

No Cure for Regret

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PITCH BLACK.

Someone's tossing and turning under covers -- like they're caught in a net and can't get out.

A MAN pops up, face sweaty, panting...

INT. FRANCES' BEDROOM - NIGHT

This is PAUL FRANCE (30's). A hopeful guy, faith driven -- no such things as coincidences to him -- only divine assignment.

Paul flips on a lamp. He shakes the body beside him.

PAUL

Get up, honey. Erica, wake up.

ERICA (30's) turns around, groggy. She lifts her eye mask. Squints at him.

PAUL (CONT'D)

God's gonna do it! I had a dream He did it. It's going to come to pass. I saw it -- it was too real. I BELIEVE IT!

He gets out of bed.

PAUL (CONT'D)

Hallelujah! Hallelujah to the king!

Erica watches. Unsure of what to do but she participates in the praise.

ERICA (V.O.)

It was then when I wish I'd said something. Because next thing I know --

INT. FRANCES' HOUSE - SPARE BEDROOM - DAY

Light green walls... a crib... changing table... rocking chair... dressers...

ERICA (V.O.)

All this was in our home.

INT. FERTILITY CLINIC - WAITING ROOM - DAY

Paul and Erica kill time by reading a baby magazine. They stare at the pictures of the babies.

ERICA (V.O.)

God always spoke to Paul in visions. And they always came to pass but this one I had no faith in. I'd been believing for so long, that I felt it best to not hope at all. Can't be disappointed when you have no expectations...

INT. FERTILITY CLINIC - SPECIALIST'S OFFICE - DAY

Paul and Erica follow a NURSE inside. They take their seats.

ERICA (V.O.) (CONT'D)

So when Paul suggested seeing a fertility specialist, I unwillingly went along. Who wants to hear --

SPECIALIST

Your hormone levels are all normal but as we suspected from looking at the ultrasound, you didn't ovulate this month. And without ovulation, you can't get pregnant.

Erica expected this -- Paul's the one hit hard. He squeezes her hand.

PAUL

Why isn't she ovulating?

SPECIALIST

Her gonadotropin levels are high, and when they're high you don't produce eggs.

ERICA (V.O.)

Things I already knew, but Paul doesn't take "no" for an answer.

INT. CHURCH - DAY

The spirit of GOD is high. People are being delivered. Music is in sync with the prophesy going forth.

Off in the corner, Erica has her hands raised -- not really into it but going along. A PROPHEET lays hands on her stomach, speaking "life" into her belly.

Paul joins in with believing God. Jumping and shouting for joy.

ERICA (V.O.)

Don't get me wrong. I wanted a baby -- I want one badly. I've tried for seven years. For SEVEN YEARS I did all that was required to increase my chances and still no luck.

INT. CAR - AFTERNOON

Paul drives. Enthusiastic. Expecting a miracle. Erica rides shotgun.

PAUL

Wanna go out for beans and ice cream?

Off Paul's look, she rolls her eyes.

ERICA

Paul, I'm tired.

PAUL

No problem, we can go rest --

ERICA

No, I'm tired of this. Trying to have a baby. The diet, the same sex position, the strict, no fun lifestyle.

PAUL

Erica, I don't think your faith's where it needs to be. Now we're gonna trust God. He always delivers, doesn't He?

ERICA

Yes, but everything we want, is not in His plan.

PAUL

With that attitude and negative outlook, we'll never conceive.

ERICA

It's realistic, Paul!

PAUL
Get thee behind me Satan!

Paul continues driving. Speaking in tongues under his breath.

ERICA (V.O.)
You'd think I'd despise this man sometimes, but I don't. I never could. I just think he takes this faith thing too far. See, Paul was born with AIDS. He didn't find out 'till he was thirteen. Being raised by his great-aunt, Bernice -- who was an evangelist -- he was around the things of God his whole life. One night, he had a dream he was surrounded by all white. It wasn't until a month later, at a doctor's appointment, that he got confirmation about what that dream meant.

INT. DOCTOR'S OFFICE - PAST

A TEENAGE PAUL sits with his GREAT AUNT BERNICE. A mystified DOCTOR is staring at Paul's file folder like it's unreal.

The Doctor goes to speak, but no words come out... Bernice and Paul look on, preparing for the worst.

DOCTOR
(stuttering)
I-I-I, don't know how to explain this. His CD4 cells are high; blood came back negative. There's no sign of the virus anywhere.

INT/EXT. CAR/THE FRANCES' HOUSE - AFTERNOON

Paul pulls up to the curb. Puts the car in park.

ERICA
What are you doing?

PAUL
I just need to talk to God, ALONE.

Erica goes to speak but decides against it. She reluctantly gets out the car.

Paul waits till she's inside and pulls off.

As Paul drives off, the bumper sticker on his car reads:
"I am realistic - I expect miracles!!!"

INT. CAR - LATER THAT NIGHT

Paul driving while humming along to the Gospel Music playing from the radio.

INT. FRANCES' HOUSE - LATER

Erica saunters up the stairs --

DING! DONG!!!

She exhales. Goes back down the stairs.

Erica peeks out the window. No sign of anyone.

EXT. FRANCES' HOUSE - SAME

Two gloved hands pick the lock with a safety pin.

INT. FRANCES' HOUSE - SAME

Erica heads to the stairs... doorbell rings again.

ERICA

Who is it?

This time as she reaches the door, it bursts open -- knocking her to the floor.

