Woman of the Cloth

written by

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Over DARKNESS, the sound of CHAOS, doors slamming --

FADE IN:

INT. MEDICAL BUILDING - OFFICE - NIGHT

CLOCK on the desk reads: 11:30

Dark. Only light comes from a flashlight being held by a MASKED SOMEONE (gender is unknown) wearing all black.

Masked Someone appears to have ransacked the office... But then, MS goes to a very specific location. Whatever this person is looking for, they know where it is.

EXT. MEDICAL BUILDING - SAME

A BMW pulls into the lot.

A PREPPY MALE darts out, too late to be this chipper, ready to work; coffee in hand. He unlocks the office door, steps in, alarm beeps -- punches in the password.

INT. MEDICAL OFFICE - SAME

Every drawer in the file cabinet is open.
Masked Someone beams the light onto a file.
Sees a name -- JIZELLE RODGERS.
Masked Someone takes the files --
Preppy Male enters at the same time --

...They stare at each other. Showdown. Both afraid...

Or so it seems... Preppy Male puts his head down like he’s seen nothing.

Masked Someone runs out...

Preppy Male sits at his desk. Exhales. Turns his desk light on.

-- We hear a car speed off! --

Preppy Male dials 911.

OPERATOR (V.O.)
911, what’s your emergency?

PREPPY MALE
(frantic)
Please help! I’ve been robbed!
INT. BMW - MOMENTS LATER

Masked Someone, SPEEDING AWAY. Takes off her mask.

We get a VERY QUICK glimpse of her profile, but not long enough to remember any features because instantly a deer bolts by -- her car swerves -- misses the deer -- collides into a tree and rolls into a DITCH --

CUT TO:

SUPER: ONE WEEK EARLIER

DARKNESS. Groans... grunting... labored breathing...the sounds become clearer -- more passionate...
We’re under sheets...

A man lets out a loud GRUNT -- orgasms. His chest vibrating from the after effects.

This is LEVI RODGERS (50’s). A slick oil type of fella’. Handsome. A calculated asshole.

The sexiest female body we’ve ever seen emerges from under the sheets and struts into the

BATHROOM - CONTINUOUS

This is JIZELLE RODGERS (late 30’s). She’s every man’s type. If she were in sweatpants and a helmet she’d still be the sexiest woman in the room.

Jizelle spits his cum into the toilet.

JIZE LLE (V.O.)
Every twenty-eight days, this is my routine. Thought I’d be free by now. Key word is ‘thought’. But wise folks understand ‘thought’ comes from not knowing.

She brushes her teeth. Through the medicine cabinet mirror we see the vastness of this bathroom: A shower with a bench, a hot tub, a bidet -- there’s money in this family.

Jizelle grabs a maxi-pad from under the sink. She reaches towards the back of the cabinet, into a secret compartment and pulls out a needle filled with blood.

Jizelle locks the door. She squirts the blood from the needle into the maxi-pad. Balls up the pad, wraps it in the plastic and trashes it.
INT. DINING ROOM - LATER

AVERY (9, blind), KRISHNA (19, looks and acts older than her age), and ZARA (16, thinks she knows it all) are seated at the table.

Jizelle sets the plates in front of each person.

JIZELLE (V.O.)
Here’s my kin: Avery, he’s my own flesh. There’s Krishna; the eldest sibling. A hard sell for nineteen, but she could pass for thirty with those outdated threads. Zara, the youngest lady in the house, she’s a handful’a mouth. Sneaky, good heart but a cunt of a child.

Levi takes a seat at the head.

JIZELLE (V.O.)
And this high cotton fella’ is my Levi.

She sets his plate in front of him.
Jizelle gives him a flirtatious eye.
She takes her seat at the opposite end.

LEVI
(to Avery)
Say grace.

Everyone grabs hands. Zara rolls her eyes.

AVERY
Jesuses heavenly Father, thank you for this food, and for money to buy food and make it nutrition to our bodies. Ahmen.

ALL
Amen.

KRISHNA
Great prayer, Avery. Looks scrumptious, Jizelle.

Jizelle acknowledges the compliment with a smile.
Everyone eats at a normal pace except Avery, he eats slower, more concentrated.
JIZELLE
So how’s school?
(V.O.)
Three...

Jizelle looks at Levi, trying to subtlety get his attention. She’s uneasy about something and wants him to intervene. But he doesn’t notice her.

KRISHNA
All’s swell. We’re going much more deeper this semester. The holocaust and how it was prophes--

ZARA
It’s not a real school. All it is is church stuff.

JIZELLE (V.O.)
...Two.

KRISHNA
No, actually Zara, academics are involved.
(to Levi)
Did you know we once had the most gifted mathematicians in the world? (everyone)
But for the last two decades our focus has mainly been theological studies.

LEVI
We’re sending you there for more than just learning, y’hear. Relationships. Wisdom. Priming you to pass you the mantle.


JIZELLE (V.O.)
ONE. Here we go--

ZARA
(to Krishna)
This doesn’t bother you?

KRISHNA
(lost)
I’m sorry?

JIZELLE
--Girls, how about we--
ZARA
Women are continually being groomed
by trash ass...

AVERY
Ouuuu.

ZARA (CONT'D)
...men to be what they want us to be.
(to Levi)
What if she doesn’t want to be a minister? Does she have a choice?

LEVI
When the good Lord calls you? No.

ZARA
--Bullshit. Everyone in your Bible
had a choice.

JIZELLE
--Your mouth!

Zara rolls her eyes.

LEVI
--Repent for that!

ZARA
Ask the dead man in the sky--

AVERY
(Jesus not dead, Zara.)

ZARA (CONT'D)
(over)
--to forgive everything I’ve done
wrong, although he “supposedly”
knows everything I will do; think
about doing, not to mention all the
‘accidental on purpose’ shit I plan
on doing. Oh, and if I’ve “humbly”
asked once, why I gotta ask again?
Did He forget? Can’t I just say,
“hey, forgive me forever, so we
don’t have to discuss this again?”
Or how about-- if it’s simpler for
Him-- He forgives what He knows I’m
sorry for and work with me on the
rest?
(re: Avery’s comment)
Oh, and Avery, he’d have to actually
be born to die.
AVERY

Mommy...

KRISHNA
(meek)
It’s called faith. The substance of things hoped for and--

ZARA
--The blah blah blah not seen.
Right. But let’s be honest--

JIZELLE
--Aright STOP.

ZARA
ALMOST DONE--

LEVI
(slams his hand on the table)
DAMMIT THAT’S ENOUGH!

SILENCE. Levi has spoken... A BEAT... Then softly...

KRISHNA
A parents job is to lead us into our purpose. Serving God and his people is all I’ve dreamed of doing.

ZARA
(in disbelief)
And you really don’t see a problem with that?

LEVI
Another word and your grounded.
EAT.

ZARA
(Pushes away from table)
Forgot I was fasting.

Zara goes upstairs. No one protests.

INT. RODGERS’ RESIDENCE - KITCHEN - LATER

Jizelle loads dishes in the dishwasher. Annoyed. She opens the fridge and pulls out a container of Prune Juice.
JIZELLE (V.O.)
Levi always said I didn’t have to love his children like my own, I just had to treat them like I do.

Jizelle pours a half glass. It’s brown, very fluid— not nearly as thick as prune juice... it’s scotch. She downs it, straight. No stopping.

Back to the back of the fridge it goes. Top on tight.

INT. RODGERS’ RESIDENCE - BEDROOM - NIGHT


JIZELLE
You really need to see what’s wrong with her. She did a complete turn-around and I don’t understand—

LEVI
Teenager. She’s got questions. It’s common. That’s her mother’s energy.

JIZELLE
Krishna’s complete opposite.

LEVI
I got ya’ something.

Levi puts the DNA kit in the center of the bed.

LEVI (CONT’D)
Figured since you’re not know diddly about your momma or none of your folks. This here’s gon’ gain us some insight.

JIZELLE
I don’t care to know about those individuals.

LEVI
Things couldn’t have been that egregious if you’ve forgiven them?

A beat... then Levi throws on the charm...
LEVI
Look, Peach-crumb, maybe some of your...
(careful)
Womb issues...

JIZELLE
Let it go.

LEVI
Just hear me out now...

JIZELLE
No. I mean it.

INT. LEVI’S CHURCH – DAY

A nice sized congregation – 500 or so members. Every pew is full. This is an older style church. Very traditional. Women don’t wear pants.

