

## "THE SKEPTIC"

Written by

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EXT. IN THE BEGINNING AND THE FALL-HEAVEN TO EARTH [PENNY'S DREAM] [ANIMATED]

The man falls to his knees on the ground, and his woman drops behind him.

The earth is covered by gathering darkness. A cloud.

Fallen angels-demons-fall from heaven, through that dark cloud.

The demons, much larger in stature than the humans, clasp chains and metal collars around the humans, locking them. The human captives and prisoners look up with eyes that have turned black since The Fall. Their eyes are black marbles that make them blind. The humans struggle along in their chains, pulled by the demons.

Even the demons bow themselves to their leader, the god of the darkened, fallen earth, satan.

One man (Moses) strains a hand to the dark heavens, and down to them comes the Law-the Ten Commandments.

Many men fall back, but for those who see the light cast by the words that shimmer before them and touch their souls, the black eyes become milky white cataracts with just a hint of color.

And then a rainbow arcs through the clouds. At the end of it is a man. The Son of Man.

All who see Him have their eyes immediately cleared and colorized. All things are new under the bright cloud that begins to consume the dark cloud to overshadow it with its glorious glory.

INT. HOME

&

COFFEE SHOP-DAWN-ESTABLISHING SHOT

Young woman moving on an escalator through life, during her own narration, an internal monologue concerning her observation that skepticism isn't just for unbelievers (atheists). A lot of Believers are skeptical, too. She is. Because skepticism comes from lack of knowledge. It comes from lack of curiosity. It comes from bad teaching (legalism, condemnation, tradition-over going to the Word).

However, skepticism is really the best place to live for a lot of people. It makes one curious, hungry for truth. It makes one agitated by an itch that needs answers to sooth it. Showering; brushing her teeth and staring into the mirror; opening her closet, and throwing on her coat or sweater; walking (looking thoughtful) down the street; entering a coffee shop, smiling briefly (distractedly) as a server greets her; and settling in to a booth. To order a coffee. To think. To plan. To do her best to find out what God really wants her to know...about Him and His Son.

INT. PENNY'S HOUSE-BEDROOM-DAY

PENNY PARKS-ROBERTS (early 30s) jerks awake suddenly.  
[Viewers get the sense that the preceding visual was a dream Penny was having.]

Penny rubs her hand over her face, looks over to the right at her alarm clock. It says 6:13 a.m.

Penny sighs heavily, blowing out her cheeks, and lets her right arm flop down toward the clock. Using her left elbow, Penny sits up just enough to be able to see the switch she's looking for. Moving it to "OFF," Penny collapses back onto the bed.

Sighing again, Penny turns over onto her left, pulls into the fetal position, and throws the comforter back over her

head.

After a moment, Penny abruptly stretches all the way out and flops back onto her back. Penny pulls in her knees, pushing her double-strand twisted bangs back from her forehead. Grunting, Penny pushes up onto both elbows. She looks around, grunts again and lets her head drop back on her neck.

Grunting again, Penny pulls up so that her knees are against her chest. Wrapping her left arm around her bent knees, Penny rubs her right hand over her face, trying to scrub it awake. Moaning, Penny pulls her arms back around her ears so her shoulder blades push together. Out of breath, Penny shoots a glare over at the alarm clock.

Looking over to the unoccupied left side of the bed, Penny pushes out her lips, gently runs the flat of her left hand over the space, and shakes her head.

PENNY

like the clock is her nemesis

Every morning...

INT. PENNY'S CHILDHOOD BEDROOM LIT BY A NIGHT-LIGHT-NIGHT

Penny (9 years old) kneeling on the left side of her bed, hands folded, eyes closed, mouth moving to silent words. She looks up at that ceiling and flexes her fingers. Then she looks left and right, sighs, and climbs into bed.

PENNY (V.O.)

Even when I believed in God, I  
 didn't...believe. Even when I  
 thought Jesus came, did miracles,  
 died on the Cross, and even came  
 back to life... I didn't think He  
 was God. Jesus, I mean. I didn't  
 think Jesus was God. I knew He was  
 the Son of God, but I also knew He  
 served God... So for me my question  
 was, How could a servant of  
 God...be God?

## INT. COMMON AREA OF PENNY'S PARENTS' HOME-DAY

Penny (early 20s) on the edge of her seat looks from a huge television screen displaying Jesus crucified to her father who is staring intently at the screen. Penny gets to her feet and makes her way toward the front hall. She reaches one arm out toward the stair railing, glances over toward a long foyer table. A Nativity scene surrounded by lighted Christmas decorations (blinking trees and wrapped presents) is displayed there. Penny, slowly squats in front of it, resting her chin on her hands to look. Her eyes examine all of it.

PENNY (V.O.)

I used to think God lived in a place called the Secret Forest. Mysterious blue light came through the trees in the dark... And that light came from some golden coffer with runes on it. And there were priests-like my mom or my friends' moms who REALLY believed and had rightful access to God... They could contact Him on my behalf. And for them (not for me) He would answer. So (indirectly) I would feel the power of God, who in my own right, I had no right to know. I had no right to see God. I had no real need to understand God. I was supposed to forget about Him after these strange encounters with Him anyway...which I did. Then I'd go on with my life.

Because I thought of God in mythical ways. He was like a genie to me. He was like...someone who lived on the moon and heard the wishes I made with all my might...

