her head.

CONNIE

Well, you know I have to approve before I spend my money to get her a card from you.

KYLE

I've been calculating and with tax her gift will come to \$4.27.

CONNIE

Baby, I'm all for you not having a high maintenance woman, but 4.27?

KYLE

I'm gonna get her a Hersheys bar with almonds. She eats them at lunch. Then I'll make her a card and staple a flower to it. I have a month to change my mind if I want to.

CONNIE

That sounds like a good affordable idea.

KYLE

Nothing beats a thoughtful gift, right? That's what you said.

CONNIE

And me?

KYLE

I haven't forgotten about you, Mom.
But hopefully you'll have someone
by then.

He winks at her.

CONNIE

You know what I could use?

KYLE

Ummmm... a date?

CONNIE

Enough. Stop being a wise-ass. You
wouldn't know what to do if I went
on one.

KYLE

(under his breath)
No, you wouldn't know what to do...
(normal tone)
You have a lot going for yourself.

CONNIE

And men are intimidated by that.

Kyle doesn't believe that.

KYLE

No offense, Mom, but why would a
guy not want a successful woman?
Doesn't everyone want the best?

CONNIE

Why I'm having this conversation
with a boy who hasn't hit puberty
yet is beyond me.

KYLE

Not true. I have hair under my
arms. Look.

Kyle lifts his arm to show her.
Connie gives a stern look. He stops.

KYLE

So let me hook you --
(correcting himself)
May I hook you up?

CONNIE

You can hook those dishes up, and
then hook that soap and water up in
the shower.

INT. KYLE'S BEDROOM - NIGHT

Kyle is kneeling beside his bed praying.

KYLE

God, thank you for my life and
everything you gave me: my mom, my
school, my valentine, my clothes.
Can you make my mommy happy, too,
and send her a nice guy? In Jesus'
name, amen.

INT. CONNIE'S BEDROOM - NIGHT

Connie lies against her headboard, yellow pad in hand. She
writes...

INSERT PAD - A GAME OF HANGMAN

A noose. In a separate column are a list of qualities:

Height: *She draws two short legs.*

Punctuality: *A body with two arms. Arrows pointed at the
wrist.*

Education: *She draws a head. Beside it she's written "no
brain."*

Bad teeth: *She draws a frown on the face.*

This is how she rates her dates.

INT. DEBORA'S BEDROOM - NIGHT

A drunk James staggers in -- pants unbuttoned. He bumps into
the wall and knocks some pictures to the floor. He struggles
to maintain balance. His slacks drop to his ankles. He
stumbles, waking Debora.

JAMES

(slurred)

Debora. Debora!

He uses the bed to help himself up.

JAMES (CONT'D)
Get ya ass up and greet me!

Now standing in his boxers, James shakes his pelvis like Elvis in a bad attempt to turn her on.

DEBORA
I'm gonna go get your food.

He taps her butt, food isn't on his mind at all.

JAMES
Get on over here.

From behind he licks her neck like a dog. She turns, wraps her arms around his shoulders and caresses his neck.

DEBORA
You said you would stop drinking,
honey. Remember?

He shoves her to the bed.

JAMES
What I tell you about trying to
control me, Debora!? Huh?!

James laughs while arousing himself and walking towards the bed.

INT. DEBORA'S BEDROOM - MOMENTS LATER

An alarm clock reads: "2:33." The bed squeaks from some heavy duty work. The only other noise we hear is from a man grunting.

James rolls off Debora, exhausted. He lies still for a moment, shoots her a look --

INT. DEBORA'S KITCHEN - MOMENTS LATER

Debora moves around like a pro. She has an apron on as she prepares neckbones and grits.

INT. DEBORA'S BEDROOM - NIGHT

Debora carries a plate of food to his side of the bed. He looks so comfortable, so at peace, so secure. She stares in the mirror and sees the complete opposite.

James's Iphone vibrates on the dresser. Debora picks it up.

TEXT MESSAGE from Ingrid
Hey Big Daddy. Miss you. Can't wait till you're here for good. I love you.

She puts the phone down, food still in her hand, nudges him.

DEBORA
 Wake up, James! Get up!

JAMES
 (sleep)
 Ingrid, I told your ass about
 bothering me while I'm sleep.

DEBORA
 (shaking her head)
 I have your food.

James opens his eyes to a plate of hot food being mushed into his face.

INT. NEIMAN MARCUS - DAY

Veronica browses through racks of outrageously priced clothes.

VOICE (O.S.)
 Need help?

Here comes SASHA, her fly, much older coworker. Sasha keeps up with the latest styles. And she must have an 'in' with a plastic surgeon, because she has lots more work done than she can afford.

SASHA
 (very catchy)
 Hey, girl.

VERONICA
 Hey, Sash.

SASHA
 The new seasons wear -- OMG. The Prada dress? Fab-u-lous!!

Veronica's eyes light up.

SASHA
 Come, let me show you.
 (they walk)
 So last night -- how long is your lunch?

VERONICA

Thirty.

SASHA

Okay, so you know I'm seeing
Jerry...

VERONICA

The lawyer who just made partner?

SASHA

That's Jimmy... no, I mean Gary --
but Jerry made a bunch of money
from investments, retired early. So
anyway, his wife called right in
the middle...

She pokes her finger through her fist.

VERONICA

WHAT?! What did you do?

SASHA

(with no remorse)

Kept riding him. Shoot, I knew the
new spring collection was coming
out this week and I know better
than better. I had to get mine.

Sasha pulls a platinum credit card from between her breasts.
They share laughs.

VERONICA

I hear that.

SASHA

I know what my blessing come from.

They stop at the Prada section of the store. Sasha runs her
fingers across a thin silky dress.

Veronica glances at the \$2400 price tag. She caresses the
dress. Nothing to die for and definitely not worth her six
weeks salary.

VERONICA

That's one thing I love about
Prada, they never overprice.

SASHA

Riiiiiiight. So reasonable. Like only a bum bitch couldn't afford this. This would look fly on you. Tell Cecil to hand over the Visa.

VERONICA

Girl, please. He'd cut his meat off before he did that.

Sasha grabs a Neiman Marcus credit card application. Hands it to Veronica.

SASHA

You know his social right?

INT. ROOM - NIGHT

A bed covered in designer bags, boxes, and clothes.

A foot sliding into a pair of Christian Louboutins. A Prada price tag marked at \$700 falls to the floor.

We follow the dress up a woman's body as she slides it on. It's fitting like a glove on OJ Simpson.

As the Angle widens it reveals a nasty room. This is no apartment -- just a room. The wood is burnt, the walls are bare, the floors squeak with every step...

Sheree assesses her outfit in front of a foggy, cracked mirror. She's pleased. She grabs her open suitcase, her college diploma falls out. She quickly -- almost as if she's ashamed to see it -- tosses it back into the suitcase and shoves her clothes and shoes on top of it.

INT. ROOM - LATER THAT NIGHT

In the corner, a 13 inch TV rest on a standing breakfast tray, playing reruns of "I Love Lucy."

A tipsy Sheree saunters in. She's wearing the same dress from earlier. Shadowing her is MARK. He's nervous and jittery.

MARK

This ain't where you live, right?

SHEREE

No. I just rent this room... to get peace, ya' know.

He's uncomfortable... but he's horny too.
So we know which feeling won.

Mark undresses, folding his clothes carefully.
He pulls out a hundred dollar bill.

Sheree closes his hand into a fist.

SHEREE
I like you Mark.

She mounts him.

INT. ROOM - LATER

Mark's getting dressed. The TV playing an episode of "I Love Lucy"...

MARK
You live by here? I can drop you
off.

SHEREE
When am I going to see you again?

MARK
Here, take the money. Just keep it.

SHEREE
Excuse me? I don't want your money.
I'm not some whore.

He raises his eyebrows. Her actions have fooled him.

MARK
You don't remember me, do you? They
call you Goldie, ri--

SHEREE
Leave!

Awkward silence. Mark flashes a devilish grin.
Sheree turns her head, avoiding eye contact. Ashamed.

MARK
(closing door)
You were just like they said.

Door SLAMS shut!

Sheree fights her tears. Disappointed. Sits on the bed.
Watches Lucy and Ricky hug and kiss.
Imagines she's Lucy someone loves her that much.

Sheree grabs her cell. Brings up O'Neal's name.
Her finger dances around the SEND button.

Instead she tosses the phone to the wall.
She reaches under her bed and grabs a bottle of liquor.
Downs it.

EXT. STREETS - DAY

Sheree, wobbles up the street in last night's dress; too drunk to be bothered by the stares from CIVILIANS passing by. They look concerned, but not enough to help.

She stops at the corner, inches from the street. Off balance, knees shaking, liable to fall at any second. She reaches out to a TALL MAN -- his back to us -- she falls forward. He catches her inches from the floor.

A car screeches to a halt -- just missing them. We never see the Tall Man's face.

EXT. NEIMAN MARCUS PARKING LOT - DAY

A trunk pops open. It's full of designer store bags: Saks, Neiman Marcus, Nordstrom.

Veronica tries to stuff more bags in. No success. Frustration sets in. She throws the bags in the back seat.

EXT. THE FOSTERS' TOWNHOUSE - DAY

Veronica almost knocks the MAILMAN over when she snatches the mail out his hand. She flashes him an unapologetic smile and runs up the stairs.

INT. THE FOSTERS' KITCHEN - CONTINUOUS

She tosses the mail on the table, spreads it out wide.

She opens an envelope addressed to Cecil. Pulls out a bill from

NEIMAN MARCUS

That reads: \$12,234.
Minimum payment due \$900.

VERONICA
(to herself)
Damn.

INT. MALL - JEWELRY STORE - NIGHT

Cecil browses the cases of the finest jewelry: watches, rings and bracelets.

Sales associate MONA, a simple beauty, with teeth as white as the clouds, approaches...

MONA

Already I can tell you have great taste.

Cecil looks up. Impressed by her beauty. Mona glances at his wedding ring.

MONA

Would you like to see something?

CECIL

(debates)

Ummmmmm. I'm alright.

MONA

Right now we're having a pre-Valentines day special. Everything is twenty percent off. Just take a look.

(flirtatious)

No harm in looking, right?

INT. CONNIE'S OFFICE - DAY

Connie, behind her desk typing, when Tony lurches in.

TONY

(buttering her up)

Ms. Trife, how are you today? As good as you look?

Her eyes don't leave her computer.

CONNIE

What is it, Tony?

TONY

(fast)

I need big favor -- and I know you don't like to mix business with pleasure but I've been with you since day one and haven't asked you for anything this year, so please consider all those reasons why you should do this favor before you answer...

(normal pace)

My church will be honoring the decorating committee -- and as you know, I'm the head of it and I'd like you to attend.

CONNIE

You know how I feel about church. I'll send a gift.

TONY

The gift would be you. Please, Ms. Trife.

CONNIE

I have --

TONY

Nothing to do that day. And you could bring Kyle. Kids are more than welcome.

CONNIE

I'll mull it over some more and --

TONY

Ms. Trife, please. You are the only family I have. You know my parents still hate me. I just need someone there that is truly happy for me and accepts me for the person I am.

CONNIE

(touched, nodding)

For you I'll do it this one time...

TONY

(elated)

Thank you!

CONNIE

... But it's time for a new speech. You gave me that same one last year.

TONY

Ewww I did? How tasteless. I'm gonna go work a new one right now.

LATER

Connie paces the room. Intense conversation is taking place with whomever is on the other side of her earpiece.

CONNIE

... That's an option, but frankly, you're running out of options and I'm running out of time... my gender has nothing to do with how I run things or look after my clients best interest! And I exp-- hello...?

Tony enters with food. Connie settles behind her desk, takes a few breaths and lets the blood settle down.

CONNIE

Men and their damn egos!

TONY

Hmmm, you don't have to tell me.

CONNIE

Truthfully, women run business better than men.

TONY

I agree.

CONNIE

We take less risk and focus more on the money.

(looks at the food)

Now this I like. A little proactive.