Levi does what he does best, manipulate people...although some call it preaching.

“Amens”, “Preach”, “Yes Lord” are coming from the congregation.

Jizelle, dressed like an old first lady, fans herself and cheers her husband on.

JIZELLE (V.O.)
Thirty eight years old, seven years of marriage, and still living a lie.
(out loud)
Preach, Pastor!

She stands, waves her hands in the air to the Lord. Routine is down packed.

JIZELLE (V.O.)
I hate how determined he is sometimes. It clashes with my stubbornness. Despite that, me and Levi have a great marriage and we really like each other. This man saved my life.

We fade into a flashback:
A slightly younger Jizelle is crying. She holds a baby (Avery). We’re still in the same church and Levi is on the same pulpit preaching...
JIZELLE (V.O.)
I’d been running like hell when conviction set in. It was through Levi that I met the love of my life: God.

RESUME SCENE
The organist plays a welcoming hymn. People are standing. A couple with two small children walk to the altar.

LEVI
(to couple)
Amen, Brother. Amen.
(to congregation)
You see this? This is the word manifested: men leading their family’s to salvation. HALLELUJAH!

The church rejoices along with him.

INT. LEVI’S CHURCH – STUDY – LATER
Levi’s soaked in sweat. Jizelle helps him put on a dry shirt. He’s agitated.

LEVI
...Eleven-thousand god damn dollars. I preach my soul out. Take time from my family and visit their sick asses at the hospital, and they barely give shit--

JIZELLE
(calm)
Just focus on God’s word and serving his people, He’ll complete the rest.

In the corner is Levi’s armor bearer, EMORY SIMMS (41, good looking even with his pot belly).

EMORY
(careful)
Excuse me, but Pastor we need to go.
(taps his watch)
...Plane boards in an hour.
LEVI
(exhales loudly)
Maybe I need to face the church so they’ll appreciate the importance of what I’m-- we’re trying to do. TV’s, ATM machines; the carpet is trash. Folks don’t wanna watch a drab church. People are dying, they wanna see life. We gotta be bigger than your favorite rapper if we’re gonna win more souls. This ain’t a game people.

JIZELLE
All in the Lords timing.

Levi’s face shows he could give two shits about the Lord’s timing. He wants it now!

LEVI
(to Emory)
Where we at with the sermon?

EMORY
(holds up the Ipad)
Where it always is, sir.

JIZELLE
I read it, it’s exceptional.

She looks to Emory, acknowledging his role in the situation.

LEVI
A feel good ‘giving’ message?
(Jizelle nods)
Captured my cadence?

JIZELLE
To a ‘T’. He knows your voice.

Emory beams with proudness.
He gives Emory a pat on the back: good job.
Levi puts on his blazer. Kisses his wife as he leaves.

INT. ZARA’S BEDROOM

Spacious and junky. In the midst of this filth we find Zara on a beanbag, resting on her back. On the floor beside her: Swiss rolls, soda cans and a rolled up dollar bill with white powder residue.

She sifts through a playboy magazine.
Zara gets a facetime call. She wipes her runny nose, hides the playboy and answers. The caller: GOODY (18), a soft-spoken and handsome teenager thats all about Jesus. Imagine Joel Olsteen as a child.

ZARA
Hey, babes.

GOODY
Hi, my love. Howww ya’ feeeelin’?

ZARA
You’re too cute. I’m well. Just studying.

GOODY
Awesome sauce.

Off his look Zara rolls her eyes.

ZARA
And you?

GOODY
Overjoyed with an abundance of love.

Off his look Zara grimaces.

ZARA
So tell me, how’d it go?

GOODY
(excited, pauses)
Babes, they loved me! God was really with me. A part of me thinks I got it. I just don’t want to jinx it, ya know?

ZARA
Goody you’re an awesome speaker; I know you did. And I’m usually right. Right?

He agrees with a smile.

GOODY
Give what I say any thought?

ZARA
I’ve been so caught up in the Word ... Just one thing at a time.
GOODY
Not getting any younger.

ZARA
Please.

GOODY
Zar...

An alarm in his background goes off.

GOODY
Uh-oh, you ready? It’s time.

ZARA
Yes, I’m famished!

GOODY
Don’t see it that way, babes. Look at it as a sacrifice unto our savior.
(goes into a prayer)
God thank you for answering our prayers. And I hope you spoke to Zara in the same ways you spoke to me. Help her see that this fast is not in vain, but that she will be my wife. In your awesome child’s name. Amen.

Zara was rolling her eyes the entire time.

ZARA
(dismissive)
Aright, I’m gonna eat.

They disconnect. Grabs her pack of opened cookies, that she was already munching on, and goes back to the playboy.

INT. GREATER TABERNACLE – DAY

Shuffling down the prodigious staircase is the charismatic BISHOP JEAN SAUNDERS (61). He’s smooth, cunning, but all business. Levi hustles behind him.

Bishop opens the sanctuary doors. It’s like the gates of heaven just opened.

Levi’s in awe. Never seen anything this beautiful.

BISHOP SAUNDERS
(re: tour)
Remove your shoes.
SANCTUARY - CONTINUOUS

One word: OPULENCE.

Thick purple carpet. A balcony on top of a balcony; thousands of seats; a stain-glassed image of Jesus adorns the windows over the pulpit.

The plush carpet almost swallows their feet whole.

BISHOP SAUNDERS
(re: carpet)
Feel that? Could lose your keys down there.

Bishop points to the TV’s hanging from the walls, the oversized projector suspended from the ceiling... then a solid gold plated podium with Swarovski crystals imbedded down the side. Today, it’s encased in a thick plastic casing.

BISHOP SAUNDERS (CONT'D)
Three dimensional TV’s, state of the art sound system. Souls in hell can hear us on Sundays. Nine thousand people packed in every service. Even Bible Study is standing room only. People swarming from across the country, waiting with bated breath for the man of God’s message.

Levi takes it all in. Bishop smells blood.

BISHOP SAUNDERS
(re: stage)
Go head. Go up there. Get a feel.

Levi looks to him: you mean it? Bishop nods. Levi saunters towards the stage.

INT. RESTAURANT - PRIVATE ROOM

Levi and Bishop feast: lobsters, shrimp, dark liquor; cigars rest in their ash trays.

Emory stands watch at the door.

Levi’s leaned in, hanging on his every word.
BISHOP SAUNDERS
God’s business is serious business, it don’t get much more serious. The level God’s ‘bout to elevate you—
(chewing)
Excuse me...a lot more exposure.
(sucking the meat out his teeth)
More exposure: more eyes; more eyes: more fingers. Plain enough?
(Levi nods)
It’s much bigger than you. The family life: kids, wife, things good?

Bishop puts his hand on his shoulder.
...Pleading without pleading...
He knows what can come if Levi’s holding back info.

BISHOP SAUNDERS
Any skeletons I should know about?

LEVI
No. None, sir.

BISHOP SAUNDERS
It’s better to get ahead of stuff like this. They tend to emerge on your way up.

LEVI
Not a bone.

A beat. Bishop isn’t totally convinced.

BISHOP SAUNDERS
Last fella’, Apostle Greg Hines, I put on TV’s in sixty-four countries, less than a year. That’s my doing. We like you Levi, but your image... It needs refining. Kinda asshole-ish. People won’t follow a asshole if he’s not likable. You need finesse, smile more, speak first. Cut the alpha shit.

(Levi nodding)
That wife of yours, keep her close. She makes you appealing. Gives you that “Ummff”.

LEVI
That’s (no problem)--
BISHOP SAUNDERS
(over)
More pictures of you and the family. Social media, couples conferences. Let the public see you both. The blind boy—

LEVI
Avery.

BISHOP SAUNDERS
Center a healing service around him. I got a few Doctor’s that’ll play ball. Your wife, let her smooze. Rub elbows with the gals that hate her. Get pregnant. I’ll market you as Ruth and Boaz.

LEVI
We’ve been trying...

BISHOP SAUNDERS
Perhaps your stroke ain’t what it used to be.

LEVI
(a stern look)
It’s not me. Jizelle—

Bishop smiles. Was he joking or prying?

BISHOP SAUNDERS

LEVI
‘Lady Jizelle’.

BISHOP SAUNDERS
Second wife ain’t she?
(Levi nods)
Won’t be hard to sell her as a former lady of the night. She’ll draw the sadity saints and the fellas. And we know christian wimmenz are suckers for men in church.