The image of God at the gate of the Secret Forest hid God from me. All my Jesus movies and all the things you're supposed to know about Jesus...especially at Christmas time and Easter... During Easter it was more important, but I couldn't have told you why. Because it's not really true, but it felt that way to me then. Maybe Santa had solidified in my mind as more "real" than some bunny, so Easter HAD to

be about God...

INT. SANCTUARY OF A BAPTIST CHURCH DURING A SERVICE-DAY

PENNY(7 years old)is seated beside SHELLEY(4 years old) between their parents. CROSBY (early 20s) has a bible on his knee. naudia (early 20s) is slowly clapping her hands to the music. Everyone is clapping their hands and swaying and jumping and shouting around them. From Penny's perspective it's a forest of swaying legs. People are running up and down the aisles. The preaching is fiery. Shelley and Penny look at each other. Shelley puts her thumb in her mouth. Penny looks from the Bible on her father's knee up to Crosby's face. Crosby turns to nod down at her. Penny nods back and puts her arm around Shelley. Looking forward again, Penny nods again.

I grew up believing that I could inherit salvation from my parents, if they had it.

Over time, I started to feel so insecure and inferior...till I didn't believe I had a reason for living...

INT. YOGA STUDIO-DAY

Penny (late 20s, pregnant) is on a stationary bike, spinning.

INT. YOGA STUDIO-DAY

Penny (late 20s, pregnant) is being shown a modified pose for pregnant women by the yoga instructor.

EXT. RUNNING TRAIL-DAY

Penny running with earbuds.

EXT. RUNNING TRAIL-DAY

Penny running in the rain. She waves at QUINN as she passes him where he leans against the front of a Moonlight Blue Porsche Cayenne S wearing BLAKE ROBERTS in a Baby K'Tan under a bubble umbrella.

## INT. PENNY AND QUINN'S BATHROOM-NIGHT

Penny (late 20s) in a bathtub with a highlighter between her lips, holding a book away from the bubbles and water. The cover reads: ANGER Is a CHOICE.

PENNY (V.O.)

I tried a lot of things, trying to find some peace. Trying to find a purpose... Trying to give my life meaning... Trying to get away from all the stuff my conscience told me was wrong in my life-which was most things.

While I searched, I picked up lots of idols and threw them in my hobo sack: Obsessions with celebrities, their shows and lives... A faux-religion called politics, with its own gods and doctrines and symbols... I surrendered my life to those things for temporary peace and fulfillment... But at the end of those bottles of tonic, I felt more and more disappointed.

Broken at the end of chasing one of these rabbit trails, I finally found God to hold onto in Jesus Christ

## INT. PENNY'S BEDROOM-DAY

Penny (early 30s) on her knees on a spread yoga mat, hands hanging loosely at her sides as she tips her head back and stares out the window toward the sky.

PENNY (V.O.)

He never lets go of me-even when I fall short.

Imagine me in AA, calling up my sponsor...as I finish a decanter alone. Imagine my sponsor being willing to counsel and help me.

In the midst of all my sinning, I've found that God is there-blessing me and making my ways straight. He knows all the ways I'm still failing and living unworthy of salvation. Still, He comforts and guides me.

Jesus comes through when I trust Him-His power, wisdom, and goodness. But I find myself forever asking...and getting

information, and it's hard to arrive at a place called, "Capital T-truth."

MONTAGE-VARIOUS

A) INT. BATHROOM-DAY-Penny in pajamas wearily brushing her teeth and rinsing.

B) INT. BATHROOM-DAY-Penny gathering energy in an invigorating shower spray. Penny shampooing her hair.

C) INT. BEDROOM-DAY-Penny looking into her closet, grabbing things, and sliding the closet door shut.

D) EXT. CITY STREET-DAY-Penny walking down the street (looking thoughtful) in a coat or sweater. Penny enters a coffee shop, smiling briefly (distractedly) as a server greets her. Penny settles in to a booth. Penny orders a coffee.

END OF MONTAGE

INT. COFFEE HOUSE-BOOTH-DAY

Penny takes off her coat, settles into the booth, takes a sip of coffee and stares out the window, thinking.

DISSOLVE/CUT TO: [Actually want scene changes to be abrupt black outs, like a person blinking.]

INT. UPSCALE, CASUAL RESTAURANT AND WORKING WINERY-NIGHT

Hustle and bustle of waiters and hostesses receiving, seating, and assisting patrons. Sounds of conversation, laughter, clinking dinnerware and glasses. Guests hugging other guests as they join them at their tables. People waving and gesturing to folks across the room.

Enough noise is going on around Penny and her friend LISA to create a wall around them that encloses them in intimacy even as they speak with decently loud indoor voices.

Penny gestures eloquently with strong hands.

PENNY

I'm not this Bible...brain! I'm  
TRYING to be a wife. I'm TRYING to  
write. And BLOG... I take pictures.  
I see my gifts...

LISA nods, leaning forward to test her martini as she  
listens intently.

LISA

You ARE smart about the Bible,  
Pen...

PENNY

(shrugging and throwing up  
her hands)  
Yeah... Okay, but I haven't even  
read it all!

LISA

(shrugging back and sipping)  
Who has?

Penny pauses to smile and shake her head at Lisa who takes  
another sip. Penny also smiles acknowledgement at the  
waiter as he places an appetizer on the table.