TONY

I would love to take credit but it's not my doing. Someone had it sent up.

CONNIE

Who?

Tony shrugs. Connie stares at the food. He pulls out a bottle of FIJI water.

TONY
They really paid attention to you.
Fiji. Hey.

CONNIE
Get rid of it.

TONY
Ms. Trife I'm hungry.

She is too.

She minimizes a screen on her computer and underneath it is her horoscope. It reads: Do something different. The best decisions are often unplanned.

EXT. PARKING LOT - AFTERNOON

Connie pulls up to the parking attendant booth.
Dexter's beaming.

DEXTER
How was lunch?

CONNIE
Who told you?

DEXTER
You're not as complicated as you
think.

He extends his hand for the ticket.
She keeps her hands in the car.

CONNIE
Not until you tell me how you knew.

DEXTER
Fine with me. I can stare at you
all day.

After some moments of Connie staring ahead and Dexter staring at her, a car pulls behind her.

Connie exhales. Mad she had to give in first.

CONNIE
Here.

She extends the ticket.

DEXTER
 You really wanna know? Is it that
 important to you?
 (no response)
 Fine, I'll tell you...
 (a beat)
 Over dinner.

She smiles and hands him the ticket.

CONNIE (V.O.)
 Do something unexpected.
 (out loud, playful)
 Here, creep. Great book. My son
 just read that.

She points to a Shakespeare book in his booth.

DEXTER
 I'm almost finish. How about you
 tell me his thoughts about it over
 dinner...

It's cute enough to get her to grin. He's not letting up.

CONNIE (V.O.)
 The best decisions are often
 unplanned...
 (out loud)
 Where would you take a woman like
 me?

DEXTER
 You willing to find out?

Connie gives him the once-over. Takes her time answering. She
 nods yes. Dexter does his best to contain his excitement.

CONNIE
 So dinner on Friday?

DEXTER
 Are you asking me out?

She gives him the "boy please" face.

INT. CHURCH BASEMENT - AFTER WORK HOURS

A room full of PEOPLE. Various ages, sizes, shapes and races.
 The MEN stand on one side; the WOMEN sit at the round tables
 set across the room.

GRIFF (50's), a tall, masculine, handsome man enters -- picture Marvin Winans. He commands the attention of the room. Women look wherever he goes.

GRIFF

May I have your attention?!

(still some talking)

There's a cash prize!

(immediate silence)

That was a Joke! I'd like to thank you all for coming out... for being active members of the ministry, and for seeing the vision I have for the singles. Oftentimes, we get overlooked around Valentines day. We get singles classes, or retaught stuff we already know. No one shows us how to date or what questions to ask when we do date. This speed dating is especially important for my single sisters. On the table are a list of questions that men hate to answer right off the back.

There are a couple "boos" from the fellas. Griff's eyes scan around.

GRIFF (CONT'D)

Those are the guys you want to stay away from.

(they laugh)

But seriously, I want everyone to enjoy themselves, mingle, keep it holy. I believe you've been briefed on the rules. And remember: dating is NOT A SIN.

INT. CHURCH - UPSTAIRS

Debora creeps in. She's wearing shades and a hat, trying to go unnoticed.

GRIFF (O.S.)

May I help you?

DEBORA

(bashful...whispers)

Where's the event?

GRIFF

I'm sorry...?

DEBORA

Maybe I have the wrong place. You know what? I do. I was looking for LOVE OF JESUS... it must of moved.

GRIFF

This is the right place. But what -- oh, the speed dating?

DEBORA

Is Bishop Chrome still here?

GRIFF

No he passed two years ago. I'm Griff Martin, the new Pastor.

He extends his hand. She reluctantly shakes it, giving him the once-over. If her eyes could talk they'd be saying DAMN!

GRIFF

You are?

DEBORA

Debora... Sims.

GRIFF

Sims. Sounds familiar.

DEBORA

I grew up in this church. Went here almost all my life.

GRIFF

I've never seen you.

DEBORA

Had you have, you wouldn't notice.

GRIFF

Believe me, I would.

(she smiles... a beat)

Since you have no clue why you're here, even though you've been coming HERE most of your life, would you mind waiting a moment?

INT. GRIFF'S OFFICE - CONTINUOUS

Griff's behind his desk signing a check. Dexter sits in a chair. Legs shaking nervously.

GRIFF

My apologies, I should of had this ready for you.

No response from Dexter. He's too excited to care.

GRIFF (CONT'D)

Lost track of it with this speed dating thing. It ain't too late to sign up. A good turnout... some nice looking ladies down there.

DEXTER

Nah, I'm good.

GRIFF

(looks at his legs)
A bathroom down the hall.

Dexter's mind is on Connie. He shakes his head; has the slightest clue where the bathroom comment came from.

DEXTER

I finally asked the girl from the office out!

GRIFF

The older one? Haven't you been asking her out?

DEXTER

Well, yeah... she finally stopped playing and... you already know, Pastor.

Griff nods his head. Proud.

GRIFF

If we were on the street I'd say "my nigga."

INT. THE FOSTERS' LIVING ROOM - NIGHT

Cecil and his son JEFFERSON (12), are in a heated game of Modern Warfare on X-box.

INT. BATHROOM - CONTINUOUS

Cecil stands in the doorway.

VERONICA

How long is he gonna be here?

CECIL

He has a name. Second, as long as he wants. He's my son.

VERONICA

You know how I feel about him coming over unannounced. Like, have some respect for me too. I am your wife.

Cecil balls up his fist and puts it to his mouth. It takes everything in him to restrain himself -- eyeing her down as he steps away.

VERONICA

Ughhh! This what I mean, every time he comes around you act different.

CECIL

This is my son, Veronica. My son! He's welcomed here whenever!

VERONICA

Just go!

INT. LIVING ROOM - CONTINUOUS

Cecil enters, masking his frustration with a smile.

Jefferson had the TV on mute and hadn't left the game on pause. He smiles at his father, letting him know he's winning. Cecil hops on the couch, snatches the controller and they are right back at it.

INT. DEBORA'S BEDROOM - NIGHT

Debora jotting in a notebook. She flips to the back where there is a year long

CALENDAR

Circled in black & blue ink. And before that JANUARY 3rd, and we begin to notice the black&blue circles cover most of the calender.

She stares in the mirror, caressing her face. No bruises. Smiling.

INT. CAR - DAWN

Connie drives while Kyle rides shotgun.

KYLE

And make sure you let him open the doors, pull out chairs, pay... Okay? Are you listening, Mom?

They pull up to a house.

KYLE

And most importantly: call me when you get in.

(he opens the door)

And how did you meet this guy?

CONNIE

Get out my car.

Connie smiles. Gives him a peck on the cheek. He closes the door behind him, looks at his mom through the window. He points to his eyes and then to Connie as if to say: *I got my eyes on you.*

INT. NEIMAN MARCUS - LOCKER ROOM - DAWN

Veronica's at her open locker. She checks her left and right to see who's watching -- no one's around. She throws on a wig, a hat and a pair of shades.

INT. NEIMAN MARCUS - MOMENTS LATER

We're on the far side of the store. A place where not many customers come.

Veronica -- in disguise -- waiting in line nervously.

BLAINE (O.S.)

Next.

Veronica steps to the register. Overly friendly BLAINE -- fresh off of training -- greets her with a warm smile. Veronica puts the bag on the counter.

BLAINE

Hello. Returns?

Blaine pulls the clothes out; there are six or so items. She moves slowly, admiring each piece.

BLAINE

(holding a shirt)

Wow, this is beautiful.

Veronica checks to see if she's being watched. Blaine admires another piece.

BLAINE (CONT'D)

Was something wrong with the garment?

Veronica shakes her head: no. Growing impatient.

BLAINE

You have great taste. Are you a stylist?

Blaine scans the items back into the system.

VERONICA

No.

Blaine waits for more...

BLAINE

Oh. You look so familiar. Do I know you?

She scans a white shirt. There's a ring around the collar.

BLAINE

This has been worn; I can't take this back.

Veronica looks at the collar. She can't debate this.

VERONICA

Just give it here.

Now suspicious, Blaine begins to smell the clothes.

VERONICA

What are you doing?

BLAINE

I'll have to call my manager over.

VERONICA

(slightly panicked)
What? For what?

BLAINE

Ma'am this smells like perfume.

Blaine grabs the phone to call her manager. Veronica holds the receiver down. Blaine shoots a look. Veronica squints her eyes, rolls them, packs the clothes back into the bag and sashays out.

INT. 4 STAR RESTAURANT - NIGHT

Beautiful. Elegant. The best of the best.

Off at a table in the corner, Dexter and Connie each nurse a glass of wine. A nervous Dexter smiles whenever Connie speaks. They're in mid conversation...

CONNIE

Well I don't know. I don't want to offend you.

DEXTER

No. Feel free to ask whatever. Anything.

CONNIE

Is this a faze you're going through?

He's lost. Huh?

CONNIE

Dexter, I'm older than you...

DEXTER

Not by a whole lot, but I still don't get it. This is our third date. Can't you see I'm sincere?

CONNIE

Are you really?

DEXTER

Connie, my interest in you transcends our age. But lets be clear: I ALWAYS have liked older women.

CONNIE

What is it about older women that attracts you?

DEXTER

Maybe it's the settled in lifestyle. I ain't into partying and clubbing, I prefer to Netflix or a nice drive. I find women my senior...

She shoots him a look. He smiles. Continues on...

DEXTER (CONT'D)

Enjoy those same things. So how was your dating life before me?

CONNIE

THIS, as in dating or being out with the same man more than once, is ancient to me.

The WAITER sets their plates in front of them.

WAITER

Enjoy.

He walks off.

CONNIE

These are my first 'date-dates' on almost four years.

DEXTER

That says a lot.

Connie isn't sure if she should take offense or not. She waits for an explanation but instead Dexter continues digging into his food.

CONNIE

Then I'll shutup. I already said too much.

Off her look Dexter rolls his eyes and shakes his head.

TIME CUT

Finishing up their food. What started as a nice time seems to have taken a turn for the worse.

Dexter still tries to interact. Makes small talk with Connie while she fiddles with her blackberry.

DEXTER

(re: blackberry)

... I hope that thing is paying for dinner.

CONNIE

If you can't afford it I got it.

DEXTER

Anyway. So what do you think?

CONNIE

I think your comment was rude and childish.

DEXTER

Huh? What? What are you talking about?

In a hushed tone, through her teeth:

CONNIE

Lower your voice.

DEXTER

Pardon?

CONNIE

Everyone doesn't need to know what we're talking about.

DEXTER

I'm not your son.

CONNIE

Damn right. He would never say something so ignorant. You know what? Take me home. Now and thank you.

DEXTER

At least tell me what I said.

CONNIE

Your "it says a lot" comment.

DEXTER

I apologize if you were offended. I didn't mean --

CONNIE

I'm ready to go.

DEXTER

What? Why? I said sorry. Just let me explain.

Connie throws her napkin on the table, snatches her bag and saunters out.

DEXTER

Wait. Where you going?

INT. DEBORA'S KITCHEN - DAY

Griff is seated at the table, riffling through a magazine.

Debora joins him with two glasses of Kool-aid. Admiring his looks.

 GRIFF
 (re: magazine)
Two years and they threw in the
towel.

 DEBORA
That isn't long at all.

 GRIFF
Get this: they been together
sixteen. Ever been married?

No response. She's dazed. Fantasizing about his lips and hands.

 GRIFF
Debora?

Griff lifts his head from the article.

 GRIFF
Debora. Been married?

She snaps out of it.

 DEBORA
I'm sorry. Ummm. Have I?
 (flustered)
No. No I haven't.

 GRIFF
You sure?

 DEBORA
Yeah. My mind was elsewhere. I'm
not against it. Just every man I
meet has been so...

 GRIFF
 (re: magazine article)
Don't let things like this scare
you.

 DEBORA
That doesn't scare me. The male
species does.

GRIFF

Oh, really?