Levi nods in agreement. Smiling. He can see it in his mind. Bishop reads that.
BISHOP SAUNDERS
You follow? Know what Apostle
Greg’s sell is? Ex-cocaine dealer.
“Six years” in Mexican prison.
Ain’t been within a cunt-hair of
jail. Mugshots you see, fake. But
the people I know make things that
ain’t appear as if they were.

Bishop winks. Playfully slaps his hand on Levi’s face.
Pinches his cheek. Levi nods in agreement. He’s on board.

INT. THERAPIST OFFICE - NIGHT
A puff of smoke blows in the air.

On a big couch, Jizelle has an e-cigarette in one hand and
a brownie in the other. Eyes closed. High as an astronaut.

On another couch, LEYDA COLE (37, therapist, attractive).
She lays on the couch also, but her head’s at the opposite
end. A real blunt is in her hand. She smokes with such
femininity.

JIZELLE (V.O.)
Yes, I love the Lord but I have
vices. I like to get high.
Technically smoking is the sin. So
with Avery’s bear nose eating my
way to bliss.
(Bites; out loud)
God, this is good.

Jizelle offers some to Leyda.

LEYDA
Had three earlier. Luckily I was
with a patient that talks the
entire hour. Didn’t notice me
nodding off.
(they laugh)
Ahhh. I can’t wait till I can give
this up. Retire and go live on a
beach...

JIZELLE
Then who’ll hear all my problems?

LEYDA
There’s enough sand for the both of
us. Edibles and mimosas.

Jizelle smiles half-heartedly.
Leyda crosses towards Jizelle. Innocent seduction, but filled with pretense. She stops at her desk. There’s a picture of her and her two sons.

JIZELLE
How are they?

LEYDA
Teenage boys: horny and sneaky. I want you to meet them.

JIZELLE
I stay away from horny, sneaky men. It’s why I married older.

They laugh.

LEYDA
Why are you so afraid?

JIZELLE
I’m sorry...?

Leyda walks to Jizelle. A beat... As Leyda goes to talk--

JIZELLE
--Said we’re not going down that road anymore.

LEYDA
So you do understand what I’m saying.

She does, but that’s not what she wants to talk about.

JIZELLE
Have you given thought to--

Leyda shakes her head ‘no’. And disappointed she’d switch subjects like that. Jizelle pushes her away--

LEYDA
(annoyed)
Jizelle--

JIZELLE
I knew better.

LEYDA
You serious? You’re making me the criminal in this?--

JIZELLE
It’s okay. Forget I asked.
Jizelle gets up to leave.

LEYDA
Really? Are you serious, Jizelle?!

Jizelle turns up her lip in disgust.
Your ‘victim act’ is getting mold.

JIZELLE
I said it’s fine.

Leyda’s appalled. Jizelle never said such a thing.

LEYDA
(chuckling to herself)
You’re a mind-fuck, you know that?!
I’ve done every thing you asked;
the exact way you’ve asked.

Leyda lifts her shirt and reveals a deep scar on the side of her abdomen.

LEYDA
Or do you not remember?

INT. RODGERS’ RESIDENCE - BEDROOM - NIGHT

Jizelle relaxes in her bed. Pajamas on. She sips from a mug. Avery walks in. Hops in bed.

JIZELLE
Something wrong with your room?

AVERY
Too dark.

They share a laugh.

JIZELLE
Jokes are getting better.

AVERY
(sniffs)
Why do you wear that perfume to bed?

JIZELLE
(whispers)
Can you keep a secret? Wore it all day. Too tired to shower.
AVERY
MOM.
(she shrugs: sorry)
Better than the one you wore when I was a baby.
(and THEN)
Does God hate gays?

Jizelle’s taken aback. Gathers herself.

JIZELLE
No. There's not a inch of hate in God.

AVERY
But he hates sin, right?

JIZELLE
Well, yes.

AVERY
So then...

She can see he’s not fully understanding.

JIZELLE
You like cookies, right?
(he nods)
Well look at it like this: we’re the cookie and sin’s chocolate chips. So the sin -- or chocolate chips -- is what God wants to rid us of. And that’s all sin: lying, cheating, doing married people stuff when you’re not married.

AVERY
What do married people do?

JIZELLE
Make babies.

AVERY
But I was at your wedding. So am I sin?

JIZELLE
Of course not.

AVERY
But being gay is a sin?
JIZELLE
In certain translations of the Bible, yes. Are you...?

AVERY
(shrugs)
Maybe.
(beat)
I don’t know what boys or girls look like.

The innocent sarcasm makes her smile.

JIZELLE
I’d love you no matter what.

AVERY
Will I ever meet my real dad?

JIZELLE
You have. But you were barely off my breast.

Avery makes a grossed out face.

AVERY
What did he look like?

QUICK CUT (flashback)
a young handsome, metrosexual man -- this is Avery’s dad. He has short well maintained hair, and he seems up to date with the latest fashions.

He rubs a pregnant woman’s (whose face we don’t see) stomach.

RESUME SCENE

JIZELLE
Splitting image of you.

AVERY
I can only imagine what I look like?

JIZELLE
Very handsome. You’ve got his smile and chin.

AVERY
Everyone tells me I have your smile.

Jizelle gazes at him with love and sorrow in her eyes. Shakes her head:no. But he can’t see that.
She wraps him in her arms before he can speak again.

JIZEILLE
C’mon lets get some sleep.

INT. COLLEGE DORM - NIGHT

Krishna irons a pair of pants. She hums ‘amazing grace’. The TV plays a game show. Her cell rings.

KRISHNA
Mrs. B!

INTERCUT - BIANCA’S apartment.
Dingy and outdated. Bianca, on her couch, magazines spread on her lap, soaking her feet.

Bianca isn’t fat, but she has a gut. Her too small shirt tells us she’s still in denial about her size.

BIANCA
The lies on Facebook, you really mean them? -- And don’t say you don’t have a Facebook. I saw it.

KRISHNA
Now’s not a good time.

BIANCA
Respect my name, and what I’ve done for you.

KRISHNA
(sarcastic)
You birthed me; nothing more.

BIANCA
One day you’ll choke on your bitterness.

KRISHNA
I need to go.

BIANCA
I don’t know what your father and that whore beat you over the head with now but you need to come back to earth.

KRISHNA
Excuse me? Explicit language isn’t-
BIANCA
-- This whole act’s turning--
you’re like a chick-fil-a robot.

KRISHNA
It’s not an act. You gave us up. So excuse me if I don’t want to indulge in long conversations about boys and my personal life with you. I have no relationship with you. I never had one. You chose drugs over your eight children. So you have to live with your bad decisions. Only good decision you made was choosing a great man -- my father -- to have me with. You have a blessed day, okay.

BIANCA
UGH! Predictable response! Be human, Krishna. We weren’t made to be perfect.

KRISHNA
Should I be less like Jesus and more like you?

BIANCA
Yes, because I actually exist.

KRISHNA
Have a great d--

BIANCA
If you really believe in that book then you know who the real devil is--

BIANCA (CONT’D)
--It’s not me, it’s your father--

KRISHNA
Stop. STOP!

BIANCA (CONT’D)
YOU LIVED WITH THE MONSTER. YOU KNOW!

KRISHNA
He’s no monster!

BIANCA
I fought for you and you helped put me away!--

Finally, Krishna’s anger peaks! She screams into the phone:

KRISHNA
I rebuke you in Christ name! I REBUKE YOU!
Krishna hangs up. Bianca chuckles.

**BIANCA**

My child’s become nothing more than a brainwashed cunt.

Krishna opens her laptop, it’s on Facebook. She goes to her friends list and deletes: Jessica Mckinny.

**INT. DARNELL’S CAR – NIGHT**

Krishna’s in the passenger seat. DARNELL JEFFRIES (30’s, pudgy, short, glasses, big gap) is behind the wheel. Darnell’s dressed pretty shabby.

They’re parked in a dark part of this lot.

**DARNELL**

Honestly, I feel like you did this on purpose.

**KRISHNA**

Me? By myself, with no help from you?

He reaches for her hand but she pulls it back.

**DARNELL**

I’m not mad at you.

(beat) You need me right now. You don’t know what you’re doing.

**KRISHNA**

I’ll figure it out.

**DARNELL**

With who?