MARIO THE WAITER clasps his hands before his chest,  
eagerly, smiling and leaning forward at the waist in a near  
bow.

MARIO THE WAITER

How is everything?

PENNY

(smiling big)  
Great.

Lisa covers her mouth with one hand as she chews, speaks,  
and points at her martini glass.

LISA

Can I get a glass of water, please?  
Two, actually. And napkins.

Mario The Waiter frowns seriously, clasping flat hands down  
by his thighs.



MARIO THE WAITER  
Right away. And I'll check on your  
entrees.

Penny smiles and makes eye contact.

PENNY  
Thank you very much, Mario.

MARIO THE WAITER  
(smiling sweetly)  
You're welcome!

LISA  
You're too hard on yourself.

PENNY  
I feel like people are always  
saying that to me. But I don't  
wanna-

Lisa waves her hand, matching her interruption.

LISA  
It's TRUE, Pen. God doesn't want  
you to always be afraid of what  
you're NOT doing right, because He  
LOVES you. I love you-your heart,  
your mind, your emotion, and your  
talent! I love all the crazy stuff  
that make you YOU!

PENNY  
But it's not about me.

LISA  
(taking a sip)  
Okay. It's about God.

PENNY  
I never knew what it meant to be  
saved.

Lisa looks up briefly as Mario The Waiter places two  
glasses of water on the table.

LISA

Yeah, you know when I was growing  
up, there were these girls...

Penny glances between Mario The Waiter and Lisa.

PENNY

Thank you.

MARIO THE WAITER

Any minute on those entrees,  
Ladies.

LISA

Thanks, Mario.

MARIO THE WAITER

No problem. And here are your  
napkins.

LISA

(pointing at her head)

I like a good memory on a waiter.

MARIO THE WAITER

(smiling big)

It looks good on me don't it?

PENNY

(laughing)

It does, Mario!

MARIO THE WAITER

(licking his teeth)

Okay. Let me get out y'all way.

LISA

(smiling)

Anyway, these girls wore dresses  
all the time. Never-even when it  
was totally ridiculous for them not  
to-did they wear shorts or pants!  
So but when I asked them, Why? They  
said, Because we're saved. Back  
then that didn't mean anything to  
me. I had no idea SAVED had to do

(MORE)

LISA (CONT'D)

with God. I thought they were in a cult! Isn't that sad?

PENNY

What?

LISA

They didn't know either!

PENNY

What do you mean?

LISA

If they knew what their being saved meant... If they knew what salvation means...they wouldn't have said it meant wearing dresses!

PENNY

(pointing at Lisa)

Thank you! That gets to my point.

MARIO THE WAITER

(placing plates on the table)

Your food, Ladies.

PENNY

Thank you.

MARIO THE WAITER

Is there anything else I can get you guys?

LISA

I don't see the vinaigrette.

MARIO THE WAITER

I'm so sorry about that. I'll bring it right now.

PENNY

I don't even think I knew the word, Salvation. I just thought about it as going to heaven. Those young girls thought it was about what they wore.

I got really afraid one time-that I wasn't going to heaven.

Lisa winks at Mario The Waiter as he places the vinaigrette on the table.

LISA

Hm.

PENNY

I just wanted to know how you know  
you're going to heaven.

LISA

What did your mom say?

PENNY

That's the funny thing now that  
you're bringing up. I don't think  
we know the answers to this thing.

LISA

(squinting)

What do you mean?

PENNY

I mean...Mom told me, If you're  
really afraid you aren't going to  
heaven...that's how you know you're  
going-to heaven. If you're afraid  
you're not going to heaven then you  
know you're going to heaven.

LISA

(dumbfounded)

Hm... I hope you don't mind my  
asking, But aren't your parents  
Believers? Doesn't your mom believe  
in what the Bible teaches?

PENNY

(shrugging)

I could answer that in a lot of  
ways... How do we know what people  
believe?

LISA  
(throwing up her hands)  
Well...

PENNY  
Lisa, all we know...is what people  
SAY. And how they SEEM to us. Only  
God knows what people really  
believe. Where they really are...

Yeah, I grew up thinking we were Christians... I don't even  
call myself that now-Christian.

LISA  
Why?

PENNY  
It's tied to too many things that  
have nothing to do with Christ. I  
believe that the Bible is true-even  
what I don't understand. I believe  
in the Triune God, Elohim. Jehova,  
the Son of God and that through Him  
God manifests and reveals Himself  
to us. And the Holy Spirit is our  
teacher of the truth about God...

LISA  
Can I say, You SOUND like you know  
your Bible to me?

PENNY  
But there's so much I don't know.  
And even in talking to you right  
now, I realize there's so much none  
of us knows. Some of us are on  
truly shaky ground calling  
ourselves Believers. And I don't  
like to say that cause it sounds  
really judgmental.

LISA  
Well, I think it's true. Because  
what are we out here doing? Telling  
people we believe in God and don't  
even know how to get to heaven or  
what it means to know Him?

PENNY

You might think I'm crazy, but I don't think salvation is just about going to heaven...any more than repentance is about guilt. We need to change our minds. We don't need to feel bad about what we used to think.

Lisa licks her teeth and points a conspiratorial finger at her martini glass.

LISA

A lot of us think salvation's about this.