DEBORA

You guys are animals. Selfish.
Inconsiderate. Liars. Abusers.
Cheaters.

Griff just grins. He doesn't say a word.

DEBORA

Griff, can I ask you something?
I guess I'm asking you as a Pastor
-- and please don't be offended,
but where are all the good men?

GRIFF

We're all around.

DEBORA

You guys start off nice, then you
do a 180.

GRIFF

Debora, it boils down to who the
person really is. I don't believe a
person shows their true self two
years down the line -- we just pay
attention two years down the line.
Because by then the 'mist' has worn
off and your kind of familiar with
the person. But signs are there.
Always are. Despite what they say,
love isn't blind... but loneliness
is.

DEBORA

I would pray, and still do pray to
God for a good man, a wholesome
guy, he don't even have to be that
fine -- just treat me right. Don't
put your hands on me. Appreciate me
for who I am. Spend time with me.

GRIFF

If God sent the man who is
everything you want -- all you
prayed for -- would you be ready
for him right now?

INT. MALL - JEWELRY STORE - NIGHT

Cecil ambles in. He makes a Beeline for the display case.

MONA
(surprised)
You're back.

EXT. MALL - NIGHT

Cecil smiling from ear to ear. He ignores his ringing cell.

INT. THE FOSTERS' BEDROOM - MORNING

Heart shaped Balloons float around. A dozen long stem roses are on Cecil's side of the bed.

Cecil carries a breakfast tray with heart shaped pancakes and orange juice. He sets it beside Veronica.

MOMENTS LATER

Veronica chows down her breakfast as she finishes reading her card:

VERONICA
...You're engraved in my heart
forever. Cecil.

For the first time, she shows a sense of gratitude and appreciation.

VERONICA (CONT'D)
Babe, this is so sweet. Give me
kiss.

He leans in for a kiss and right before they touch he puts a jewelry box in between their lips. Her face lights up. She snatches the box and opens it. She pulls out the most beautiful bracelet we've ever seen.

Veronica bouncing with excitement. Her orange juice spills, the fork flies off the tray but she can care less.

She puts the bracelet on her wrist, tosses the tray to the floor and grabs Cecil by the ears pulling him on top of her.

INT. NEIMAN MARCUS - DAY

Veronica and Sasha work the fragrance section.

VERONICA
It was all that, okay. All that.

SASHA
It probably wasn't even that good.

VERONICA
No, it was. Trust.

SASHA
You ain't had none in what... three months? Any sex is good after that long.

VERONICA
Girl bye.

SASHA
That bracelet is fierce though. Nice to see he broke the bank for Valentines day.

VERONICA
He better had. It's only right.

CUT TO:

AN ATM SCREEN READS:
-2,179 (checking). -930 (savings)...

We're at --

INT/EXT. DRIVE-THRU/CAR - CONTINUOUS

An enraged Cecil throws the car into drive and floors it.

INT. CHURCH - SANCTUARY - DAY

Neat. Almost filled.

Connie's in the congregation. She listens on as Tony -- standing in between a team on SIX MEMBERS -- closing out his speech...

TONY
From the bottom our heart, the very, very bottom, we here in the decorating committee just thank you for this award. My team... you guys make it possible and without God, none of this is possible. So thank you all.

There's a standing ovation.

INT. CHURCH BASEMENT - LATER

Connie exits the bathroom. Tony is there waiting for her.
They walk.

TONY

Thank you for coming. It means a
lot, Ms. Trife.

CONNIE

See, I gave up my Sunday and my
Valentines day just for you.

TONY

Oh, you had plans?

CONNIE

That's besides the point.

TONY

I have someone I want you to meet.

CONNIE

No, I'm leaving.

He grabs her hand and runs. She gallops as fast as she can in
her stilettos. Trying to keep up.

INT. CHURCH VESTIBULE - CONTINUOUS

They make their way through the traffic. Tony spots someone.
He gazes back, at a reluctant Connie.

TONY

Hey Brother Foster. Someone I want
you to meet.

He turns around. Connie's face is frozen.

TONY

(to Connie)

This is our pianist: Brother
Foster.

(to Brother Foster)

What's your first name again?

DEXTER

Dexter. Dexter Foster. Nice to meet
you. Would you excuse me?

Dexter nods at Connie and walks off.

AT THE DOOR

Griff greeting MEMBERS as they leave.

MOMENTS LATER

Connie breaks through traffic. She spots him heading into the

CHURCH BASEMENT - CONTINUOUS

CONNIE
Dexter! Dexter!

He stops, turns towards her. She's slightly out of breath.

CONNIE
Can we sit? Just for a second?

They take a seat.

CONNIE
I never...

She stops mid-sentence. This is hard for her and he decides to make it harder. He pulls his phone out. Fiddling with it for no reason. Just being a dick.

CONNIE
Okay, this is not going to fly. I'm trying to talk to you...
(he raises his eyebrows)
You're really acting your... I'll make this quick. I apologize and it won't happen again. Accept?

DEXTER
(being an ass)
Oh, yeah. I really felt that. Do I believe it? No. Feel it? I guess.

CONNIE
(stands)
Great. Which way out?

DEXTER
Connie, you can't say it won't happen again because how would you ever know?

Connie has a confused look on her face.

CONNIE
I know when I'm sincere.

DEXTER

Only way to know if it's sincere is
if we go out again. And what better
day than today?

INT. O'NEAL'S KITCHEN/DINING AREA - AFTERNOON

A candlelit table set for two.

O'Neal, dressed in a suit, looks it over. He's pleased.

Bzzzzzz!! Bzzzzzz! He heads to the door. Buzzes the person
in.

He pulls a bottle of wine from the fridge and uncorks it.
KNOCK!! KNOCK!

He grabs some roses out the freezer, hides them behind his
back.

O'NEAL

Open.

The door swings open and to his displeasure, Sheree, filthy
and barely dressed is standing there.

O'NEAL

(shocked)

What the hell you doing here?!

She attempts to skate by him but he stops her.

O'NEAL

You can't Sheree. Not today.

Sheree looks over his shoulder and sees the dinner made for
two. She pushes her way past him.

O'NEAL (CONT'D)

Sheree, you gotta go!

SHEREE

This is for the white girl?

Sheree takes a fork and digs into the food.

O'NEAL

What's wrong with you?

She saunters to the back of his house, towards his room...

SHEREE

Where is she?! She in here ain't
she?!

He restrains her before she opens the door. She bangs on it.

SHEREE (CONT'D)

Ain't she!?!

O'NEAL

You drunk!? You smell horrible!
Sheree, you gotta go!

Sheree breaks out crying. Uncontrollably. Wraps her arms
around his shoulders. Hugs him tight.
He tries to push her off but her grip is too tight.
Tears are getting on his suit.

INT. KITCHEN - LATER

O'Neal sits across from his beautiful girlfriend MADISON. He
looks bothered. Trying to hide his feelings but can't.

MADISON

Sweetie, what's wrong? You don't
like my outfit?

O'NEAL

Baby, I'm fine.

MADISON

You don't look it. I love the food.
It's delicious. Oh wait, here.

She reaches in her pocketbook, hands him a card. She smiles
as he opens it. He begins to read:

O'NEAL

O'neal, you are the man of my
dreams; the man of my future and
the joy in my life...

INT. O'NEAL'S BEDROOM - SAME

Sheree lying in his bed. Sleep.

O'NEAL (OS, CONT'D)

(still reading the card)

... I love you, adore you and pray
that I can be as great to you, as
you are to me.

INT. O'NEAL'S LIVING ROOM - LATER

Madison and O'Neal on the couch. She rest her head on his chest as a movie plays.

They're kissing. Each second intensifies.

O'Neal shirtless. Madison in her underwear.

O'Neal leading toward the bedroom, but abruptly stops.

O'Neal gives her the once over, bites his bottom lip and shoves everything off the kitchen table.

O'Neal hoists her up, she wraps her legs around him. Without hesitation, he takes her right there.

INT. O'NEAL'S LIVING ROOM - LATER THAT NIGHT

Freshly sexed, half naked and beyond exhausted, they lie on the floor in their own sweat and other wet spots. Madison, eyes closed, hand on her forehead -- pleased. O'Neal stares at the ceiling -- guilt ridden.

MADISON

(eyes closed)

Babe, that was astounding. You were a lion.

The sound of a door creaking open. O'Neal rolls on top of her. Trying to drown out the sound of the door.

O'NEAL

Want something to drink?

He peers up. Sheree is standing at his bedroom door, in his shirt, staring at them. He jolts.

MADISON

What's wrong? You okay?

O'NEAL

After effects. Shock. You know.

MADISON

Like them earthquakes.

(open eyes)

I can go freshen up and be ready again if you want.

O'NEAL

No. No, get dressed. Let's go for a ride.

O'Neal hops up first. Bolts to his room before Madison can see Sheree.

INT. O'NEAL'S BEDROOM - CONTINUOUS

O'NEAL
(intense, whispers)
Listen. You got thirty minutes to be gone! Out of here. Out of my life. Away for good.

SHEREE
Why are you doing this to me?

O'NEAL
Go Sheree!

SHEREE
Just help me.

O'NEAL
Do you remember what you said? "I'm not your business anymore."
Remember that?

Sheree reaches for the door but he stops her. She yells but O'Neal quickly covers her mouth.

O'NEAL
What the hell is your problem? You need to see a doctor, Sheree.

SHEREE
Just wanted to tell your little whore hi.

He gathers himself. Takes a deep breath. As he leaves out:

O'NEAL
And leave my shirt.

EXT. CONNIE'S ENCLOSED PORCH - NIGHT

Connie and Dexter sit on her swing chair. Close. Personal. Both nursing a mug of hot chocolate.

CONNIE
It wasn't the comment, it was the way you said it. I guess... I don't know. I'm not good at making excuses.

(MORE)

Oh, and the fact that you never explained the comment made it worse.

DEXTER
It's better to ask than to assume.

CONNIE
Excuse me young fella', but I know these things.

DEXTER
All it meant was: you've been single for a long time...

CONNIE
And?

DEXTER
You may have forget how to be in a relationship.

It has some weight to it but she's not sure she totally agrees. She puts him to the test.

CONNIE
Explain.

DEXTER
Relationships aren't like riding a bike. You can't pedal someones emotions. Once you've been use to considering just you and your feelings for so long, it's hard to add someone else to that equation and put their feelings before yours. Damn near impossible for a woman like yourself.

CONNIE
Hard? Maybe. Impossible? No. I can do it... and I would, if he's worth it. When God sends me a good man, I'll know. Until then...

DEXTER
So you've never had a good guy, Connie?

CONNIE

Maybe one, or two, but they couldn't deal with the fact I made more than them. Also -- and this is a BIG NO-NO -- they still lived in apartments. I needed a man with a house. Preferably paid for, like mine is. I felt like that was only fair.

DEXTER

So they couldn't deal with you making more or you couldn't deal with them making less?

Connie's silent... but never at a loss for words:

CONNIE

I feel like some men, the ones I've met, don't want to do better. Y'all want us to prove how much we love you by ACCEPTING your WORST. And that's what I refuse to do.

DEXTER

You shouldn't. The older I get the less I care about all the bells and whistles. I just want a woman on the same page as me.

CONNIE

Well that's what I want. And my page has a house, a car, a...

(pauses)

And what do you mean by 'the older you get'?

She chuckles.

DEXTER

Despite what society shows us, it's a lot of good guys out here. Case in point, I was dating a woman who fell on unfortunate times. Her and her children had to live in a shelter --

CONNIE

Oh, God. Are you a Capricorn?

DEXTER

(perplexed)

I am. But what's that--

CONNIE

You all think you're every woman's savior, like some superman wannabe's.

DEXTER

You finish hating? So we kicking it, hanging out on the weekends. Well I lost my job and she tells me she can't do this no more. She needs a man with more stability.

CONNIE

Aside from a hurt ego, I don't see your point?

He shoots her a look. Are you serious? Makes it plain --

DEXTER

She had a good man; she just thought she could do better.