**KRISHNA**

Me and God.

Darnell lets out a deep laugh.

**DARNELL**

You think he’s listening to you? Especially now?

That hit her hard. She puts her head down. Shamed.
DARNELL
I don’t mean it that way, but these things happen for the better. Let’s take a ride.

Darnell starts his car, hand on the steering wheel revealing his gold wedding band.

DARNELL
Seat back.

Krishna reclines her seat all the way back. He turns the headlights on...

...As he drives we see he’s on her COLLEGE CAMPUS.

Darnell stops a few feet before the security gate. A GUARD’s in the booth. Darnell grabs a blanket from the backseat and tosses it over Krishna -- hiding her.

The security divider raises up as he accelerates through...

GUARD
Goodnight, Professor Jeffries.

EXT. REHAB CLINIC – DAY

MERCURY FIELDS (40), an ex-crackhead that hasn’t shaken the look, walks through the doors. She doesn’t have many teeth, hair’s dirty, fingernails look like black crayons. She gets in the

OLDSMOBILE – CONTINUOUS

BARNEY (62), an old man that looks even older than he is, tongue kisses Mercury.

BARNEY
Sure as hell look sad for a free woman.

Mercury just sulks.

MERCURY
You smell like Budweiser.

BARNEY
Stopped by the bar before I swang through.
MERCURY
Well, pop a mint. I’m gonna stay clean this time. I mean it. No more slip-ups.
(places her hand on her belly)
I’ve found purpose.

INT. RODGERS’ RESIDENCE - DAY
Jizelle’s angry. She makes a phone call...

CUT TO:

An Iphone vibrating on a leg...

This is Krishna’s leg. The vibrating wakes her. She’s in the front seat of

DARNELL’S CAR

Same clothes on from last night.
They’re parked in a cornfield-- a nice hideout.

KRISHNA
(in a whisper)
Hello.

INTERCUT

JIZELLE
(thankful)
I was hoping you weren’t in class...

KRISHNA
No, I’m in the library. Studying.

JIZELLE
Avery’s got no school. His Godmom was suppose to get him but I can’t reach her and I have a full plate--

KRISHNA
No problem. Gimme thirty.
(to Darnell)
You need to call home.

Darnell gives her a confused look: why?
INT. FERTILITY CLINIC - OFFICE - DAY

DOCTOR JARRED CLEMMONS (60’s) is the best in his field.

His office is decorated with his accomplishments dating back to the early nineties -- knickknacks that indicate this is a fertility specialists office.

He and Jizelle sit across from each other. She slides him an envelope. He opens it. All cash.

CLEMMONS
Thicker than usual.

JIZELLE
For the month. Tired of seeing you every week.

He tosses it in his drawer.

JIZELLE (CONT’D)
Can we start this now?

He hits a stop clock on his desk. It counts down from 03:00, 02:59...

JIZELLE (V.O.)
Routine extortion. The hefty price I pay for living this lie.

CLEMMONS
In all fairness, I think you should know he’s reached out to colleagues of mine. He’s intent on having a baby.

JIZELLE
But we know that’s impossible. And I pay you--

CLEMMONS
For confidentiality. But he’s scoping other clinics. One has even sent for your records. Look, my mouths sealed, regardless, but the more hands embroiled...(the more it’ll cost...)
CLEMMONS
-- I told you when you first
migrated here; come clean. Live
your truth. Seven years we’ve been
dancing around this. But I mean, in
all honesty,
(re: her beauty)
look at you... No straight man
would mind?

TIME LAPSE

...The CLOCK is at 00:00...

Jizelle exits first with a fake smile.

JIZELLE
Thank you, DR. Clemmons, we really
hope so.

INT. RODGERS’ KITCHEN – DAY

Avery makes a sandwich just as well as a person with eyes
would.

AVERY
Oh, and Krishna, I figured out what
I want to be.
(a beat of anticipation)
A boxing world champion!

Krishna’s in the LIVING ROOM engrossed in her text message
that appears on the screen from Darnell.

*Avery continues talking*

Darnell – I’m telling her today. You’re who I want.

Krishna – No! Don’t do that.

Krishna drops her phone. Overwhelmed with guilt.

AVERY
... And if they’re making life on
mars you think they won’t make eyes
for the blind? If I dedicate myself
now--

Trying to get back in big sister mode:

KRISHNA
How’d you hear about boxing?
AVERY
I hear about everything.

Krishna’s phone beeps. Text message. It reads:
Darnell - You there?

AVERY (CONT’D)
But to answer your question, ‘boxing fights for the blind’, writes stories on it. They’re good, I feel like I’m taking punches. But... Krishna, I’m confused about the squared circle. What’s it look like?

The doorbell rings in a funny distinct way -- a unique customized ring!

AVERY
Godmom!

Avery, shuffles to the door with a sandwich in his hand.

He opens the door and hugs PAULETTE (40’S). Paulette has aged like wine. She has an ‘air of wealth’ about her. Walks with confidence, speaks with confidence and calls the shots.

Paulette smiles at Krishna. Is it a ‘I know you’re fucking my husband” smile or a ‘nice to see you’ smile? It can be interpreted as both.

INT. JIZELLE’S X5 - EVENING

Levi’s in the passenger seat. They hold hands as she guides the steering wheel with her left hand.

JIZELLE
How was the flight?

LEVI
(shrugs)
Lonely.

Levi rubs her leg in a sexual way. She smiles.

CUT TO:

We’re in the back row of the X5. Levi fucks her brains out from the back. Sweat on both of their faces...

He lets out a loud grunt. Stops. Still inside her... He removes himself from inside her and slumps down.
JIZELLE
God that was good.

They laugh. Her head on his lap. She looks to the roof.

JIZELLE
(breathing heavy)
Think they heard us, even over the music?

LEVI
Oh, the heavens heard you, darling; I wouldn’t be surprised.

Reveal that they’re parked in HIS CHURCH’S PARKING LOT... And it sounds like Choir Rehearsal is going on.

Levi runs his fingers through her hair.

Jizelle notices he’s breathing very fast.

JIZELLE
(careful)
Did... did you take Ex--

LEVI
Just a small tiny piece--

JIZELLE
Levi...

She leaves it alone.

JIZELLE
(playful)
Well you coulda saved me some.

He’s not in the playing mood.

JIZELLE
Can you lighten up, mister moody? (no response)
Well maybe this’ll cheer you up. I have someone-- who I know you’ll approve-- willing to be our carrier.

LEVI
(scoffs)
I’m not in the ‘rent a womb’ business. All kindza’ spirits start developing that way.
JIZELLE
No, honey, it’ll carry our genes.
Your sperm, my eggs; her uterus.

LEVI
I’d much prefer we do it the way
it’s been done since the beginning
of time.

JIZELLE
I’ll miscarry. Again.

LEVI
--Hell, a miscarriage may make
things better. It’s more of an
emotional pain than physical,
right?

JIZELLE
WHAT?!
She uprights. Angered.

LEVI
Where there’s tragedy, there’s
opportunity.

JIZELLE
You’re kidding right?!

LEVI
Of course.
He wasn’t. He gives a weak smile to cover his lie.
She doesn’t believe him, although she wants to.

LEVI
We talk enough about me. What about
you?
He motions for her to rest her head on his lap. She
reluctantly does so.

JIZELLE
I’d like to put my counseling
skills to use once we elevate. A
lot of first lady’s don’t have an
outlet. We’re judged and envied by
the same people we counsel and lay
before God for.
LEVI
But how would that advance the ministry? The goal is families.

JIZELLE
I thought the goal was souls.

LEVI
The goal is God’s work. And his work for this ministry is families. We wanna win entire households for the kingdom.

JIZELLE
(seeking clarification)
Let me get this right, my idea doesn’t fall in line with (the vision) --

LEVI
(over)
No, not for this season. Your focus should be our family -- building and growing it. Jizelle, you know how salient this is to me?

JIZELLE
Getting on TV? Or my life?

LEVI
Not a breathing thing means more to me than you. I’m clear on the many times you almost lost your life carrying life. But that was before you were saved. Now you’re womb is anointed. It’ll be angels in there with that baby.

That hasn’t added any comfort to her. Tears form in her eyes. He closes his eyes and lays hands on her belly.