PENNY

I think intoxication or, or...drunkenness is about infatuation. I think it's about idolatry. It's not about having drinks at a party. It's not about wine with dinner.

Lisa takes a sip, keeping her eyes on Penny.

LISA

Or a martini.

PENNY

Lisa, it's about idolatry. Basically what we make most important. What we want most. Do we want God? Do we want whatever other thing we make an obsession that blinds us to God?

That's the thing.

Drunk with wine or filled with the Spirit is a question of what you seek FIRST. His righteousness. The truth the Holy Spirit can give you about the Lord...or fun. At the bottom of a glass...

LISA

Yeah, but people will judge me if I drink. They'll say I'm not a true Believer. Like you say, Only God knows that. And whether I drink is not the issue. It's what's important to me-what values guide my life.

PENNY

(nodding)

It's what you value MOST.

LISA

(frowning and nodding)

Right...

PENNY

(shrugging)

Tupac said it best. I THINK it was Tupac. Only God can judge me.

LISA

(taking another sip)

Well Billy Graham says, Our job is to love. The Holy Spirit convicts. God is the judge. Well, that's what he says on Facebook.

Penny and Lisa laugh raucously, drawing stares. They toast.

PENNY AND LISA

To Facebook!

EXT. AMPLE PARKING LOT FOR POPULAR TRACK-DAY

Lisa in sweats, headed for her car juggling keys, frowning and preparing to start her remote keyless ignition. People are waiting for spots in the field of cars. Other folks are passing Lisa going in both directions (toward and away from the track). Gravel crunches underfoot. Voices coordinate and commiserate vaguely about plans for running and other things. As Lisa walks by a man on his cell phone, her own rings.

Lisa pulls her cell phone out of her sweat pants, presses accept on the screen, wipes her right ear with the band on

her right wrist and puts the phone to her ear.

Lisa's eyes are on the loudtalker who's passing her slowly.

LISA

Hello?

INT. PENNY'S HOUSE-GREAT ROOM [KITCHEN, DINING ROOM, LIVING ROOM NEAR FIREPLACE]-DAY

Penny's getting some sweeping, mopping, dishwashing, laundry, and general housekeeping done. Her birds are singing loudly to the Jamaican music Penny has on low near their alcove (which would normally be used for an upright piano or buffet and hutch).

Penny pauses near the cold fireplace, pushing the button that turns off the vacuum. Clicking it into the upright position, Penny throws the cord out of her way and switches to the broom.

PENNY

Hey, girl! What up? You busy?

INTERCUT Lisa

LISA

Um, no. I just finished my run.

INTERCUT Penny

PENNY

I can call you back.

INTERCUT Lisa

LISA

Nope. I just hate it when people can't talk on their phones like normal people. I mean, I have a phone, too. Do you see me SHOUTING to mine like there's a deaf person on the other end? Excuse me, hearing impaired.

INTERCUT Penny



PENNY

(smiling)

We all need to feel important you know? I'm not about to judge someone wanting attention, girl.

INTERCUT Lisa

LISA

(rolling her eyes)

But, Pen, this is just manners! I'm sorry... I draw the line at bad manners.

INTERCUT Penny

PENNY

(rolling her eyes)

Where you at? The gym?

INTERCUT Lisa

LISA

Outdoor track. The one I took you to that one time.

INTERCUT Penny

PENNY

(rolling her eyes and shaking her head)

That one time... Thanks, Lisa, for reminding me. Okay, well, what are you up to?

INT. INSIDE LISA'S CAR-DAY-TRACKING [TRAVELING]

Lisa driving, leaving the parking lot.

LISA

I thinking I'm gonna go to the grocery store before I take a shower. Then I'll try to get some work done... What's up with YOU? And please ignore how I sound. I always have an attitude when I work out.

INTERCUT Penny

PENNY

Which is every day. NOT that you  
have an attitude.

INTERCUT Lisa

LISA

(grinning)

That I work out. I know. It might  
be that time of the month, too.  
Gross I know.

INTERCUT Penny

PENNY

No. But some folks act like it is.  
Like it doesn't visit all of us on  
a pretty monthly basis.

INTERCUT Lisa

LISA

(giggling)

Pretty monthly... LOL. Um, but you  
know what?

INTERCUT Penny

(smiling)

PENNY

No, what?

INTERCUT Lisa

LISA

That reminds me of what we were  
talking about-acting like we're  
perfect. Like we've all read the  
Bible.

INTERCUT Penny

PENNY

(laughing)

Seriously, Lisa, some of us HAVE  
read the Bible. By US I don't mean  
me.

INTERCUT Lisa

LISA

(snorting)

Exactly! That's my point! Quit  
acting like you're perfect! Is that  
what makes a great Christian?  
Meanwhile, you shout on your cell  
phone in the parking lot like any  
other loud-mouthed lost person?

INTERCUT Penny

PENNY

(sobering)

I really don't wanna act like I  
think...things we do make us what  
we are.

INTERCUT Lisa

LISA

What?

INTERCUT Penny

PENNY

I mean, yes, When we believe in  
Jesus... That shows up. Anything  
you believe shows up in your life.  
Like if you think it's okay to  
curse and smoke...You curse and  
smoke...

INTERCUT Lisa

LISA

Right!

INTERUCT Penny

PENNY

But if you curse and smoke... That  
doesn't mean I know what you  
believe about Jesus. You know what  
I'm saying?