CONNIE

(playful)

Maybe she thought you were just average.

DEXTER

Her 'TOO PARTICULAR' ass just missed out. It's crazy because y'all will fall in love with a 'sit on your couch all day loser' that ain't trying to better himself but a brother that's doing things but not where you want him to be life, able to fully take care of you and all -- gets shitted on.

CONNIE

You think you're an expert on women don't you?

DEXTER

Studied them my whole life. My mom, two sisters, a psycho sister-in-law. All completely different yet the exact same in a lot of ways. My mom refused to be with anyone that didn't have a car. At 58, guess who she's with now? No ONE.

CONNIE

So women should settle so they can be in a relationship?

DEXTER

I would want the best for my daughter if I had one. But... Okay, look... You're in business. You know people settle all the time. Settling isn't a bad thing. It's often encouraged by both parties. No one gets everything they want. Routinely, we act like the things that matter most are negotiable: time, communication, love, stuff like that should never come second place to beauty or money. So settle to be in a relationship? Yeah. But compromise your dignity, morals and standards to be in one? Definitely not!

INT. THE FOSTERS' BEDROOM - NIGHT

Cecil's sleep. Veronica's wearing nothing but a towel. Her shape is PERFECTION. She dries off.

VERONICA

I couldn't wait to get home. Everyone loved the bracelet. They were hating, just like I expected. You did the damn thing with this, baby.

She slips into bed -- naked, snuggles up to Cecil, kisses his neck... rubbing his chest... but still no response.

VERONICA

(in between kisses)

Baby... Cecil... let me give you the rest of your gift...

His cell phone rings. He pops up. Answers:

CECIL

Hello.

Veronica doesn't move. We can hear a female voice on the other line. Cecil exhales loudly.

VERONICA

(under her breath)

Oh, you trying it.

CECIL

Yeah...yeah... of course he can.

Veronica rolls her eyes and turns her back to him. Pissed.
Cecil hangs up.

VERONICA

What did she want? And why she
calling so late?

CECIL

She got evicted. Jefferson's gonna
be staying with us.

VERONICA

Til' she finds a place, right?

He shrugs. He doesn't know.

VERONICA (CONT'D)

You just need to file for custody.

CECIL

(brash)

You know damn well you don't want
my son living with us! So don't act
like you in my corner now.

Caught off-guard, Veronica's too shocked to say anything
back. A blank look settles in on her face.

INT. THE FOSTERS' BEDROOM - LATER

Backs to each other. Veronica tosses and turns but she's
careful to never turn completely around.

Cecil doesn't move at all. He's to his limit. Fed up. It
shows on his face.

INT. O'NEAL'S BEDROOM - RAINY NIGHT

Rain pounds the window. O'Neal lies awake in bed, staring out
into the night. Madison sleeps under his arm. O'Neal can't
help but to think about Sheree.

EXT. CONNIE'S PORCH - RAINY NIGHT

Specks of rain splashing through the mosquito screen and on
to Connie's face.

Connie's sheltered in Dexter's arms. Both are SLEEP and
Neither of them have a care in the world.

MONTAGE

PAY STUB:

119 hours worked.

Cecil shakes his head, and stuffs the stub in his pocket.

- Jefferson sits awaiting dinner. Veronica sits at the table and sets her plate in front of her, completely ignoring Jefferson, fiddling with her phone as she eats.

- Connie and Dexter walk through the supermarket. They get stares from Males and Females of various ages. Only Connie is uncomfortable.

- Griff is preaching. Debora sitting in the front row.

- Sheree empties all her liquor bottles into the toilet.

- Dexter and Kyle are on the couch playing video games, while Connie stares on from the kitchen as she cooks.

- Griff and Debora kneeled down in the living room, holding hands and praying.

- Sheree getting dressed. She's cleaned up. Less revealing -- more presentable.

INT. DR. MISHGELL'S OFFICE - DAY

Plaques and certificates are on the wall.

Seated in a chair is DR. MISHGELL; on the couch across from her is Connie. She stares into space as she talks.

CONNIE

... And then he was gone. I don't know what to make of it.

DR. MISHGELL

It appears you still blame yourself. As though you hold yourself responsible for his actions.

She does, and now she's trying to find the words to express how she feels.

Connie exhales. This hurts. Exposing her wounds...

CONNIE

Partly. I had never seen my father let us down. So when a man gave me his word, I swore by it. Looking back I see how stupid I was. You should trust no one that much. Being vulnerable played a major part. All my life I was wanted by attractive men. Then cancer came, my hair started falling out, and my skin was lightening, no one would even look my way. Then this gorgeous man just sweeps me off my feet. He doesn't care about how I look, he wasn't after my money, or some perverted creep that got off on chemo patients... he was a God fearing man who had my back.

(a beat, tears flow)

Night after night for six years, I'd lay in bed replaying our relationship over and over and over again. Trying to find signs -- signals... some sort of something. Anything... but there were no cracks in the wall he built around me.

DR. MISHGELL

You felt isolated?

CONNIE

Yes... but safe. Is that weird?

Dr. Mishgell shakes: no.

CONNIE

I yearned for the isolation. To be the only woman in his world. He made me feel comfortable relying on him. Never threw anything in my face. He took over where my daddy left off.

DR. MISHGELL

This fear of being let down is something we usually experience as children. This is why it becomes so hard to open ourselves up as adults, because the feeling is still very much pertinent in our existence.

(MORE)

But in your case, being that it happened at a terrifying point in your life, you became more susceptible to the heartache that attaches itself with this kind of disappointment.

CONNIE

Being surrounded by accomplished, handsome, well paid men -- most which are married -- doesn't help either. I see firsthand their double lives. They show up to events with their wives but sleep with the temps. That in part has caused me to build up a wall inside of the wall that he built.

An awkward silence. Dr. Mishgell listens. Waiting. Then:

DR. MISHGELL

In our previous session, you finally broached that you wanted Kyle to have a male role model in his life. A positive one. And that when you did make the acquaintance of someone that being a father figure is a mandatory must.

Connie exhales. Confused.

CONNIE

Truthfully, by the time I really liked someone enough to meet Kyle, I thought he'd be grown or almost finishing high school.

DR. MISHGELL

Are you that fond of Dexter?

Connie grins. Nods yes.

DR. MISHGELL

This wall you've built, is it becoming a prison? Are you secluding yourself in your own fears?

CONNIE

I don't know; you tell me.

DR. MISHGELL

You smile whenever I mention Dexter.

Connie smiles. Not purposely but she can't help it.

DR. MISHGELL (CONT'D)
How are things between you two?

CONNIE
Good but he's ten years younger than me. Sixteen years older than Kyle and they have more in common than we do.

DR. MISHGELL
That bothers you.

CONNIE
It does. We have fun -- don't get me wrong -- and he's like my best friend -- but we wouldn't pass a compatibility test.

DR. MISHGELL
You've mentioned wanting to try new things. Is that something you're still interested in?

CONNIE
Of course.

DR. MISHGELL
Then you two not having a lot in common is a great thing.

CONNIE
I don't see how.

DR. MISHGELL
He can introduce you to his world. Things that are out of the norm for you. New things.

Connie ponders this.

CONNIE
And maybe I can introduce him to things in my world and use that to kind of change the things about him that I don't like.

DR. MISHGELL
That's not what I meant, Ms. Trife.

INT. NEIMAN MARCUS - LOCKER ROOM - DAY

Veronica storms in. Angry. No mood to converse. She opens her locker, hangs her coat and pocketbook up. Pins her name tag on. Slams her locker shut. Storms by Blaine who can't quite place Veronica's face but knows it looks familiar.

INT. NEIMAN MARCUS - BATHROOM - LATE AFTERNOON

We hear crying, sniffing, heavy breathing, panting... The door swings open. LOUISE (60's), searches each stall. She finds Veronica sitting on a closed lid toilet. Bawling.

LOUISE

Darling, what's the -- come here.

VERONICA

(shaking her head)

Not now, Ms. Louise. I just want to be left alone. Please.

Louise listens. Doesn't press the issue. But then --

VERONICA

I HATE HIM!

INT. NEIMAN MARCUS - NIGHT

Store is closed. Veronica and Louise do the nightly routine: fold clothes and put them in the right place.

VERONICA

And I know it sounds selfish but that child of his...

LOUISE

Is he disrespectful?

VERONICA

I can't stand him. He irks my nerves. He needs to be with his mother. Things were rocky when he came but now they're crumbling.

LOUISE

Is the child the issue?

VERONICA

He's my main issue.

LOUISE

Why were you two rocky before his son moved in?

VERONICA

Basically he mismanaged money and spent our mortgage on a bracelet for valentines day. He had the nerve to ask for it back. What kind of man does that? I refused. To this day he's still holding that against me. It's been months. Then he moves his son in there without even talking it over with me. I'm just done. I'm so over it, Ms. Louise.

LOUISE

This is your marriage. Be careful what you speak out your mouth. I know you're frustrated and unhappy but days like this come.

Louise holds her left hand up. Wiggles her ring finger.

LOUISE

Thirty-two years. I've been there. Right where you are. Commitment can be harder than childbirth.

VERONICA

I want no parts of that man.

EXT. MALL PARKING LOT - NIGHT

Veronica throws some Neiman Marcus bags in the backseat of her car and hops in the front.

VERONICA'S CAR - CONTINUOUS

She turns the key but it won't crank. She tries a few more times... same result.

...MOMENTS LATER...

VERONICA

(on the phone)

Yes... ETA... Oh, boy. I don't have 90 minutes... what do I pay y'all for...? Whatever, just hurry...

She ends the call, looks at her cell phone. 12% left on the battery. She debates making a call...

INT. THE FOSTERS' BEDROOM - NIGHT

Cecil and Jefferson sit against the headboard.

JEFFERSON

Dad, there's this girl at my school... man she's fine.

CECIL

Oh yeah?

JEFFERSON

Yeah. All the boys like her but she only talk to me. I think she likes me but I don't know. She's pretty high-maintenance.

CECIL

RUN! Go the other way. Trust ya dad.

Cecil grabs his phone. Starts to text...

INT/EXT. VERONICA'S CAR/MALL PARKING LOT - NIGHT

Bright headlights blind Veronica's eyes.

It's not a tow truck. It's a 2016 Porsche Truck.

TYLER exits the truck. He's tall, well groomed, handsome and with all the apparent signs of wealth. He knows he can have any woman he wants so he often behaves as such.

TYLER

(assertive)

Pop that thing, V.

VERONICA

Excuse me?!?

TYLER

The hood.

Tyler walks to the hood.

TYLER (CONT'D)

But don't act like you wouldn't have popped that other thang if I had said to.

She rolls her eyes.

VERONICA
Can I charge my phone in your car?

He lifts the hood.

TYLER
You just wanna check out my ride.

VERONICA
I've been in better.

TYLER
(re: her car,
sarcastically)
Clearly. You still with country
boy?

VERONICA
New Jersey is not the country.

He catches a look at her wedding ring.

TYLER
Looking at that LITTLE ROCK, I
would of thought he was from
Arkansas.

Veronica hides her hand.

TYLER
Don't hide it. I couldn't see it
anyway.

He laughs.

A SHORT WHILE LATER

Tyler closes the hood.

TYLER
That should do it. Now get behind
the stick.

Veronica rolls her eyes at the comment.
She gets in the car, cranks it, starts up fine.
He shuts the hood; she steps out.

VERONICA
Thank you. I guess I owe you, huh?

TYLER

Stop. You know I'd do anything for you. That's why you called.

He pulls her close. She pulls back some. He pulls her back in. Holds her tight.

VERONICA

No, Tyler. Not that kind of party.

TYLER

You don't look happy. Just a hug.

His eyes say more.

VERONICA

Let me pay you.

TYLER

You can't even afford a new car. So you sure as hell can't pay me for my time.

VERONICA

Name your price.

He thinks. A devilish grin comes over his face.

INT. GRIFF'S CAR - AFTERNOON

Griff mans the wheel. Debora rides shotgun.