LEVI
Lord, in the name of Jesus, I speak life into this womb! Healing, full term pregnancy in Jesus name. May my wife’s endometrial lining be as strong as Samson was.
(Jizelle quietly laugh)
May she birth kings and queens in your son’s mighty name.
(done praying)
God’s gonna do it. You believe that?
(no response)
(MORE)
He is. And we’re gon’ have fun assisting him.

He gives her a sly smile, leans in and kisses her. Finds himself back on top of her. Round 2.

INT. RODGERS’ RESIDENCE – NIGHT

Avery, Krishna and Paulette sit in the living room watching Television. Krishna has a notepad in front of her. She’s studying too.

Avery and Paulette play a game. Avery tries his best to color within the lines of a picture. He’s failing miserably. But Paulette encourages him on:

PAULETTE
Good job so far. You peaking?

They share a laugh.

AVERY
(Krishna)
Get your phone.

KRISHNA
Huh?

There’s a flash on the screen. She snatches it up.

Krishna checks her messages from Darnell – 9 unread messages.

She scrolls down and sees –
“Why aren’t you answering me!”
“I’m on my way”... Then “I’m outside. I’ll come to the door”

She gets off the cushioned seat. Paulette stares at her with those eyes again – does she know?

AVERY
Something smells.

INT. RODGERS’ RESIDENCE – BATHROOM – MOMENTS LATER

Krishna has the water on. She texts back – “No, she’s here.” She exhales. Seconds pass...

-- DING! Doorbell rings! Krishna almost shits herself.

PAULETTE (O.S.)
I got it.
Krishna locks the door. Nervous as hell.

**LIVING ROOM**

Paulette peers out the window and makes a strange face.

**BATHROOM**

Krishna hears the muffled voices of a man and woman. There’s a tap on the window. She lifts the curtain – it’s Darnell.

**LIVING ROOM**

Paulette follows the NEIGHBOR out. She spies a familiar car that seems to be parked in the cut. Gives it a long look. She can’t make out the license plate.

    NEIGHBOR
    Again, forgive my--

    PAULETTE
    (dry, not focused)
    Not a problem. I’ll make sure she gets it.

Paulette’s too focused on the car to pay him any mind. She lifts her hand and gives a polite wave.

**BATHROOM**

    KRISHNA
    (pleading)
    Why are you here? Your wife is in my living room. Please just leave.

She tries to close the window, he stops her.

    DARNELL
    We’ll make it together.

*Krishna whispers*

    KRISHNA
    My father won’t pay for my school--

    DARNELL
    I’ll take care of it.
KRISHNA
--How, Darnell? My tuition’s more than you make a year. And where will you teach--

DARNELL
--You’re not a minor. I got us, okay! Just trust me. We’re family now.

Jizelle’s pulling into her driveway, headlights on.

DARNELL
Shit, I gotta go.

Darnell sees the X5 coming up the driveway. He vanishes. She just misses him.

INT. RODGERS’ RESIDENCE – MOMENTS LATER

Jizelle sets her bags down. Krishna walks in at the same time.

PAULETTE
Just missed your neighbor.

JIZELLE
Saw him on my way in. He’s having a surprise party for his wife. Told me to invite you, said he liked your flair. Krish, you ready?

PAULETTE
--I’ll take her.

JIZELLE
That’s way out your way.

PAULETTE
I don’t mind. Really.

INT. PAULETTE’S CAR – NIGHT

Paulette pulls off slowly with Krishna in the passenger seat.

PAULETTE
Strap up. Nothing worse than being rammed from behind and you’re unprotected.
INT. RODGERS’ RESIDENCE - BASEMENT

Levi tip-toes down the stairs and into the 12 seat

THEATER ROOM

He locks the door behind him. Turns on the projector. Connects it to Wi-fi and searches the internet.

He throws on a pair of wireless headphones and presses play.

We can hear soft moaning and aggressive fucking. On the screen is --

Porn! Levi feels his suit jacket for lotion. Has none. Pulls out a bottle of hand sanitizer - it’ll have to do. He hits a button that turns the lights off. Goes to work. Groans and moans...

Unbeknownst to him, Zara is in the row right behind him, scrunched up in a ball. She was asleep.

As her dad wacks off, she creeps out in complete silence. Disgusted. She SLAMS the door shut behind her.

Levi, unsure if he’s heard something, looks over his shoulder - nothing there. Back to business.

INT. PAULETTE’S CAR - NIGHT

Dark and foggy. RAIN pounds the windshield. Paulette drives slow, navigates the best she can. Wipers are on high speed.

Paulette uses a paper towel to wipe the fog from the window. When she’s finish she gives it to Krishna to wipe her side. Krishna does.

KRISHNA
I don’t mind if you pull over. Maybe let the rain ease up?

PAULETTE
You afraid?
(Krishna shakes:no)
I have no reason kill you, do I?

Paulette laughs... We can’t tell if it’s threatening or playful. Krishna’s tense.

PAULETTE
Just joshing. Loosen up.
KRISHNA
I’m fine. Just sleepy.

PAULETTE
I hear you’ve got my husband this semester.

KRISHNA
(caught off guard)
Umm, yeah I think -- I think he is...

PAULETTE
(smiling)
Probably not the first time you forgot, aye?

Krishna’s uneasy and it shows.

PAULETTE
He’s not the most memorable man but he has his ways about him, as I’m sure you know.

(beat)
His students tend to really take to him.

Krishna laughs. Hopes that’ll close the topic. She takes a granola bar out of her purse and tears into it.

PAULETTE
Eat when you’re nervous?

Krishna grimaces: please stop the questions.

PAULETTE
Third one since we pulled off. And the spaghetti at the house...

(pause)
I remember when I was carrying twins -- may they rest in peace --

KRISHNA
Whoa! That’s not what’s going on here.

Paulette doesn’t buy it. She covers Krishna’s hand with hers. Comforting.

PAULETTE
Are you sticking to that?

Krishna snatches her hand away.
KRISHNA
I don’t know what you’re talking about.

Paulette gets down to business...

PAULETTE
Look, I’m your best friend in this situation. Four miscarriages over here. I see the symptoms. You share with him yet?

Krishna, unsure if she should speak. Decides to stay quiet...

PAULETTE
Life is filled with choices and what makes life worthwhile is what we choose. Behind door number one--

KRISHNA
I don’t know where you heard this from, but really--

PAULETTE
Krishna, I know you’ll abort the baby. It’s not what you want but the father’s not in your ideal situation. Probably a closeted homosexual with HPV -- that you may wanna get checked for. Who knows? What I do know is you need me. You have no one else. And despite what he feeds you -- because all cheaters say the same thing -- he’ll never leave his m(e)-- his wife. Threatens to, but he knows you’ll beg him not to ‘cause you’d disgrace your family name and that’s something your father won’t let you live with. Now this is speculative of course. But if you want to do the right thing and have this baby, and I know you do, because deep down you’re a bright girl, I’ll guide you through it. I’m powerful. I’ll keep you safe; protect your family’s image. It’ll be as if a child was never born.

INT. RODGERS’ RESIDENCE - KITCHEN - MORNING

Avery, Zara and Jizelle are at the table. Breakfast set before them.
AVERY
Where’s Pa?

Levi saunters in. Same clothes as last night. He takes a sausage off her plate. Zara’s grossed out.

ZARA
Ilkkk, dad! I didn’t hear any water. You clean your hands.

Levi pulls sanitizer from his shirt pocket. Takes his seat. Zara pushes her plate away.

ZARA
Gross.

She spits the food from her mouth into a napkin.

LEVI
Twenty-five percent cleaner than soap.

ZARA
And not to be used as lubricant.

AVERY
What’s lubricant?

LEVY
Excuse me?

ZARA
Lotion for sex--

JIZELLE
ZARA!

Avery busts his gut laughing. Zara holds her hands to her chest: what did I do?

INT. BARNEY’S TRAILER PARK

Spic-and-span clean. You’d have no problem eating off the floor. Yet, Barney enters and he doesn’t look so fresh--Jack Daniels in his hand.

Mercury’s at the computer desk. A cup of soda’s on the desk without a coaster. Barney slides a coaster underneath it.

MERCUSY
I give up. This shit’s too hard. I ain’t find nothing.

The Google search box:
BRANDON LEVINE from Dividan county.
BARNEY
SURE YOU GOT THE RIGHT NAME? You know your brain and all...

MERCURY
I’m sure okay. Internet’s suppose to have everything.

BARNEY
You don’t remember the baby’s name?

MERCURY
No, when I went away he just took off. Not a trace ever since.