INTERCUT Lisa

LISA

So... You're saying that we act  
like everybody else?

INTERCUT Penny

PENNY

Well, we do... But we shouldn't.  
That's a whole 'nother thing. We  
should be different. We should live  
lives that give people an overall  
sense that Jesus is in our lives.  
But that doesn't mean we're gonna  
be perfect.

INTERCUT Lisa

LISA

I didn't say perfect. Wait, I did!  
Okay what am I saying?

INTERCUT Penny

PENNY

I think you're getting back to the  
idea of being judged for  
drinking...or any of the things  
that are typically judged by  
Believers.

INTERCUT Lisa

LISA

Right. Okay. Yeah. But what are YOU  
saying?

INTERCUT Penny

PENNY

Layers of things... They seem to contradict each other. But they don't. We do look more and more like Jesus. But we start off looking like everyone else, even though we believe. That's the walk. Some of us go faster and some of us go slower.

INTERCUT Lisa

LISA

Some of us stop...

INTERCUT Penny

PENNY

(shrugging)

I dunno... I've only really had a RELATIONSHIP with God and seen Him do things that were unique to me. That only I could understand. That's only been less than two years, Lis.

I'm barely to the point where I know...that I don't know anything.

INTERCUT Lisa. Lisa smiles a little.

INTERCUT Penny

PENNY

But I used to think it was about a denomination. I didn't even know what a denomination WAS. I still don't really know what that word MEANS... I asked someone the other day was their quote-unquote Christian description a denomination. And she said, No. It's a tradition. Huh?

So like I don't know what makes people tick religiously.

INTERCUT Lisa. Lisa uses her fingers to number off.

LISA

Trying to be good. Not wanting to  
get in trouble. Basically.

INTERCUT Penny

PENNY

I remember when I was kid... They  
put me in the church basement... I  
remember staring up at the light  
from the window wells the entire  
time. And then some guy dressed up  
in a red devil costume with horns  
came out of nowhere! I was  
basically ready to be done with  
church after that. It was boring...

INTERCUT Lisa

LISA

I just remember it being brown.

INTERCUT Penny

PENNY

(cracking up)  
And itchy.

INTERCUT Lisa

LISA

(surprised by laughter)  
Itchy?

INTERCUT Penny

PENNY

All I knew was that after church I  
got to eat at Bob Evans or Perkins  
or wherever, and I got to take off  
my tights!

INTERCUT Lisa

LISA  
 (nodding)  
 Yaaaaaaasss! The tights and full  
 skirts and bows and hair done to  
 within an inch of its life!  
 Yaaaaasss, girl!

EXT. PARKING LOT SHARED BY GROCERY AND GAS STATION-DAY

Most pumps are occupied at the gas station. The nearest parking spaces are occupied near the east and west grocery entrances, but it's relatively quiet.

Lisa keeps her eye on traffic and carefully chooses a spot.

Lisa pulls into a spot and puts the car in park. Sighing, she sits back.

INTERCUT Penny. Penny is still cleaning.

PENNY  
 The minister was our neighbor, and  
 we drove with him to Sunday school.  
 It was held before the service my  
 mom and dad attended. But when they  
 showed up, my sister and I had to  
 sit...and sit...and sit through  
 what felt like HOURS...

I didn't call it speaking in tongues. To me it was just people thrashing around and babbling and EMBARRASSING me. To me it wasn't preaching. It was just loud, boring, incomprehensible, passionate shouting. And, on top of it, if you were new... They forced you to stand up. They wanted you to come DOWN.

INTERCUT Lisa

Lisa pulls up one leg of her pants, squirms in the seat and turns her lips up at a passerby in something that's more a grimace than a smile.

LISA  
 You know they say that's the MAIN  
 reason people visit a church...and  
 don't come back!  
 (dry)

Why are you calling me, girl?

INTERCUT Penny

PENNY

I know Patrick don't drink.

INTERCUT Lisa

LISA

No, girl. You know we just don't  
see eye to eye on that.

INTERCUT Penny

PENNY

(smiling)

I LOVE his uptight ways.

INTERCUT Lisa

LISA

(laughing)

That's why we married 'em. We love  
our uptight men with their uptight  
ways.

INTERCUT Penny

PENNY

So but I'm having something at the  
house. I'm cleaning up right now so  
you won't wonder what in the world  
I was thinking having you over into  
my mess. But bring something  
Patrick can drink. Apple cider-

INTERCUT Lisa

LISA

(snorting)

Cider.

INTERCUT Penny



PENNY  
(laughing)  
Or sparkling grape juice.

LISA  
Okay. Let me get out this car and  
get my groceries before I turn to a  
pillar of salt right HERE! I need a  
shower!

PENNY  
Okay, I'll let you go. Love you.

LISA  
Love you, too. Wait! When is it?

PENNY  
Tonight. It's Friday, right?

LISA  
No. It's Thursday.

PENNY  
Oh. Okay. It's tomorrow then.  
Around seven. Casual.

INTERCUT Lisa

LISA  
You're killing me, Pen. You're  
inviting me, and you don't know  
when it is? Is anybody else coming?

INTERCUT Penny

Grinning, Penny answers in a loud voice.

PENNY  
I'm not killing you; I'm loving you  
to life, and I condemn every tongue  
that comes against us in Jesus'  
name!