DEBORA

Slow down. What's the rush?

GRIFF

I want to catch the game.

INT. HOOTERS RESTAURANT - AFTERNOON

Griff, dressed in his Sundays best, is too into the game and his chicken wings to notice Debora has yet to touch the food. He's screaming, on the edge of his seat.

Debora might as well be invisible. Surprisingly, she doesn't seem to mind. She's thrilled to see him act out the box; however, she's slightly uncomfortable with the half naked women taking orders.

LATER

Game's over. Debora now has his attention. Occasionally he glances over her shoulder at the screen.

DEBORA
So pastor likes Hooters and sports?

GRIFF
All men should.

DEBORA
Did your team win?

GRIFF
Nah, they're scrubs, but I love them anyway. I'm a loyal guy.

DEBORA
You feel comfortable in a place like this?

GRIFF
I'm comfortable anywhere, as long as I'm in my skin.

DEBORA
But look...

GRIFF
(smiles)
I enjoy my life. What everyone else does, is not my concern. A couple of the young women here attend the church. Great, respectable young ladies. Tithers too. Best chicken in town, too.

She shrugs. Griff stares at the plate, a little embarrassed.

GRIFF
You didn't eat?

She shakes her head: no.

GRIFF (CONT'D)
Aww, baby I'm sorry.

He kisses her hand, leaving hot sauce stains shaped like his lips on her hands.

DEBORA
You preached today, you hear me? It was...

She continues talking... We focus in on Griff's LAUGHING.

Debora thinks he's laughing at what she's saying but it quickly registers to her that the TV has his attention --

DEBORA
... Griff.

GRIFF
(staring at TV)
I'm sorry baby, this guy A FOOL.
Check him out.

Debora turns towards the TV. Lo and behold:
James on THE ROUND-UP -- a sports highlight show.
Debora nearly falls off her stool.

INT. GRIFF'S CAR - NIGHT

Griff focuses on the road. Debora seems to have something weighing on her mind. Griff glances over, holds her hand.

INT. DEBORA'S BEDROOM - NIGHT

Debora scopes through a photo book. She is brought to tears by the photos of Sheree in High School.

She scans through another box and pulls out:
diplomas, awards for OUTSTANDING ACHIEVEMENT...
report cards with all A's... her valedictorian award.

She comes across a baby picture of Sheree.
She flips the picture over.
It says: *Mommy's bundle of joy at 6 months.*

INT. NEIMAN MARCUS - DAY

Connie's in the dressing room. Dexter's squatted in a chair.

In his view: Veronica and Tyler exiting the store hand in hand. As he rises to get a clearer look --

CONNIE (O.S.)
What do you think?

He turns... Connie is in a beautiful white dress that's only suitable for a ball. She doesn't have his full attention. He's more focused on Veronica and Tyler.

DEXTER
 You look great but where would you
 wear it?

CONNIE
 Maybe you can take me somewhere
 that doesn't allow jeans or
 sneakers.

EXT. MOVIE THEATER - NIGHT

Standing on the long line amongst a younger crowd, Connie and
 Dexter garner stares from everyone. It makes her
 uncomfortable but he feels proud.

DEXTER
 Something told me to pre-order the
 tickets.

We focus in (maybe slow motion) on the YOUNGER AGED GIRLS
 eyes that glance at Connie, then Dexter, THEN BACK AT Connie.

CONNIE
 It's not too late to go see "Where
 my heart belongs." No line for
 that.

DEXTER
 Next time. You promised --

She holds up her hand. Stops him mid sentence.

CONNIE
 I know, I know...

Up ahead: Bart locks eyes on Connie as he struts into the
 theater. She tries to turn her head before he can notice but
 she's too late. He stares at Dexter, trying to place the
 face.

DEXTER
 What's wrong?

She shakes her head. He can tell somethings up.
 He kisses her neck. No response.

DEXTER
 Connie. You mad?

CONNIE
 It doesn't bother you that people
 stare at us wherever we go?

DEXTER
Hell no. As fine as you are.

This puts a reassuring smile on her face. But then, like most men do, he says something stupid:

DEXTER
You know I love your old ass.

Connie storms off the line. Dexter goes after her.

DEXTER
Baby. BABY. It was a joke!

INT. CONNIE'S CAR - NIGHT

Dexter drives; Connie is shotgun. It's getting heated.

DEXTER
First, the way I dress. Now the movies I pick. Get a real problem, Connie.

CONNIE
It's not the movie, it's your ignorant comments. The way you dress is fine -- sometimes... But must you wear jeans and sneakers everywhere?! It's okay to look like a GROWN UP!

She regrets that the moment it leaves her lips...
A thick silence.

DEXTER
Sorry, I like to be comfortable.

CONNIE
I'm sorry... I didn't mean that.
Not in that way.

DEXTER
I don't complain about your heels and furs that you wear EVERYWHERE we go. Who wears heels to go indoor rock climbing? A mink to go bowling?

CONNIE
If you could afford it you would do wear it, too!

Dexter pulls over. Tense. Turns to her.

DEXTER
What's ya' problem?

CONNIE
What's yours?

DEXTER
Connie, listen, I don't want to argue. But I WON'T let you disrespect me no more.

CONNIE
(correcting him)
Anymore. And every thing that I said was the truth. Was it not?

DEXTER
If that's how you see me then why you with me?

Connie stares straight ahead. No response.
A few seconds of silence...

CONNIE
Do you wanna be with me?

Silence.

DEXTER
DO YOU WANNA BE WITH M--

CONNIE
Just drive please!

Dexter is in disbelief. He turns the car off, gets out.
Slams the door behind him.

Through the windshield, Connie POV:
Dexter strolling down the dark highway.

INT. CONNIE'S BEDROOM - NIGHT

A frustrated Connie doodles on her yellow notepad.
Kyle enters, hops on her bed.

KYLE
Uh-oh, what's wrong, Mom?

CONNIE
I'm fine.

KYLE
 (re: notepad)
 You're never fine when that thing
 is out.

CONNIE
 Grown up problems, Kyle.

KYLE
 Like what? Tell me.

CONNIE
 Nothing you need to be concerned
 about.

KYLE
 You're my mother. Of course I'm
 going to be concerned.

A half smile overtakes her face. A beat.

KYLE
 Would you rather me guess--

CONNIE
 I'd rather you mind your business.

KYLE (CONT'D)
 Ummm... Dexter looks younger than
 you and doesn't do things the way
 you want so you are looking for a
 reason to stop talking to him.

Connie's blown away but doesn't show it.

KYLE
 And even though you really like
 him, you're--

He stops mid sentence. Disappointed. Connie eyeballs him.
 Waiting on him to finish. He gives her a kiss and rolls off
 the bed. Mopes out.

KYLE
 You're right, these are grown up
 problems.

CONNIE
 Where you going?

KYLE
 (sad)
 To bed. I've got a long day
 tomorrow.

INT. THE FOSTERS' BEDROOM - NIGHT

Cecil lies in bed, TV off, with the sheets pulled back, making space for Veronica. She enters and lies beside him.

CECIL

Come here, girl. Lookin' all sexy.

Veronica flashes a fake smile; scoots over a little, but really not in the mood.

He smothers her neck with kisses. Reaches for her breast but she shields them with her arm.

CECIL

Did I tell you how proud I am of you? You really been doing good with money. I haven't had to work overtime in weeks.

He reaches for her breast again. No success. He rolls her on to her side and mounts her. He tries to kiss her lips but she turns her face.

VERONICA

I'm tired.

CECIL

Too tired to kiss me?

She rolls her eyes and gives him a quick peck on the lips. Cecil squints at her in disbelief.

VERONICA

I don't want to be touched. I'm just not in the mood.

He gets off of her.

CECIL

You been saying that every night. Wzup?

VERONICA

Stressed.

CECIL

How? From what?

VERONICA

Really?

CECIL

Yeah, really. I pay bills, clean, provide a lifestyle so all you have to do is work if you choose. What more is there?

She faces him. Appalled.

VERONICA

You just don't get it. I don't want to work! I'm a woman. I want to be spoiled and treated right! Ugh.

CECIL

So what you saying? I don't do enough? I ain't a good provider?

VERONICA

I'm your wife. You should go above and beyond. You go above and beyond for YOUR son so you should be willing to the same for your wife.

Those words sting him.

CECIL

What? Where is this venom coming from? I swore we were in a better place.

VERONICA

Oh, now your lost? How can I give you children if you don't even do enough for me now? UGH!!

INT. THE FOSTERS' HOUSE - MORNING

Veronica is on her way out when she spots a bag on the door.

She pulls a box out the bag. Lays it on the kitchen counter. Opens it. It's a dress identical to the one she purchased and tried to return back to Neiman Marcus. She does a little dance. Exuberant.

She can hardly contain herself until she looks at the label... it looks like the PRADA, feels like the PRADA but it's not the PRADA. PISSED! She tosses it in the garbage.

INT. MANSION - KITCHEN - NIGHT

Tons of unpacked boxes are stacked and scattered throughout. We can hear a phone ringing in the distance.

On the counter a cell phone displays: 17 missed calls.

When the ringing stops, we hear passionate -- airy -- lustful groans...

AHHHHHHHH! Someone just had the orgasm of their life.

Tyler rises from behind the center island. Sweaty. Shirtless. Passion marks on his neck...

Veronica emerges, wearing just a bra. Catching her breath. He heads out. She grabs her phone.

TYLER (O.S.)

I thought you handled that? Don't he think you doing inventory?

VERONICA

He don't listen.

(looks at her phone)

Damn! 17, Cecil. Can I get a breath?!

Tyler's back with two bottles of water. He places them on the counter and opens them.

TYLER

(drinking)

What he want?

VERONICA

Probably what you just got.

He's finish the first bottle. She reaches for the second. He snatches it first. Downs it.

VERONICA

Well damn. Can a sister get a bottle?

TYLER

(finished)

My bad. I get real thirsty after a workout like that.

He goes to the faucet and fills up the empty bottle. Holds it out for her to take. She reluctantly does so.

Veronica calls her machine. Turns on the speaker phone.

CECIL (V.O.)

Veronica, call me back. It's important.

She deletes the message with much attitude.

MACHINE (V.O.)
Message deleted. New message.

CECIL (V.O.)
(sad)
Veronica, baby where are you? I need you. Where are you?! I called the house -- you're not there... called your job... it's important. Call me.

She presses a button.

MACHINE (V.O.)
Message deleted. New message.

Lots of noise. Sounds like a hallway full of teenagers--

TYLER (O.S.)
Aww, Damn!!! Veronica.

MACHINE (V.O.)
Last message.

Cecil speaks so softly that it's inaudible under his whimpering.

INT. O'NEAL'S LIVING ROOM - NIGHT

A KNOCK at the door. O'Neal opens.
Sheree breezes by him and plops on the couch.

SHEREE
You missed me?

O'NEAL
I thought I made myself clear. And how'd you get in the building?

SHEREE
Didn't come to start trouble. And don't act like you haven't missed me. Just want to say thank you and let you know for these last few months I've been on the straight and narrow.

O'Neal takes a seat.

O'NEAL
That's good news.

SHEREE

Yup. I found a job. Can you believe it?

O'NEAL

Finally decided to put that degree to work?

SHEREE

Not really. I'm a counselor. A "big sister" so to say. Just another step to a better me, while helping someone else become a better them. It's a win-win.

O'NEAL

It's a lot of lives at stake Sheree. You sure you ready for this?

SHEREE

Oh, here we go, doubtin' Doug. I'm doing fine. And my supervisor is very impressed thus far.

Sheree glances at the coffee table where there's a black ring box.

SHEREE

Wait. Is that what I think it is?

O'NEAL

(grabs it)

Yes. You should probably go.

She's not letting up with this ring issue...

SHEREE

Are you for real?!

O'NEAL

(nodding)

I'm going to make her my wife.

This burns Sheree up on the inside. She does her best to hide it but her best isn't good enough.