BARNEY
Medical records? Birth certificate?

Mercury ponders this...

A KNOCK on the door. Barney opens it.

Two Jehovah’s witnesses’. He tucks the Jack Daniels behind his back.

WITNESS #1
Greetings in our Lord’s name.

INT. DARNELL’S CLASSROOM – DAY

Professor Darnell is in his element. Class has ended. The students gather their book bags and stand up to leave.

DARNELL
...Test on Tuesday, the findings of Jesus.

Classroom is empty. Darnell sits behind his desk grading papers. Paulette saunters in.

PAULETTE
Not disturbing you am I?

INT. COLLEGE CAMPUS – HALL

Paulette and Darnell walk towards the cafe. Krishna comes out the bathroom – stops in her tracks... Paulette smiles at her, Darnell freezes for a second and pulls it together.
INT. COLLEGE CAMPUS – CAFE

Sitting across from each other, bored, Paulette and Darnell. Darnell’s shifty. Looking over Paulette’s shoulder. Nervous.

There’s a plate of Taco’s, only Paulette eats. Darnell barely touches his food.

PAULETTE
You haven’t taken a bite. I swear I didn’t poison it?

DARNELL
Still full from breakfast actually.

PAULETTE
They’re delicious.

DARNELL
They look it.

Paulette looks behind her, wonders why she doesn’t have his attention.

PAULETTE
Something’s the matter. Last time you skipped a meal--

DARNELL
I’m fine, Paula.

PAULETTE
Then try one. I Made them myself--

DARNELL
(harsh)
I’M NOT HUNGRY.
(catches himself)
Had I known you were coming, I would of starved myself.

A closed mouth smile: phony as he can be.

PAULETTE
That makes me feel better.

DARNELL
I have a shitload of papers to grade. I may stay late tonight.

PAULETTE
You can’t do it at home?
DARNELL
I figure since I’m here, it’s
easier to lock-in...

PAULETTE
What happened to us?

Darnell debates if she should pretend to not know what she
means or be just as forward...

DARNELL
Growth. Different directions;
different interest; goals.

PAULETTE
So I’m not imagining things?
(Darnell shakes: no)
(a beat)
My birthday was two days ago.

He perks up. Oh, shit it was. Stuck. Paulette waits for a
response - something other than the guilt in his eyes...

DARNELL
My mind just isn’t where it was--

PAULETTE
Your heart. I don’t wanna know
about your mind -- I wanna know
about your heart, Darnell.

Darnell’s ashamed. He stares down at the table.

DARNELL
There’s not another woman if that’s
what you’re thinking.

Paulette rocks her head back and forth - debating...

PAULETTE
Well legally you’re right.

Darnell has an addled look on his face.

PAULETTE
All these years and you still don’t
know me well enough to know that I
know you better than you know you?

She stares, takes him in. Myriad of emotions. She keeps calm.

He’s befuddled. How the hell does she know?
And that indiscernible smile is on her face again.
PAULETTE
Can’t get you out of this, Darnell.

DARNELL
I don’t need-- out of what?-- What are you talking about?!

PAULETTE
Just take a bow and come backstage--

DARNELL
I need to get back to work.

PAULETTE
--The thing I wanted most you gave to someone else.

DARNELL
I’m so lost-- what are you-- talk normal.

PAULETTE
You’ve fucked with the wrong one.

INT. CIGAR BAR – EVENING
Levi puffs a cigar. He sits across from two large men.

BROCK (50’s), has to be on steroids or been lifting since he was two because no man’s naturally this big.

ALEX, (late 40’s), even temperament-- the head honcho.

ALEX
Where’s our bag?

LEVI
Well fellas, how the family, business. No smalltalk?

BROCK
No wining and dining tonight, fuckboy. The money?

LEVI
And you’ll get it. But I need something. I want out.

ALEX
So you’re ready to die?

BROCK
--The money.
LEVI
I need out first, okay. I need your word that we’re done here.

They’re growing impatient.

BROCK
A lot of mouth for a motherfucker breathing only cause I say so.

Brock gets out his seat and sits next to Levi. Squeezing him all the way in.

Brock swings his cigar clipper around his pointer finger.

LEVI
I want to extend an opportunity to you.

Brock slams his fist on the table. Garnering attention.

ALEX
You playing with me?

LEVI
Every cent I owe you is with me. But wouldn’t you want more?

BROCK
Hand it over.

LEVI
Lend me your ears.

Brock threatens him with the cigar clipper...

BROCK
Wanna keep your tongue?

Brock pats him down, feels nothing.

LEVI
Get off me, okay. RELAX.

BROCK
He ain’t got shit.

ALEX
There’s a car outside your church. Inside that car is an arsonist with all the tools necessary to turn your temple of worship into the lake of fire.
BROCK
He gets off on the flames.

ALEX
Literally.

BROCK
Strokes his dick to it.

Brock taps his jacket pocket, where his cell is.

BROCK (CONT’D)
Just waiting for the ‘go’.

LEVI
--Wait. Listen. It’s in my car--
I mean c’mon, you think I’d carry that kind of cash around?

Brock snatches his keys. Stares him down. Levi better not be lying. Brock goes to exit.

ALEX
Wait. Steak first.

BROCK
(re: money)
I’ll get the pasta.

Brock continues on his way.

LEVI
Alex, we’ve been connected over a decade. That counts for something.

ALEX
Just business; never personal.

INT. THERAPIST OFFICE

Jizelle sits on the bench, calm. Leyda paces back and forth.

LEYDA
Now this?

Jizelle gives her a look. Raises her eyebrows: yes this.

LEYDA
And what about what I want?

JIZELLE
One step at a time.
LEYDA
I had plans for us, Jizelle! Life plans--

JIZELLE
Lets think logically here--

LEYDA
So what good am I to you? You just use m--

JIZELLE
I’ve never asked you to do anything that didn’t benefit you, too. (beat)
Have I...?

Leyda slows down the pacing as she considers whatever has been proposed.

LEYDA
You’re hiding something. What is it? Why keep it from me? You said I make your world go ‘round.

JIZELLE
(intense)
That’s why I need you! I’ll be right there with you. It was cruel of me to ask you to bare my child, and I just want to right that wrong.

Jizelle lovingly grabs her hand. Kisses it.

JIZELLE
Can I count on you like I believe I can?

EXT. CIGAR BAR – PARKING LOT

Brock rummages through the trunk of a Cadillac. Bingo! 50k cash.

Click click, the sound of a gun being cocked.

VILL
Don’t you move you racist motherfucka.

VILL (22, hat pulled low), wearing a Jesus Chain, has the barrel of his silencer pressed to Brock’s spine.
HOVAIN (17), Vill’s younger brother, snatches the money from Brock.

Brock moves suddenly -- thfff thffff, two shots in the ass. Brock falls to the ground. His shirt lifts up revealing a swastika tattoo.

VILL
Told ya’ dumbass not to move.

Vill quickly does the ‘sign’ of the cross and mouths: ‘forgive me’.

Vill nods to Hovain: you know what to do.

...MOMENTS LATER...

Vill drops 5 bags of ecstasy pills in the trunk.

INT. HOVAIN’S CAR – MOMENTS LATER

Vill in the back. Hovain drives. A WHITE GIRL in the passenger seat. She’s on the phone --

WHITE GIRL
(frantic)
There’s a dead body and bunch of drugs, and guns! Send Cops now! -- The Cigar Lounge!

She breaks the phone in half and tosses it out the window while Hovain drives.

INT. CIGAR BAR

Alex and Levi watch as the cops rush into the parking lot. Alex is alarmed. Shoots Levi a look: you son of a bitch.

Alex watches as Brock is handcuffed to a stretcher and led into the back of an ambulance.

LEVI
All business is personal.

Just as Alex goes to pull his gun, Police swarm in. Alex changes his mind.
INT/EXT. CAR/ LEVI’S CHURCH

The ARSONIST sits behind the wheel. Matches, paper and a vial (cologne sample size) of gasoline are in the front seat. The alarm to his phone goes off.

ARSONIST
(disappointed)
Shit.

He pulls off.

CUT TO:

EXT. DITCH – NIGHT

*We’re back at the crash.* (opening scenes)

Shattered glass, deployed airbags; windshield cracked; roof caved in...