INTERCUT Lisa

Rolling her eyes, Lisa smiles.

LISA  
Is anybody else coming?

PENNY  
Maybe. All I know for sure and all  
YOU need to know...is that YOU'RE  
coming.

INT. RETAIL DRUG STORE IN WAITING AREA OF PHARMACY  
DEPARTMENT AND HEALTH CARE CLINIC-DAY

Five to six pharmacy clerks behind glass in blue scrubs (male and female, brown and cream-skinned) accepting prescriptions for filling, ringing up purchases, stocking shelves, and fielding questions from customers approaching the glass or on the phone.

A woman in a white overcoat is carrying a large, red thing that looks like something that should be used for private bodily functions toward a white-haired man who settles himself behind a screen on a precarious looking seat projecting from the screened area.

Between the screened area and a footmapping kiosk for custom orthotic inserts is a seating area in the shape of an L without its corner.

It's nearly winter and huge signs about Flu shots are everywhere in blue.

Across from the pharmacy window, there are two sets of shelves extending from the wall. A triangle display says, "Sorry, we are currently closed," beside the largest of three monitors. Names are scrolling down, first and last with the times and statuses of appointments.

Penny sees "Penny Parks-Roberts | 9:15 | Pending" in a list of names scrolling up. A prompt on the monitor directs patients who have scheduled appointments to touch the screen in order to begin check-in.

After staring at the monitor for a while with a few other people and glancing around at the other guests—a huge, fat man in a red tee shirt with a blonde daughter in a puffy purple coat; a brown-skinned woman with a fringed head wrap; a young woman or girl focused on her phone; a gray-haired lady; and a woman all in black (trench coat, tall

boots, leggings) and a perfectly-dressed toddler-Penny moves over to the other two monitors.

A woman holding the hand of a little boy (about four years old) moves through the area, and Penny looks up as she speaks.

MOTHER OF FOUR YEAR OLD

We have to make an appointment next time, honey.

Penny pushes her bottom lip out in sympathy for the four year old, stares after them till she can't see Mother of Four Year Old and her son any longer, and then checks in. She pulls her wellness screening paperwork out of her pocket with her phone, moves over to the shoe insert display, and starts checking her email.

GRAY-HAIRED MAN/GRAY HAIR

Can I get this other shot with this one, too?

WOMAN IN WHITE OVERCOAT /OVERCOAT

Excuse me?

GRAY-HAIR

Can I get this one, too? I'm allergic to penicillin, by the way.

OVERCOAT

Okay. Have you had that one before?

GRAY-HAIR

No.

OVERCOAT

Well, you'll have to fill out another set of paperwork, if you want to get that done today.

GRAY-HAIR

That's fine.

OVERCOAT

I'll be right back.

GRAY-HAIR

I was sure I told them over the  
phone... Sorry about that.

OVERCOAT

(headed away with weary  
patience)

No, it's fine. I'll be right back.

Overcoat disappears through a doorway at the left end of  
the glass window, taking the strange red object with her.

The woman with the fringed head wrap's phone rings for the  
third time. She gets up to take it. She moves away,  
speaking into the cell phone.

Penny shakes her head and sighs deeply, observing her.

CORY, a brown-skinned man of average height emerges from  
somewhere near the larger of the three monitors and calls  
out.

CORY

al-Hassan? al-Hassan! Mason?

The young woman focused on her phone, who looks older than  
Penny first thought, stands up, shrugs, and squints a smile  
at Penny as she heads over to Cory.

Penny smiles back, glancing down the aisle and up into the  
slanted mirrors that give an overview of the entire store.  
She goes back to her email.

OVERCOAT

Now you know it won't be covered  
under your insurance?

GRAY-HAIR

What? No.

OVERCOAT

(sounding brighter than when  
she left to retrieve  
additional paperwork)

Yeah. If you get it today with us,  
it won't be covered.

GRAY-HAIR

I'll just call my doctor.

OVERCOAT

Okay. I'm sorry... I just want you  
to understand that while we can do  
it for you today; you WOULD have to  
pay out of pocket.

The woman in the fringed head wrap approaches, smiling at Penny with reddened, but friendly dark eyes. Penny smiles back and takes a few steps toward her. She leans in and speaks in a voice she hopes isn't too loud and gossipy.

PENNY

Are you al-Hassan? Is your name al-Hassan?

AL-HASSAN

Yes. I am.

PENNY

They just called your name.

al-Hassan moves like she's going to head over, and Penny speaks quickly.

PENNY

They already called the next  
person.

al-Hassan's shoulders drop.

PENNY

I know. Isn't it always the way?

AL-HASSAN

Way what?

PENNY

Way it happens? Way it works...

AL-HASSAN

I thought I might get a little bit of shopping done.

PENNY

I know.

al-Hassan moves by Penny toward the check-in area in order to have a look. al-Hassan comes back and sits down again. al-Hassan glances up at Penny who's gone back to her email again. al-Hassan surprises Penny by speaking.

AL-HASSAN

Do they actually take sick people here?

PENNY

Yes. Uh, yes. I think so. They have a doctor.

AL-HASSAN

Well, yes. It is very convenient!

PENNY

It is! They're really expanding!

AL-HASSAN

Yes!

PENNY

(uncomfortably)

Is that what you're here for? Are you sick?

AL-HASSAN

Um, no. I'm actually here for work.