O'NEAL

So, I'm glad to see you're doing well. Thanks for stopping by. And as you can see

(re: ring)

you can no longer just pop up whenever you want.

She stands. He follows her to the door.

SHEREE

You said we'd always be friends.

O'NEAL

That was when I still had hope for us. I don't have that hope anymore.

Every word is cutting her even deeper. A beat.

O'NEAL

Take care, Sheree.

INT. O'NEAL'S BEDROOM - LATER

O'Neal, shirtless, lies in bed, staring at the ceiling. Stressed. Nervous. Battling regrets. He stares at the ring box, examining it.

INT. THE FOSTERS' BEDROOM - MORNING

The sunlight peeks through the blinds.

Veronica wakes up. She notices she's in the center of the bed. Alone. She snatches her cell, more missed calls from Cecil.

Cecil's name flashes on her phone -- an incoming call. The phone is on silent. She answers.

VERONICA

Hello (listens)... Oh, my God.

CUT TO:

EXT. CEMETERY - GRAVESITE - DAY

The camera pans across the casket.

GRIFF (O.S.)

Heavenly Father, we thank you for revealing to us what lies beyond death, for giving to us the Holy Scriptures, for authenticating them through many wonderful evidences and making them sure through the incontrovertible evidence of the Lord Jesus Christ's resurrection...

In the front line we see:
 Cecil, off balance and weak, crying on Veronica's shoulder.
 She's wearing shades and wiping tears from her cheeks.

ERICA, Jefferson's mother, cries hysterically.

 GRIFF (CONT'D)

 ... May we also recognize and rest
 in the promise of Scripture that
 Young Jefferson is resting in the
 Lords arms. Precious in the sight
 of the Lord Jesus Christ is the
 death of His saints and that death
 for the believer is a going home, a
 relief from the pain and sorrows of
 this life. May the family cast
 their cares upon you with the
 ability that is needed to focus on
 what death means to our beloved
 friend who is now with you. We ask
 that you would comfort and
 strengthen in the days ahead.

INT. THE FOSTERS' HOUSE - DAY

We're at the repast. Pictures of Jefferson adorn the wall.
 Family and Friends eat. The TV plays an episode of MARTIN.
 Everyone's trying to make best of the situation.

INT. THE FOSTERS' KITCHEN - DAY

Dexter and Cecil -- both sad -- stand there in an awkward
 silence.

 VERONICA (O.S.)

Excuse me.

Veronica skirts by Dexter, rolling her eyes in the process.
 There's tension between these two. Dexter gives Cecil a hug.

 DEXTER

I love you, bro. And I'm sorry.

INT. THE FOSTERS' HOUSE - NIGHT

The last of the GUEST are clearing out.

KITCHEN

Out of Cecil's view, Veronica and Dexter are having a heated exchange. They talk in a strong hushed tone.

DEXTER

It is what it looked like and it looked wrong!

VERONICA

Don't come in here trying to start shit.

DEXTER

I won't let you do my brother like that.

VERONICA

Y'all not coochie crunch. Don't act like y'all are the best of friends.

DEXTER

We ironed out our issues!

VERONICA

Keep your voice down! My husband is mourning. He don't need to hear this.

DEXTER

Where were you when Cecil was calling you the night Jefferson died, huh? 'Cause you sure as hell wasn't answering the phone. You sure as hell wasn't at work.

VERONICA

Stay out my damn business.

DEXTER

I told him he shouldn't of married you. Everyone here did.

VERONICA

Jealous bastard.

INT. THE FOSTERS' TOWNHOUSE - JEFFERSON'S BEDROOM - NIGHT

The bed is made; it's spic-and-span clean. This was Jefferson's room.

Cecil is mourning. Sitting on the edge of the bed. Veronica enters, sits beside him. He rests his head on her breast.

CECIL

I can't believe he's not here. The perfect kid -- my only child is gone and all that drunk driving bastard gets is 15 years in prison. He'll see his children again. I won't.

A beat. She's giving him time to say all that's on his mind.

VERONICA

You are such a strong man Cecil. We'll get through this, baby. We will. And I'm sorry. For everything. We have each other, and God and all the great memories of Jefferson. We'll pull through, baby. I know we will.

She lifts his head... leans in for a kiss... then another... Her lips taking over him until they get lost in each other.

INT. THE FOSTERS' BATHROOM - MORNING

Veronica, in the mirror, dolling up her face with eyeliner. She reaches in her purse and a box of the morning after pill falls to the floor.

She rest her eyeliner on the sink and picks up the box. Almost falls to her knees when she recognizes what it is. Her mouth hangs open.

INT. DEBORA'S LIVING ROOM - MORNING

The bell rings. Debora heads to the door, opens it. It's a DELIVERY GUY holding a bouquet of flowers.

DELIVERY GUY

Debora Sims?

DEBORA

Yes.

He passes her the flowers.

DEBORA

They're beautiful.

DELIVERY GUY
Have a good day ma'am.

KITCHEN - MOMENTS LATER

She places them in the center of her island. She grabs her phone and makes a phone call. Leaving a message:

DEBORA
Hey Griff, thank you honey for the flowers. Anemones and Amaryllis are my favorites. That was so thoughtful. Just give me a call when you get this. Bye.

She hangs up. We hear a door close. The sound of footsteps grow louder. Closer...

SHEREE (O.S.)
I knew you'd take him back.

DEBORA
(excited)
Sheree! Baby. Thought you forgot where I lived.

SHEREE
I always remember where I'm not welcomed.

DEBORA
And these are from Griff. He's out of town preaching at a Male empowerment conference. If I had a way to reach you, I'd invite you over for dinner when he returns.

SHEREE
How long before you move this one into my Daddy's house?

DEBORA
He has his own Sheree. He's a mighty fine man. Damn near everything I asked God for.

SHEREE
How many times have I heard that line from you?

DEBORA
 Honey, what's wrong?
 (no response)
 You look nice.

Debora takes food from the freezer.

DEBORA (CONT'D)
 Some of the ladies from church are
 coming over. You should stay.
 Something's different about you,
 Sheree. What's new?

SHEREE
 A lot, mama.

INT. KITCHEN - LATER

They're sweating bullets. Water's boiling... foods in the
 oven. Both ladies wearing an apron. Debora mixes cake mix
 while Sheree sets the table.

SHEREE
 And most importantly, I stopped
 drinking. Four months now.

Debora's eyes begin to water. Touched. Happy.

DEBORA
 God's just been answering all my
 prayers.

SHEREE
 I have some, too, that... that need
 to be answered.

DEBORA
 He will do it. I promise. If it's
 in his will then it will be done.

SHEREE
 O'neal's getting married.

DEBORA
 Well good for --

She catches the look on Sheree's face. Freezes.

DEBORA
 Are you serious?

SHEREE

A part of me wants to be happy for him but I can't be. I'm still so in love with him.

DEBORA

Does he know that?

SHEREE

(shrugs)

He has to.

INT. DR. MISHGELL'S OFFICE - LATE AFTERNOON

Veronica and Cecil rest hand in hand on the couch. Dr. Mishgell, their therapist, listens.

DR. MISHGELL

Communication is known to close the gaps. Despite differences, it brings unity.

Cecil nods.

VERONICA

I feel like -- and I speak for both of us -- we're even closer now. We talk more, express feelings --

CECIL

(playful)

That's not something you ever had a problem with.

VERONICA

Well I do it more respectfully.

CECIL

Doc, I will admit that she'll let things die down some before she goes rambling off. She hasn't quite mastered the art of "shutting the hell up" but I do look forward to coming home.

DR. MISHGELL

An immense improvement.

CECIL

I agree. We're taking it day by day. I'm confident.

LATER

This productive session is over. Cecil heads out the door first; Veronica follows leisurely.

CECIL

Stay inside. I'll bring the car around.

Veronica can't hold back her smile.

We hear the main door close behind Cecil. Veronica's mood instantly changes. She exhales. It's like an elephant has been lifted off her. She stares at Dr. Mishgell; fighting her tears.

VERONICA

I'm pregnant.

DR. MISHGELL

Congratulations.

VERONICA

No. I'm pregnant.

Dr. Mishgell, reading her body language:

DR. MISHGELL

Oh. I understand.

VERONICA

I don't know how to tell him.

DR. MISHGELL

With the improvements both of you are making and with the void that was left when Jefferson passed, it may--

VERONICA

Not be his.

INT. DEBORA'S LIVING ROOM - NIGHT

Twelve or so of well-dressed and powerful women in ministry yak it up.

A sweet melodious tune plays -- it's the doorbell.

Sheree opens the door -- there before her is LADY PRICE (late fifties), a self-centered, brash woman with no filter.

LADY PRICE
Hiiiiii. And you would be?

SHEREE
Come in. I'm Sheree. Debora's
daughter--

LADY PRICE
(as she steps in)
Oh, my God, you're so beautiful.
Nothing like your mama made you
seem. Thank God we don't look like
what we been through, right? I'll
keep my coat with me, in case
you're still battling with some of
your 'old ways'. I'm First Lady
Price. The Bishops Wife.

INT. KITCHEN - CONTINUOUS

Debora yanks some finger foods out the oven. Lady Price
sashays in. Sheree follows.

As Debora goes to hug her, Lady Price holds her palm out as
if to say "that's not necessary".

LADY PRICE
Bathroom?

DEBORA
Upstairs on your left.

LADY PRICE
You only have one? Hmm, I'll hold
it.

A gray haired woman we'll call WILDA, walks into the frame.

WILDA
(to Debora)
If you don't hurry you're going to
miss your man preaching.

LADY PRICE
The Bishop use to preach these
services all across the world. This
is Griff's first one?

DEBORA
Yes. He's excited. God really gave
him a heart for men.

Lady Price walks out the room while she's talking.

LIVING ROOM - CONTINUOUS

The group of WOMEN focus on the TV.

TV SPEAKER (V.O.)
 ...Our speaker of the hour Pastor
 Griff Martin! Come on Ambassadors
 of Christ! Let's hear it for him.

DEBORA
 Come on Baby!!

Lady Price rolls her eyes.

LADY PRICE
 I don't know why they didn't call
the Bishop up first.

INT. CHURCH - LATER

Griff, preaching to a congregation full of MEN.

Dexter plays an inviting melody on the piano, adding a
 perfect backdrop.

GRIFF
 ... And I tell you, God can heal
 and deliver you from anything.

There is an applause, some "Amens" -- the usuals.

GRIFF (CONT'D)
 There are men in here now that have
 been delivered from drugs. God's
 healed some from alcohol, cancer...
 there's nothing too hard for my
 GOD!! I'm a Witness. NOTHING!
 (more applause)
 If you need healing, deliverance,
 no matter what it is, make your way
 to the alter.

A school of MEN make their way to the front -- hands raised
 and eyes closed.

GRIFF (CONT'D)
 Come on, come on. There are more in
 here. Don't be ashamed. No matter
 what it is. God knows. Don't let
 strongholds hinder you from your
 blessing. Be free in the name of
 Jesus.

Griff signals Dexter to bring it down some. A beat...

GRIFF

Listen. Before you, stands a man
that has been flawed for years.
I've had battles. I wasn't always
what you see now. The deliverance I
preach about I've also experienced.
For years I was homosexual.

A group of 'Gasps' -- even from the pulpit.

BISHOP PRICE (who is sitting in the pulpit) turns to a fellow
PREACHER. We read Bishop's lips say: '*WHAT THE FUCK?*'

GRIFF

I'm not ashamed to say the blood of
Jesus delivered me.

In the congregation: EVERY MOUTH hangs open. Those at the
alter make their way back to their seats and a few even leave
out the sanctuary.

DEBORA'S LIVING ROOM - SAME

Debora and the rest of the ladies watch with their mouths
hung open. Everyone's shocked except Lady Price who wears the
"I knew it" face.

LADY PRICE

He's got a heart for men alright.

CHURCH - SAME

GRIFF

...It was a battle. I've been in
love with a man. I was gone. All
the way gone, but God delivered me.
He changed me and turned me into
the person I was created to be...