Leyda’s bloody. Her face is scratched up. Stuttered breaths. Her attempt to remove her seatbelt is failing. Jammed. Only her right arm seems to be functioning. The left shoulder looks dislocated.

...No sign of help near...

To her right -- the folder she stole is on the floor. She jiggles the seat belt, gains some slack -- it gives. She painfully reaches for the files, her fingers dance around it until she grasps it.

Leyda makes another attempt to free herself... Finally the seatbelt unlocks.

Gas leaks from the bottom of the car... A small fire starts on the passengers side (outside the car).

Leyda rushes out and trips. The file falls out her hand and the medical papers go everywhere. While on the ground she sees gas leaking. Crawls away using her only good arm... wait, the papers. Against better judgement she goes back to gather them, but the wind blows them towards the fire. She snatches one out the air -- succeeds, but falls on her shoulder. Hard.

She stares at the medical paper in hand:
BRANDON LEVINE (SRS) *sexual reassignment surgery*

A spark turns to a flame and startles her. She slides back; the paper flies out her hand and into the flame.
There’s a full on fire now…and it engulfs the BMW. The files burn with it.

Leyda looks on, befuddled as hell.

INT. TRAILER PARK – MORNING

Barney fries an egg while Mercury sips from a mug.

BARNEY
Well lets try the courthouse. The birth certificate gotta do us some good.

MERCURY
His name ain’t on it, Barney. That’s what I’m trying to tell ya’.

BARNEY
From what I gather it seems like you don’t know shit about your son.

MERCURY
(sadly)
Well, no, I don’t know a whole entire a lot.

BARNEY
Maybe it’s best you just stay on out the picture. Let him be at peace with his dad.

MERCURY
I don’t know who’s got my boy. For all I know he could be in some dungeon--

BARNEY
Oh, stop blowing puff.

MERCURY
You don’t know!

Barney puts his egg on a plate and takes his seat. Drink of choice: Jack Daniels.

BARNEY
I got a litter of children. Hell, I bet all them’s is fine. Their mama’s was solid people.
MERCURY
You’re missing the point. I’m clean now. I deserve to see my boy. He only seen me once.

BARNEY
(eggs)
Needs salt.

Barney grabs some salt from the cabinet.

Mercury stares at Barney, hesitant to ask him something, but she must...

MERCURY
Babes...

Off her look, he rolls his eyes. Knows what’s coming.

MERCURY
... The case money. Can you help? Might take some funding but we can get an investigator on them. Speedy things along, ya’ know?

BARNEY
Them private investigators run ‘bout 42 dollars an hour and all they do is sit in the car.

MERCURY
That’s just in the movies.

BARNEY
Oh no, real life too.

MERCURY
(begging)
But Barns, please...

BARNEY
‘But Barns’ my ass. Quarter-Million dollars can go fast at that rate. I ain’t going to the poorhouse trying to fix your guilty conscience.

INT. HOSPITAL – DAY

Leyda’s bruised up. Angry. Not in the mood to socialize.
NURSE
You were very lucky. Slight bruising but nothing major. Elbow sprain. Just keep it in the sling, limit your movement... But you will need someone to drive you home.

LEYDA
My partner’s coming.

Just then Jizelle walks through the curtain. At first the Nurse doesn’t see her.

JIZELLE
(concerned)
Babe! God are you alright?

Jizelle goes to give Leyda a kiss on the lips but Leyda turns her head. That’s when Jizelle notices the Nurse.

Nurse senses familiarity in Jizelle’s face... Her eyes widen--

NURSE
First Lady J?!

Nurse’s eyes dart back and forth between them. She extends her hand.

NURSE
It’s me, Amber. From church.

Jizelle shakes her hand. 

AMBER (CONT’D)
So you two are business partners? (thick silence)
She had just been telling me she’s known you for--

Amber decides to move on.

AMBER
So, yeah, I was just telling her, she’s gonna be fine. Just slight bruising--

JIZELLE
Nothing that God can’t heal.

Amber’s so confused.

AMBER
Yeah. Amen to that.
LEYDA
(stern; to Jizelle)
Lets go.

Suspicious, Amber looks at Jizelle...leaves...

INT. HOSPITAL - ELEVATOR

Jizelle and Leyda ride it down. Jizelle holds the coat. Leyda’s arm is in a sling but she can walk. Jizelle feels through the pockets of the coat.

JIZELLE
Where is it? Who took your coat off? It’s not in here.

Leyda’s silent. An angry look on her face.

JIZELLE (CONT'D)
The files! Where are they?

LEYDA
No ‘hey how you doing’?

JIZELLE
Leyda, you don’t know how important... I need those.

An uncomfortable beat.

LEYDA
Well they roasted with the car.

Jizelle smiles.

JIZELLE
Are you sure?
(Leyda nods)
How do you know?

LEYDA
I almost burned with them.

Elevator stops. Doors open.

LEYDA
Always wondered how you could be so callous and manipulative. I realize now.
(turns to her)
You’re just a typical man.
Jizelle’s face drops. Did she say what she thinks she did?

EXT. PARKING LOT - NIGHT - CONTINUOUS

Leyda’s power walking. Jizelle catches up.

LEYDA
And now I’m even more confused.

JIZELLE
Fine.

LEYDA
Like... Just give me some truth.

JIZELLE
The truth’s nothing more than ashes now.


LEYDA
Jizelle. JIZELLE!

She snatches Jizelle’s arm with her free hand. Rough. Tight. Looks into Jizelle’s eyes.

LEYDA
I almost lost my life for you! You owe me this!

Still staring into her eyes...Jizelle shows no emotion. Blank face.

LEYDA
...Fine Brandon?!

Jizelle SLAPS her. Regrets it instantly. She runs to her car, gets in, and Speeds off. Leyda, left in shock. Everything happened so fast, her emotions haven’t processed it.

INT. TRAILER PARK - DAY

Mercury reads a pamphlet. Tears well up in her eyes.

MERCURY
(re: pamphlet)
There’s something to this, Barn.
BARNEY
It’s all horseshit if you ask me.

MERCURY
Uh-uh. Horseshit don’t make me feel this way. I feel like it’s fate.

BARNEY
You just looking for something to believe in.

Barney’s phone rings. He answers.

BARNEY
Yeah...

Meanwhile Mercury sets the pamphlet down — a Kingdom Hall tract. Strolls over to Barney.

BARNEY (CONT’D)
...Well how soon?
(turns his back, whispers)
I don’t give six shits, honestly, I ain’t trying to deal with her relapsing... So how long?
(rolls his eyes)
God dammit! Can’t do it cheaper?!...yeah. Bye.

He hangs up. She waits with baited breath... He faces her. Smiles. She smiles back.

MERCURY
Baby thank you!

She jumps into his arms. Wraps her legs around him.

INT. LEVI’S CHURCH – OFFICE – DAY

Vill dumps the 50k on Levi’s desk.

VILL
Pastor, I felt a rush.

Levi put his finger over his mouth — shhh. Levi slides him 3 stacks -- 15k.

LEVI
You done now, right?
(no response)
Listen, Vill. This is double value what you left in that trunk.
(MORE)
LEVI (CONT'D)
Enough to get out and go straight.
I did this for you.

VILL
And I appreciate it, Pastor. If you
ever need me--

LEVI
No. That was a one-time thing, that
no one can ever know about. So you
let them know...

Levi pretends to zip his lips shut. Vill nods.

LEVI
You gon’ be preaching one day.
I believe in your purpose. I love
you, son.

Levi gives him a tight hug.

VILL
Love you, too, Pastor. I’ll make
you proud.

LEVI
Now go do the Lord’s work... and
remember...

Levi puts his pointer finger over his mouth. Smiles. Hope you
understand what I’m saying.

VILL
Amen. I will, Pastor.

LEVI
Wait!

Levi holds his hand out: you forgot something.

Vill pulls the silencer from his pocket and hands it over.

INT. AVERY’S BEDROOM - NIGHT

Avery kneeling down by his bedside.

AVERY
God, please help me see. I just
want to see my mom just once,
please. And let me be normal like
other people. Can Jesus please heal
me. This all I want God. In your
son’s name. Amen.
INT. DARNELL’S HOME - BEDROOM - MORNING

A nice, comfortable and spacious apartment. This room is blue. It’s set up like a nursery.

...The sound of bacon sizzling from the kitchen...

Paulette uprights: fluffs the pillows in the crib, straighten’s the sheets...

She crosses to the other side. That half is decorated and set up the same except that half of the wall is all pink.