PENNY  
(relieved)  
Yes! So am I.

AL-HASSAN  
The health screening.

PENNY  
Yes. Me, too. For my husband's  
work.

AL-HASSAN  
I actually have not been able to  
make an appointment with my doctor.  
And it is getting close to the  
deadline. So...

al-Hassan smiles, gesturing as if she expects Penny to  
understand. Penny smiles, nodding. Penny lifts her  
shoulders around her ears.

PENNY  
Actually, at the doctor's office,  
it's a longer process. And the  
blood-taking...

AL-HASSAN  
(smiling anticipatorily)  
Much worse at the doctor's office.

PENNY  
(nodding)  
Here, they just prick your finger.  
Done.

AL-HASSAN  
(smiling)  
Ah. Yes.

Penny nods and goes back to her email. She is surprised to  
hear al-Hassan speaking to the woman in black.

AL-HASSAN  
How old is he?

THE WOMAN IN BLACK/THE MOM  
Three.

AL-HASSAN  
And is he here for the flu shot?

THE MOM  
Yes. We both are.

PENNY  
I have a three year old, too.

The Mom looks over at Penny, smiling. The Mom nods and looks down at her son.

PENNY  
Is he in preschool?

THE MOM  
No... But his grandparents take him to the library and different events.

AL-HASSAN  
Isn't three the age to begin preschool?

THE MOM  
Or four years old...

PENNY  
(glancing at al-Hassan)  
It depends. You can.

THE MOM  
You CAN...

PENNY  
I had Angel in preschool when she was two.

Penny glances at The Mom.



PENNY

But they're THREE for goodness'  
sake!

THE MOM

I mostly want him to be socialized.

AL-HASSAN

Right!

PENNY

(nodding)

I'm fine with preschool...

Penny turns to look at al-Hassan.

PENNY

But we took the kids out of public  
school and just put them in private  
school...

Penny turns to look at The Mom.

PENNY

And it's not cheap!

THE MOM

(with wide eyes and a smile)

I know! We were just talking about  
that.

CORY

Roberts!

Penny stands up, smiles at The Mom and al-Hassan, and heads  
toward the check-in area. Facing Penny, Cory gestures  
toward the room to his left with a smile.

CORY

Hi, Mrs. Roberts! I'm afraid we're  
going to have to take some blood. I  
hope that's okay.

PENNY

Yeah! Totally fine with blood being taken! What's your name?

CORY

Cory.

PENNY

Let's get it done, Cory!

CORY

(laughing)

Yes, ma'am!

INT. DOCTOR OFFICE-DAY

Office with honey blonde faux wood floors. There is room for a seating area with two chairs. The work gets done along the west wall as you enter the room. Along that wall, there are two separate workspaces. One is a place to take vitals and discard medical waste. Another is an L-shaped workspace for the doctor complete with an open cabinet that holds a giant printer. An examination chair is angled into the northeast corner of the room as you enter.

Cory organizes a plastic cartridge that's blacked out in certain areas, what looks like a royal blue pencil sharpener, paperwork, and other various medical paraphernalia. He lays it on the less elaborate, glass-covered workspace. It's positioned beneath a set of small, dark brown, closed cabinets.

Penny watches him. She crosses her arms and uncrosses them. She puts her fists on her hips and uncurls her fingers, dropping her hands to her sides. She blows out a breath and smiles as Cory turns to her. Cory is grinning.

CORY

Okay. I'm sorry. I'm going to have to take some blood. And that will take about 10 minutes for results, if it registers.

PENNY

That's okay. I'm ready.

CORY

(smiling bigger)

You just ready to get this over with!

PENNY

Yes, sir! Let's do it!

CORY

Okay. What's your dominant arm?

PENNY

(thinking)

Right. But whichever arm or hand or whatever is better...

CORY

(winking one eye shut)

Well I'd rather not draw from your dominant arm.

PENNY

Am I going to be out of commission today or what?

Cory laughs out loud, shaking his head.

CORY

No, ma'am!

PENNY

(eyes wide, grinning)

I mean what are we talking about here? Blood transfusion donor type taking? I mean...

CORY

(cracking up)

No, MA'AM! It's just going to be a finger prick.

Penny, genuinely relieved blows out a big breath, leans back, and puts her hands on her hips. She smiles, calmer.

PENNY

Praise GOD! Thank You, JESUS!

Penny and Cory both start laughing.

CORY

No, ma'am. It's just a pin prick.  
We'll just try to see which one  
gives us more blood? We just need  
enough to make sure it registers.

PENNY

I'm totally serious, you know? I  
thank GOD it's just a pin prick.  
Every time I do this we do the  
whole butterfly thing!

CORY

Oh, no, ma'am. Just a pin prick  
today... Hold on a second. I'll be  
right back, and Doctor will be  
right in.

PENNY

Praise God.

CORY

(smiling and nodding)

Right back.

Penny blows out another breath, nodding to herself.

Penny heads over to the papered examination chair, using  
the big step to boost herself up and turn around and sit.

Penny looks around the room, up at the ceiling, and then  
comes to stare at the gathered medical paraphernalia. Penny  
begins to talk in a very low tone.

PENNY

LORD, I command favor and blessing.  
I TAKE it. I CLAIM it. Not of  
myself...but the life I now live in  
the body, I live by the faith-the  
faithfulness and obedience of  
Jesus, who loved me and gave

(MORE)

PENNY (CONT'D)

Himself for me. With men it is impossible, but not with God. For all things are possible with God.