A masked ATTACKER, dressed in all black, breaks through. He shuts the door behind him. Erica attempts to make a run for it, she SCREAMS --

INT. CAR - MOVING - SAME

Paul turns the radio up -- way up -- drowning out his horrible singing --

INT. FRANCES' HOUSE - SAME

Erica's SCREAMS and cries for help are cut short by a jab to the ribs.

WE FADE TO BLACK...

That black turns into Erica's black pillow case... the bed is squeaking, moving violently. We're in --

INT. FRANCES' BEDROOM - MOMENTS LATER

Erica's gagged -- her Attacker has his hand tightly around the back of her neck. Her eyes are bloodshot red. She can't scream or fight back. Erica closes her eyes, hopes it'll relieve the pain, but it doesn't.

FINALLY, he's done. We don't see his face as he lays on top of her, shaking -- the after effects of an orgasm.

Erica cries as his breath hits her shoulder.

ERICA POV:

Attacker pulling his pants up and scurrying downstairs.

We hear the door slam shut behind him.

Erica lies in bed, pajamas around her ankles, blood on the bed, shirt torn open...

Above the bed is a

PORTRAIT

Of Jesus hanging from the Cross. His head hung low. Like He's watching what just happened.

INT. FRANCES' HOUSE - LATER THAT NIGHT

A jovial Paul enters -- still humming.

INT. FRANCES' BEDROOM - NIGHT - CONTINUOUS

Lights out.

Erica lies on her side, arms under her head. Motionless, covers to her neck -- staring at air.

A lamp on the other side of the room is turned on... by Paul. He starts undressing.

PAUL

Honey, I heard the Spirit say don't give up, yet. Then, God brought to my remembrance the story of Sarah and Abraham...

Paul gets in bed. Cuts the lamp out.
 He wraps his arm around Erica. She cringes at the touch.
 It goes unnoticed by Paul.

INT. FRANCES' BEDROOM - MORNING

Erica in bed; barely able to move -- everything's in pain.

After some mental fighting, she slowly rises out the bed. She sits on the edge for a moment. Shaking. Her forehead bruised, lips slightly swollen...

Paul enters with a breakfast tray, sees her and stops in his tracks. The tray falls out his hands.

PAUL
 Oh, Lord! What's happened, Erica?

INT. HOSPITAL ROOM - DAY

Erica's slumped on the white sheets. Weeping. Paul paces the room, praying...

ERICA (V.O.)
 I would've never told Paul. I would
 have taken care of it on my own. I
 know it's stupid, but I know my
 husband...

Out of nowhere, Paul starts jumping up and down, thanking and praising God.

ERICA (V.O.) (CONT'D)
 And the constant questioning about
 this, would keep it in the front of
 my mind.

INT. FRANCES' HOUSE - LIVING ROOM - DAY

SUPER: SEVEN MONTHS LATER

A painting of Jesus baptizing an infant hangs on the wall.

Erica rests on the couch -- a wet rag on her forehead and an ice pack on her pregnant belly. She fans herself with a magazine. Miserable.

Looking closer we see that it's not just sweat dripping from her face, tears are falling, too.

ERICA (V.O.)

I was depressed. This is the worst time of my life. I didn't want this -- I don't want this. And I know it sounds harsh but... I'm starting to hate myself. Hate my husband... I let him guilt me into keeping the baby --

PAUL

We can't pick our blessings. This is what God had planned for us. She's our miracle baby.

ERICA (V.O.)

If this is a blessing, then I'd rather be cursed. Pregnancy's been nothing but tumultuous. Weak uterus, placenta previa, a host of other complications --

ERICA

AHHHHHHH!! AHHHHHHH!!!

Paul rushes in -- Erica's shaking. Sharp pains are shooting through her spine -- foam coming her mouth. Seizure.

CUT TO:

INT. HOSPITAL - MATERNITY WARD - DAY

Paul smiles as he stares at a newborn baby GIRL. She's hooked up to an incubator. Tears stream down his face.

DR. BRIMHALL (O.S.)

Mr. France.

Paul turns. Still smiling.

PAUL

Can I see her?

DR. BRIMHALL, tall, deep voice -- picture Batman in a white coat.

DR. BRIMHALL

Your wife... your wife suffered a complication.

PAUL

Oh, Lord. Is she alright?

DR. BRIMHALL

This was a very difficult pregnancy for her. During the C-section, the right ventricle of her heart stopped working. Mr. France, I don't know how to say this to you but... your, your wife passed away tonight.

Paul breaks into tears. For the first time we see Paul in disbelief.

DR. BRIMHALL (CONT'D)

We tried everything we could to save her, but there was too much damage. Her heart just couldn't keep pumping blood. I'm so sorry...

PAUL

And my daughter?

DR. BRIMHALL

(a beat, his eyes say it all)

She's alive -- she made it. She'll... She has Angelmans syndrome which --

PAUL

Can I see Erica?

Dr. Brimhall nods. Paul's out of it. He takes a step, stops, and start's wobbling like a pole in the wind.

INT. HOSPITAL HALLWAY - LATER

Paul, aloof, drifting down the hall.

ERICA (V.O.)

When your spirit is dead, it won't take much longer before your body joins it --

INT. DELIVERY ROOM - FLASHBACK

A heart monitor beeps.

The DOCTORS shout out things we can't understand.

We're focused on Erica's face. Her odd smile -- a smile of peace -- happiness -- a smile that says, "FINALLY" --

ERICA (V.O.)

It was my time. I knew it was. I didn't want to live here anymore. So that's why I didn't fight it. I guess I did what I was put here for, to give Paul all he could want. And that's what I did our whole relationship and I regretted it. And I believe God knew I couldn't live with those regrets.

As a white sheet covers her face, we --

FADE TO WHITE