This nursery was set up for twins.

KITCHEN - CONTINUOUS

Paulette sets the bacon on the plate.

PAULETTE
Honey! Food’s done.

Darnell takes a seat at the table. His body language is that of a child that’s been scolded and still on punishment.

She sets his plate before him.

PAULETTE
Such a nice day out today. We should go for a walk.

He looks out the corner of his eye. Nods. Starts his bacon.

PAULETTE
You’re not acting like yourself.

He gives her a look: Is she crazy?

PAULETTE (CONT’D)
I’m not seeking retribution. (takes a seat)
Remember the talk we had about perspective? I look at this differently. I put my emotions to the side and sought the truth. And frankly, we’ve never really been in love at the same time. (grabs his hand lovingly)
I know why you married me--

He goes to speak but she cuts him off--
PAULETTE
-- Uh-uh. Don’t rebut it. And I had my selfish reasons for marrying you, too. A decade younger, I figured I’d be living in another generation. You wanted kids, you knew I did, but your greed came first. But I’m happy you found “love”, because you gave me the same thing -- a chance to be complete. A baby. And once the child is here, you can have your divorce and I won’t protest -- and I know you’ll try and take an unearned piece of my fortune. As long as I have sole custody, I won’t dispute the prenup. But be mindful, if you decide to get slick, I got enough on you to get alimony from your already pathetic paycheck.

He’s uneasy. Feels like less than a man.

PAULETTE (CONT’D)
You know what? I changed my mind. Let’s go clothes shopping for the baby.

DARNELL
(hesitant, re: mental)
You’re not right...

PAULETTE
We’ll be fine. Thank you.

She grabs his face with the palms of her hands and gives him a long kiss.

PAULETTE
Don’t. Fuck. With. Me.

She saunters out like a boss.

INT. KRISHNA’S CAMPUS BEDROOM – DAY

We pan across the room slowly. Everything is neat and clean. The bed is made perfectly. There’s a letter on the pillow. It reads:

Dear Dad,
I’m sorry. I just wanted to do right by you and God. Neither of you would be pleased with me. I hope you understand.
We come to the adjacent bathroom where the bathtub water is running... But the bathtub is empty...

Krishna steps into frame wearing latex gloves. She cleans the medicine cabinet mirror with windex...

Krishna opens the cabinet below the sink. Hesitant but committed. She takes Ammonia out, pours the entire bottle in the bucket...

Her breathing gets heavy. She grabs the bleach...

INT. SPRINTER - DAY

Levi’s in the back row with Bishop Saunders. They shake hands.

    BISHOP SAUNDERS
    Congratulations.

    LEVI
    Thank you, Bishop.

    BISHOP SAUNDERS
    How’s it feel?

    LEVI
    (exhales)
    I’ll be better when it’s official.

    BISHOP SAUNDERS
    The Committee stands behind you. Just one more vote.

    LEVI
    Paddock.

EXT. MADDOCK’S MANSION - DAY

Levi’s led in by a Maid.

    BISHOP SAUNDERS (V.O.)
    Yeah, Father keeps vice grips on grudges. And Father’s vote holds the most weight.
INT. MADDOCK’S MANSION – CONTINUOUS

Levi follows the Maid up the grand staircase and into an

BISHOP SAUNDERS (V.O.)
...It needs to be smoothed out.
Things between you two. I’m sure
you understand.

OFFICE ROOM

Off the side of the stairs.
The Maid opens the door. Levi strolls in. Heart in his hand.

LEVI
Father Maddock.

An short, pudgy WOMAN (66) with a shaved head turns around.
This is FATHER ROSETTE MADDOCK.

EXT. RODGERS’ RESIDENCE – BACKYARD – DAY

Avery’s perched on the balcony. Crying.
Zara opens the screen door and sits beside him.

ZARA
(re: tears)
(Were you) listening to happy feet?
(no response; joking)
Found out what you look like?

He keeps crying, ignoring her. She senses the seriousness.

ZARA
Ave, what’s wrong?

He shakes his head: nothing.

ZARA
C’mon squat. Man up. Talk.

A beat...

AVERY
I feel out of place.

ZARA
Well you’re blind and sitting on a
second story balcony. How the hell
you even...
AVERY
Nothing adds up anymore.

ZARA
The God shit, right?

AVERY
No, with ma. I never met my dad, Zara.

ZARA
Ohhhh. Well having a dad’s not all it’s cracked up to be.

AVERY
Easy for you to say. You have one.

ZARA
Well my ole’ man’s been there for you.

AVERY
Only because he’s with my mom.

ZARA
Well, yeah... But no, he genuinely loves you. He does. I hated him for it.

(understanding)
I get cha’, tho. Mines kinda opposite. Me and the Krish didn’t have a mom. That’s hardcore shit. I knew who she was but she wanted nothing to do with us, ya’ know?

AVERY
Do you know what she sounds like?

ZARA
Well, maybe. I guess. Krish might...

AVERY
I remember my dad’s voice kinda. Sometimes when my mom thinks I’m sleep she’ll tell me she ‘she loves me’, and I swear it sounds like him.

ZARA
Well...see. That there shows he’s still a part of you.
AVERY
But I want to know him.

ZARA
Look, buddy. You’ve got two sisters, a step dad and a mom that all love you. Be happy with that.

She hopes those words will comfort him but they don’t. He’s no better than before.

She tries another approach:

ZARA
Damn, this really bothers you.
Look, what do you know about him?

AVERY
Only what ma tells me, so not much. Not her favorite person. Plus pa don’t like me talking about him in the house.

ZARA
I’ll help you.

He perks up. Happy.

AVERY
Really?

ZARA
But you have to do everything I say. And we have to be discreet.

AVERY
(re: discreet)
What does that mean?

ZARA
Keep your mouth shut.

PRELAP: BZZZZZZZZZZZZZ...

INT. BATHROOM - MOMENTS LATER

Hair falls to the ground.

Zara’s shaving Avery’s head with clippers. She gathers his hair and puts it in a plastic bag.

He runs his hand over his shaved head.
AVERY
Feels funny. How do I look?

ZARA
Quite handsome actually.

That puts a beaming smile on his face.

INT. THE RODGERS’ RESIDENCE – BEDROOM – NIGHT
Lit candles on the dressers. Intimate setting.

Jizelle’s in the bed, wearing her sexiest lingerie. Champagne glass in hand. Posing, waiting for--

Levi exits the bathroom in a great mood. Silk Pajamas on. He lifts his glass and they toast.

JIZELLE
So proud of you.

She spreads her legs. He lies between them.

JIZELLE (CONT’D)
Now may I have my man back?

He sips, then kisses her inner thighs...

LEVI
All yours baby.

JIZELLE
(flirtatious)
Wait, wait. Tell me how you did it?

LEVI
Chatter bout Father’ll kill the ambience.

He resumes kissing. She reacts to the pleasure. He’s getting closer to her spot.

JIZELLE
Honey, c’mon. You know your business dealings get me wet.

LEVI
(re: tongue)
Got something else to do that job...

Levi slides his tongue across his teeth like he’s just had a delicious steak.
JIZELLE
(giggling)
Babe...

LEVI
(exhales; uprights)
I told him-- her, Father-- that I was sorry but I stood by my statements.

He buries his face between her legs, she lifts it up.

JIZELLE
And that’s it?

LEVI
Mostly. She hollered and made threats. Said I’d never succeed out there and that’s why she’ll give me her vote, just to watch me fall on my face. It’d give her more pleasure than actually holding me back.

(re: vagina)
Now can I get back to dinner?

JIZELLE
(now concerned)
Well what did she mean by that?

LEVI
I think you’ve passed the states legal limit.

He sets her glass on the dresser. His cell VIBRATES...

LEVI
FUCK!

Grabs it. Reads the message:

KRISHNA - Pa I’m sorry.

Levi’s puzzled. Too horny to care right now.

He shoots a text back.

INT. BATHROOM - NIGHT

Krishna’s on her knees, slumped over the bucket, SNIFFLING and GASPING for air, she’s committed to this.

Her face flush...gagging...shaking...
Her cell, on the sink, BZZZZZ! A message pops up:
**DAD - DON'T BE. I'M GOING NATIONAL! Talk in the A.M. Love you...**

**THUD** -- Krishna falls to the floor. Eyes rolled back in her skull. All **white**...

*End of Pilot*