Debora runs upstairs. Humiliated.

INT. DEBORA'S BEDROOM - LATER THAT NIGHT

Sheree creeps in and finds her mother sitting against the
headboard -- still disturbed -- not blinking. The news
playing...

NEWS ANCHOR (V.O.)
 World renown Pastor Griff Martin
 comes out the closet as a
 homosexual --

Sheree flips the TV off.

She pulls back the covers, fluffs the pillows and tucks
 Debora in. Sheree kisses her on the forehead, turns on the
 night light and places her Bible next to her.

INT. CHURCH - AFTERNOON

The Sanctuary is damn near empty.

Tony sits front row, cheering the pastor on. Scattered
 throughout the sanctuary are homosexual singles and couples,
 some ride or die old folks, and couple of spectators that are
 there just to watch the drama unfold.

INT. CHURCH - GRIFF'S OFFICE - AFTER SERVICE

Griff steps in. Sulked. BERNADETTE, his secretary, waits for
 him.

GRIFF
 She call, Bernadette?

BERNADETTE
 (avoids eye contact)
 No pastor.
 (a beat)
 These are the numbers from today's
 offering.

Hands him a sheet of paper that puts him in a worse mood.

BERNADETTE
 The past six weeks we've been
 really low. Accountant says we may
 have to make some cutbacks.

INT. PEDIATRICIAN OFFICE - DAY

DR. BRADSHAW, their pediatrician, is behind his desk.
 Veronica sits across from him.

DR. BRADSHAW
 Well, the baby's healthy. We're
 going to give you prenatal pills
 and some vitamins. How's your diet?

VERONICA
I haven't had many cravings, yet.

DR. BRADSHAW
Low acid. None is better.

Dr. Bradshaw searches through a manila folder.

DR. BRADSHAW
Do you or Cecil have sickle cell?

VERONICA
(clutches her stomach)
No. Not that I know of. Definitely not on my side. But my husband has all types of things on his side. Them folks jacked up.

DR. BRADSHAW
Okay. It's nothing to worry about. There are some signs of the SCT. Nothing too serious. Just ask Cecil about it.

INT. THE FOSTERS' BEDROOM - DAY

Cecil has a bunch of baby clothes laid out on the bed.

CECIL
Baby, look. What ya' think?

A groggy Veronica pops her head up from under the covers.

VERONICA
It's too early.

CECIL
You're ten weeks. Baby'll be here before you know it.

She tucks her head back under the sheets.

INT. NEIMAN MARCUS - FRAGRANCE DEPARTMENT - DAY

Veronica squats in a chair behind a glass case. Inhaling the smell of coffee beans. Through the corner of her eye she notices a familiar face. She cranes back -- trying to go unnoticed. A minimal effort at best.

TYLER
Get ya' ass up.

She rolls her eyes. Doesn't want to be bothered. Stands.

VERONICA
How may help you?

TYLER
Why you change your number?

VERONICA
We're done. I told you that.

TYLER
I know. We been done. We can still
fuck tho'.

She rolls her eyes.

TYLER
Not good customer service. So you
trying to walk the straight and
narrow, huh? Be a good wifey.

VERONICA
Please go.

TYLER
You can't be a good friend no more?
You coulda checked on me; seen how
I was doing. I been laid up in the
hospital the past few weeks.

VERONICA
You look fine to me.

TYLER
I know that. It's gon' take more
than sickle to change these good
looks baby.

A moment of unnatural silence before... she breaks out from
behind the counter.

INT. THE FOSTERS' LIVING ROOM - DAY

Veronica peels in to find Cecil on the couch. Stoned face.
Before him sits a bottle of gin, a shot glass, and a open
laptop. He throws a shot back.

Veronica approaches cautiously. Aware that this can get ugly.
But she senses something's different. He watches her like a
lion would a lamb.

She stops at a safe distance. Opens her mouth --

WHEEEWMMMMM. A bottle comes flying at her head with the speed of a bullet. She dodges it by inches. It shatters somewhere behind her. Too shocked to move.

CECIL

You no good. Dirty. Ass. Bitch!

Cecil's drunk. He staggers slowly. Backs her into a wall.

VERONICA

(nervous)

You're drunk? Baby, sit down. Let's talk.

CECIL

You sit your ass -- better yet, lay ya' ass down!! That's what you're good at. You slut! You know how much I loved you. YOU KNOW HOW MUCH I LOVED YOU VERONICA! I'm grieving; you out there screwing! Urgghhhhh!!

VERONICA

(crying)

Cecil just calm down, please. I'm sorry. I'M SO SORRY. Baby I didn't want to --

CECIL

Who is it? Who?!

VERONICA

Cecil please. Please just sit down.

CECIL

Just shut the HELL UP! Whose baby are you carrying, Veronica?

She cries hysterically... Cecil knows who it is.

Cecil punches through the wall. Purposely missing her face. But it's enough to scare her.

CECIL

Him? It's his!? You told me --
WHERE IS HE?

VERONICA

(a beat)

I don't know. I cut him off. I been cut him off. We stopped talking months ago.

CECIL

Nah, don't do that. We know you'd suck at being a single mother. Nahhhhh. You need somewhere to live. Ya' cheating ass can't live here. Who else knows? Who else?!

ARGGHHh!!! A loud yell of frustration, disappointment and shame. He can't believe this is happening.

Veronica's in tears. Hyperventilating but he couldn't care less at this point.

VERONICA

Please stop.

She plays the only card she has left -- clutches her belly...

VERONICA (CONT'D)

Please. For the baby's sake.

CECIL

Everybody told me not to marry you. I turned my back on my brother -- my own flesh and blood! For you! A TRAMP!

He puts his finger in her face.

CECIL

You got an hour. When I get back, be gone. Pack your shit.

He stares at her. Loathing the day he met her.

THPPPP! A wad of spit landing on Veronica's face. Cecil grabs his liquor and heads out.

Veronica's left on the floor, crouched, crying as her arm is wrapped around her stomach.

INT. CONNIE'S OFFICE - DAY

Connie reads through a brochure. Tony peeks his head in.

TONY

Ms. Trife, is this a bad time?

She waves him in; he closes the door behind him.

CONNIE

What is it?

TONY

Ms. Trife, I always stay out of your business but I need --

CONNIE

Don't overstep your bounds.

TONY

With all due respect, I may...

Now he has her full attention. She sets the brochure to the side.

TONY

For seven years I've watched you grow and become what you are today. I've seen you at your low points and admire the way you bounced back and how you dominate things in this chauvinistic office. But that has to stop. You can't be the boss all the time. You can't run things in a relationship. You've been in some f'd up situations but Dexter isn't that guy. You would say all the time "I want a good man," and you'd laugh when I'd say "no you don't," but look. You said that the next great man you met would be the happiest man in the world. Right?

CONNIE

That was years ago.

TONY

But what doesn't Connie do? Break her word right? Cause her words did things that her actions were too lazy to do.

CONNIE

I know what you're getting at.

TONY

Then why are you so comfortable like this? Alone, unhappy...

CONNIE

I have a business to run. Bosses to please. There's no time in my life to look after another child.

TONY

He's not a child.

CONNIE

Why are you advocating so hard?

TONY

Because he's a good guy! And he loves you. And I know you. Beneath all this power, you're still a woman at heart. You still want things money and power can't buy.

She's fed up with hearing the truth. Too hard to swallow.

CONNIE

Let yourself out. Thank you.

Tony stares at her. Feeling sorry for her.

TONY

No good man is perfect, Ms. Trife. Not even the one God sends.

Tony leaves, but before the door can fully close, she's in a sea of tears. Disappointed with herself; looking to the sky.

EXT. STREET - NIGHT

Dark as hell.

Just as Sheree unlocks her car doors, she's yoked up from behind and shoved into (not inside) the car.

Sheree's terrified face.

MALE (O.S.)

Thought I wouldn't find you? You can't hide bitch! You owe me. And if I don't get my money, them little kids you mentor gonna get what you deserve. I want my money, bitch! Or your ass is mine AGAIN!

He turns her to face him --

CEAZER. A scruffy hoodlum that you don't want problems with, slaps her sending her falling to the ground. Disheveled. He kneels down -- staring her in the eyes.

CEAZER

I want what's mine, Sheree. Remember what I said.

EXT. GYM - NIGHT

O'Neal saunters out, gym bag strapped across his shoulder. He's a few paces away from the gym when Sheree grabs his hand. He turns -- in his instincts -- ready to strike --

INT. CAR - CONTINUOUS

O'Neal drives. Sheree sitting shotgun.

SHEREE

I don't want you to judge me. Just help me. I don't have anyone else.

O'NEAL

Your mama.

SHEREE

O'neal...

O'NEAL

I can't help you. Where am I going to get ten thousand dollars from?

SHEREE

I'm working, I'll pay you back. With interest.

(a beat)

Do you still love me?

(no response)

You would do it for her.

O'NEAL

Damn right.

SHEREE

So then it should be no difference.

O'Neal pulls over.

O'NEAL

Get out!

SHEREE

What?

O'NEAL

I'm not letting you do this to me. Not again.

SHEREE

Look at these bruises. Look at my neck. My cheeks. Does it look like I'm trying to hustle you? I swear I'm not.

O'NEAL

Chance after chance. Time after time, you do the same thing. You leave me -- I take you back. You gave me syphilis -- I took you back. You couldn't pay your rent, who you call? Me. Not the sucker you left me for -- the man that beat the shit out of you. The one that pimped you out. I went above and beyond and never threw that stuff in your face. NEVER! All I did was love you. And you know where I messed up at? I loved you when you didn't love yourself. So I'm done. All you did was shit on me.

Tears fall from Sheree's face.

O'NEAL (CONT'D)

You chose that life. You got turned out and strung out. Deal with the problems that come along with it.

He presses the unlock switch -- stares straight ahead. Sheree turns to him -- her eyes pleading but his heart is cold and his mind is made up.

Sheree gets out slowly, hoping he'll change his mind. Once she's out O'Neal pulls off.

INT. CAR - CONTINUOUS

O'Neal stares through his rearview mirror. Watching his heart standing on the curb side.

A HORN BLARING!!!! HIGH BEAMS flashing --

An oncoming car holds the horn down as O'Neal narrowly avoids a collision.

INT. DEBORA'S LIVING ROOM - DAY

Debora is startled by the repeated knocking and the doorbell ringing. She glances out the window and sees a UPS truck. She opens the door casually.

Before she can speak, Griff turns around holding her package.

INT. DEBORA'S LIVING ROOM - CONTINUOUS

Debora's on the love seat. Griff sits beside her but she inches all the way over. He places his hand on her leg but she pushes it away.

GRIFF

You look beautiful.

No response. A beat.

DEBORA

(sarcastic)

Must be the mustache? Been so stressed I haven't had a chance to shave.

He's hurt by that. Brushes it to the side.

GRIFF

I don't know what to say.

DEBORA

(snarky)

Oh, so now you don't know how to use your mouth?

GRIFF

Debora, we've had some great times...

DEBORA

Fortunately, we never got close.

(a beat)

You're gay, Griff. GAY! If that's how you want to live then fine but don't involve me in that.

GRIFF

No, I'm not. I was.

DEBORA

And you didn't even tell me. I found out with everybody else.

GRIFF

I never told you about any women I dealt with--

DEBORA

These are MEN. MEN! Don't you think that's something I should know?!

GRIFF

(nods)

I'm sorry you found out this way. But truthfully, I'm changed. That was years ago. Decades.

DEBORA

Once a man plays with that life, he's always apart of it. And if that's your thing, then fine. We can go shoe shopping or get facials but I won't be with you...

GRIFF

God brought me out. I've been delivered. For twenty five years I've been delivered. Don't you believe in His power?

Shakes her head: no.

DEBORA

No. I - I don't know what to believe.

GRIFF

Don't be like that. Can you just be rational with me?

That hit a nerve. She stands. Furious!

DEBORA

Rational? You want me to be rational?! You shamed me on national TV! No warning. No anything! People calling me names, I'm embarrassed! Did you consider my feelings?

GRIFF

I'm sorry.

She starts crying.

GRIFF (CONT'D)

I love you, Debora. I can't erase what I was. But that's not who I am anymore. You told me I am everything you wanted. I'm still the same person. We all come from something.

She storms into the

KITCHEN

Griff follows...

DEBORA

If I was gay and use to sleep with women, wouldn't you want to know?

(awkward silence)

I've lost weight stressing. I feel betrayed. Betrayed by the man I love. You probably know how it feels to be betrayed by a man.

GRIFF

Debora, I'm sorry! Please forgive me. I never meant to bring shame to you. I'm not going to make excuses, but don't hold it against God. I was the one that was wrong. Not him. But I ask you to judge me by what you see, what I show you, how I treat you and make you feel.

Griff grabs her hand. Gently pulls her close.

GRIFF

This connection -- this bond, it's God's doing. I'll protect you from the ignorant slander. I won't let your name get dragged around the mud. If it takes a lifetime making this up to you then I'll spend everyday doing such. I love you Debora, I adore you. I hold you in the highest esteem. I just need the chance to show you again.

Debora's still hesitant. Shaking her head no.

DEBORA

How can I trust you?

GRIFF

Baby, step outside your flesh and you'll see I never lied to you. I kept something from you that... From now on I'll give you details. All the details you need...

Debora shakes her head: NO. He can save those details.

Griff pulls her in close. Arms wrapped tight around her. Her arms just hang there. They cry together.

INT. CONNIE'S BEDROOM - NIGHT

Lights off. Connie under the covers. Her thoughts keeping her awake.

After some tossing and turning she flicks on the lamp. Uprights. Connie grabs her yellow notepad. There's a stick figure with the name Dexter over it.

INT. APARTMENT BUILDING - NIGHT

Dexter, in his robe, burst out the door. Connie looks at him, apologetic. Dexter stares, torn, an invisible scab has just been reopened.

INT. DEXTER'S LIVING ROOM - CONTINUOUS

Neat. Quaint. They sit in awkward silence. Connie exhales. Not prepared to do this. It's new to her.

DEXTER

The floor is yours.

CONNIE

You have every right to never want to speak to me again. And no one could blame you for not. My own insecurities made me try and make you the man I always pictured myself with but you're not him -- and I'm fine with that. I knew God would never give me the man I wanted and I'm not mad at that because He did one better.

(tearing up, emotional)

He gave me you.

(MORE)

Dexter, I get a certain gusto when I'm with you and I'm so sorry for trying to change you, for not being there when you needed me most. There is no one I'd rather be with. You are my heartbeat, my best friend, the man I wake up and daydream about. I love you. And I'm so not ashamed to say it. If you could just find it --

And like that -- before she can even finish -- he kisses her. Taking her breath away.

Barely leaving life in her body. This moment reminds us why people kiss, why love -- true love -- will always cover a multitude of wrongs.

INT. CHURCH - DAY

More people than the last time we were here.

Cecil, Debora, Connie, Kyle, Tony -- all attentive as Griff preaches.

EXT. CHURCH PARKING LOT - DAY

Cecil and Dexter chop it up at Connie's car.

DEXTER

... Bro, if you need anything let me know. You can always come over the crib.

CECIL

You still got twelve roommates?

DEXTER

Haha. Nah. Me and Connie kinda staying together.

CECIL

It's that serious?

DEXTER

Yea.

He peers into the car where Connie and Kyle are singing along to the radio, making the ugliest faces.

CECIL
Just be careful before you make
that move. Trust me. You see what
happened to me.

DEXTER
What you gon' do about that?

CECIL
The bitch is dead to me!

A CHURCH MOTHER overhears him as she strolls to her car. She
puts her hand over her mouth. Judgemental eyes.

DEXTER
(overly friendly)
Hey, Mother. How you doing? He said
his itch is red. He got a little
thing on his arm.

Satisfied with his response, Mother continues her stroll.

DEXTER (CONT'D)
Bro, you not yourself.

CECIL
Like I said... but you go on, be
with the family, we'll get up.

They hug.

DEXTER
Love you.

CECIL
Same here.

INT. O'NEAL'S LIVING ROOM - DAY

O'Neal paces the floor. Nervous. Afraid.

MADISON
Well, tell me what's wrong then,
O'Neal?

O'NEAL
I just need a break. Some time to
sort things out in my life.

MADISON
Talk to me. Why are you pushing me
away?

O'NEAL

Madison. It's not you. It really isn't.

MADISON

(she stands)

Don't do me like that. I'm not to be played with, O'Neal.

O'NEAL

I'm going through something.

MADISON

Then let me pull you through. Don't push me away.

O'Neal knows there's no easy way to do this. She's really in his corner and she deserves the truth. Madison reaches for his hand. Leads him to the couch.

MADISON

I'm here to help you.

O'NEAL

I'm still in love with my ex.

If looks could kill, Madison would be on trial for life. She shakes nervously.

MADISON

So you weren't really helping her?

O'Neal looks down. Ashamed.

MADISON

Our anniversary -- when she was in the bedroom -- and you made love to me like I never knew you could, I didn't confront you about it because I believed you when you said we were solid. Safe. That you would keep my heart in one piece.

How the hell did she know that?

O'NEAL

Madison, I'm sorry. I really am. But it's not fair to you --

MADISON

You told me you were over her! That you didn't love anyone but me.

Madison burst into tears. He tries to console her, but she pushes him away. A beat...

O'NEAL

I never stopped loving her. I just
learned to live without her.

Madison slaps the hell out of him. He takes it in stride -- he knows it's well deserved. She takes her bag and storms out. While at the door:

MADISON

Next time I hope she gives you
something you can't get rid of!

Slams the door shut!

INT. PAWN SHOP - DAY

O'Neal stands in front of the glass. He studies the engagement ring one last time before handing it to the OWNER. He counts a few thousand dollars before heading out.

EXT. GHETTO STREETS - NIGHT

The worst side of any town. PROSTITUTES flirting, waiting for Jon's. PIMPS, sit in their trucks keeping eyes on their girls.

O'Neal marches to a tinted JEEP, knocks on the drivers side window.

As the window slowly rolls down, Ceazer stares O'Neal in the eyes. Ceazer's hand holding a gun on his lap.

O'Neal throws a brown paper bag in the car. Stares Ceazer in his eyes. No fear.

O'NEAL

(re: bag)
Sheree. She even. Now leave her
alone.

CEAZER

(licking his lips)
Who? Goldie?

O'NEAL

Play if you want to.

CEAZER

Boy, you know who you talking to?

O'NEAL
(slowly)
Play if you want to.

O'Neal marches away with the confidence of a KING.

INT. THE FOSTERS' HOUSE - NIGHT

Cecil trudges around his house. His eyes are bleeding tears.
He peeks in Jefferson's bedroom. Things just don't feel the same.

INT. THE FOSTERS' LIVING ROOM - LATER

A blanket and some pillows are on the couch. Cecil lies back down, stares at the ceiling.

EXT. STREET - DAY

PROTESTORS holding signs with writings and pictures.
Right now, it's hard to see what it says.

Veronica trudges across the street. A horn honks at her. She doesn't budge, still walking at her own pace, in her own world. She makes her way through the protestors and into a building --

EXT. BUILDING - DAY

Cecil splits the building with a paper in his hand.
His phone rings. Answers:

CECIL
What? Where?!

CUT TO:

INT. CLINIC - DAY

Depressed WOMEN -- some being consoled by their BOYFRIENDS, but most are alone -- in their chairs, battling their decisions. Fighting their will to leave.

Veronica, in a trance, takes her seat next to Sasha.

SASHA

This is the best place. Trust me. I wouldn't send you just anywhere. I came here for all mine.

Veronica looks beyond sick, unhealthy. She watches as women enter beyond the point of no return.

A DOCTOR steps from behind the door, grabs something off the receptionist desk.

SASHA

He's cute.

Realizing she's the only one peppy, Sasha takes a more caring approach.

SASHA

V, how you feeling?

Veronica gives her a "can't you tell" look.

SASHA

Then why you doing this?

VERONICA

I love my husband. I can't bring another mans child into this world. I've hurt him enough.

SASHA

But what if you never get him back? He already signed his part of the divorce papers?

Veronica cover her hands with her face. She's still wearing her wedding ring.

DOCTORS ASSISTANT

Foster.

Veronica tries to stand but she can't. Shame weighs her down.

SASHA

(whispers)

It's your choice.

INT. CLINIC - SAME

Cecil, out of breath, scans the room for Veronica. He spots a familiar face glancing away from him. Sasha looks up, they make eye contact. Her eyes tell it all.

Cecil breaks down. Almost falling to his knees.

A door to the hallway that leads to the to the surgery room swings open, almost hitting Cecil.

Veronica emerges holding her phone, waving for Sasha to come get it.

Cecil's too in his feelings to notice her there. She doesn't see him either.

Sasha doesn't budge. Frozen. Unsure what she should do. Decides.

SASHA

V!

Cecil turns, sees his wife, their eyes meet. Veronica's at a loss for words.

CECIL

Don't do this?

VERONICA

The right thing.

CECIL

No, it's not. I can't let you do this.

Veronica cries. Confused.

DOCTORS ASSISTANT

Ma'am, please close the door and follow me. Sir, close that door.

CECIL

(talks fast)

It's not the baby's fault. I just came from the doctor. I have the trait, too. My father had sickle cell; I never knew because I never met him. So it could be mine.

Veronica stares at him. She shakes her head no. Her mind made up. Backing up through the door...

VERONICA

But if it isn't I --

CECIL

Baby just come home!

Shakes her head no, one last time. Lets the door close behind her. Cecil bangs on it. All eyes are on him.

CECIL
Veronica. Veronica!

He tries to open the door. It's locked. He bangs on it.

INT. RECEPTION HALL - DAY

SUPER: 18 MONTHS LATER

A beautiful two tier wedding cake sits off to the side.

Balloons, decorations, and floral arrangements adorn every table.

GUEST at their tables chatting it up.

We find Veronica at a table, showing Connie some pictures in her phone.

CONNIE
Oh, my God, she's so beautiful. She
looks just like you, Cecil.

Cecil blushes.

DEXTER
(to Cecil)
She looks like her mom in that
picture.

Veronica puts her hand over her breast. Her fingers are moist.

VERONICA
(slightly embarrassed)
Excuse me. I'm leaking. Gotta pump.

CONNIE
I remember those days.

VERONICA
When I come back you can tell me
all about how he proposed.

Connie gazes down at her beautiful engagement ring.

Veronica grabs a baby bag from under the table and carries it out with her.

A SHORT WHILE LATER

The lights dim. The HOST stands by the door with a microphone.

HOST

Our bride and groom are here,
y'all. Join in with me. Let's
welcome Mister and Misses Griff
Martin.

The DEEJAY spins some music. Everyone claps as the newlyweds enter hand in hand.

INT. RECEPTION HALL - LATER

Newlyweds, Griff and Debora Martin, sit up front at a table for two. Sheree stands at the podium, behind a microphone, holding a wine glass filled with sparkling cider.

SHEREE

(into mic)

Excuse me...

(louder)

EXCUSE ME. MAY I HAVE YOUR
ATTENTION? I'd like to toast.

(Crowd comes to a hush)

I just want to say Mom, Griff, I'm
happy for you guys. I love you
both. Mom, you're my heart. And
Griff, I guess you were my hero
that day. Truly I'm happy that we
have...

A shot of O'Neal smiling adoringly at Sheree.

SHEREE (CONT'D)

...an example of what life can be
like and how love -- true love --
can overcome every obstacle. I'm
proud of you and I wish you a
lifetime of happiness together. So
raise your glasses. Toast to love,
God's will and good -- no, GREAT
MEN because you guys do exist.

Everyone in the hall lifts their glass. They CLINK!

SHEREE

Now lets dance.

The DJ spins a record -- something classic.
Everyone breaks out to the dance floor.

FADE OUT.