Penny pauses, turning her hands into fists and looks up at the OSHA chart taped to the closed door.

PENNY

I cling to you, Jesus. I rely upon you, Jesus. I trust you, Jesus. I adhere to you, Jesus. Not of myself, but I claim favor in Christ and in Your name!

DR. SAIFY TALIB/Doctor Saify followed closely by Cory enters the room. A little taller and lighter brown than Cory, the doctor has black glasses and thinning light-colored hair that glistens white in certain places. He's wearing strange patent leather shoes that look like they're made for comfort.

DOCTOR SAIFY

Good morning, Mrs. Roberts!

PENNY

(surprised and pleased)

Good MORNING, doc.

DOCTOR SAIFY

Feel free to call me Doctor Saify.

PENNY

Yes, Doctor.

Doctor Saify smiles, nodding and comes further into the room. Cory is organizing medical things again.

CORY

Mrs. Roberts, let's try your left finger.

PENNY

Yeah, fine. Let's do.

Cory approaches with one of the royal blue pencil sharpener-looking things and what looks like it would be a

great, black walking stick for an upright, walking mouse.

Silent, Penny observes them cautiously.

PENNY

I'm not gonna look.

CORY

(smiling)

Okay. It'll take ONE second.

Cory chooses Penny's middle finger, considers it, and then swabs it. Penny keeps her eyes closed.

CORY

There'll be a pinch...

As he stretches out the word, pinch, Penny feels the prick, which is, relative to all pain, none at all. She opens her eyes and looks at the action.

Cory is squeezing her fingertip and gathering the blood with the miniature black glass cane.

CORY

I think this should be enough...

PENNY

Do we need a butterfly? I want it to register so we don't have to do this again. Not that it was bad... But my husband is entertaining the kids somehow...

Cory is shifting the cartridge around. Doctor Saify approaches. He looks Penny over with bright eyes and speaks to Cory.

DOCTOR SAIFY

We may need the phlebotomy equipment.

CORY

I think it's settling...

Cory looks anxiously between Penny and Doctor Saify.

CORY  
Phlebotomy?

DOCTOR SAIFY  
Do they usually have to get it that  
way, Mrs. Roberts? Does the pin  
prick usually not work?

Penny lifts one shoulder and smiles without teeth.

PENNY  
They usually draw blood.

DOCTOR SAIFY  
Okay.

Putting his hands into the pockets of his coat and  
exhaling, the doctor moves over to the cabinets above the  
workspace covered with medical paraphernalia. Then he opens  
two doors. Cory follows his lead. He removes the gloves  
he's wearing and begins to search out the cabinets.

CORY  
Phlebotomy?

DOCTOR SAIFY  
Mrs. Roberts, I'm just going to  
draw out some blood with a needle.

PENNY  
Okay, Doctor. May I ask what is  
your first name again?

DOCTOR SAIFY  
Saify.

PENNY  
Saify. Okay, I'm ready.

Smiling and nodding, Doctor Saify moves away. Cory and  
Doctor Saify prepare. Penny looks away again, closing her  
eyes.

As Doctor Saify speaks, however, Penny opens her eyes to  
watch. Doctor Saify is tying a green glove above her elbow  
to agitate a vein.

Doctor Saify scrapes a swab back and forth over the bend in her arm.

DR. SAIFY

This may be a bit tight. I just want to irritate the vein a bit more...

PENNY

Okay.

DOCTOR SAIFY

Here comes the pinch...

Penny looks away as the needle goes in.

DOCTOR SAIFY

Coming out...

Penny glances down at her right arm as Doctor Saify removes the needle, keeping his gloved thumb over the injection site. She glances up at Doctor Saify. Their eyes meet, and then Doctor Saify looks down to the injection site.

DOCTOR SAIFY

(removing the pressure of his thumb)

Is it bleeding much?

Penny's eyes widen. She says nothing.

Doctor Saify rubs a band aid into place.

DOCTOR SAIFY

No.

Cory steps out. Doctor Saify checks some kind of medical drawer and examines a reading.

Doctor Saify slides out a rolling stool and sits down at the workspace.

DOCTOR SAIFY

Wow.

Doctor Saify looks over his right shoulder at Penny and discards his rubber gloves.



DOCTOR SAIFY

You don't eat fast food at all, do you? I can tell. You shouldn't change anything you're doing.

Penny squints her eyes, perplexed and simultaneously on the verge of laughter.

PENNY

Um... Okay..?

DOCTOR SAIFY

CHILDREN have LDL this low. 45...  
It's barely registering. And your  
HDL... I call it heavenly  
cholesterol... Your heavenly  
cholesterol is perfect.

What are you doing? Working out regularly and avoiding fast food obviously. I wouldn't change anything you're doing.

PENNY

Um, okay... Praise God.

Doctor Saify nods and turns back to the workspace and readouts.

DOCTOR SAIFY

Wow. Amazing... Now...

Doctor Saify prints out something that looks like a receipt and stands up. He heads toward the L-shaped workspace at the opposite end of the wall.

DOCTOR SAIFY

Now I'll get your wellness summary.

PENNY

Yes, sir.

DOCTOR SAIFY

(turning to his computer)

I have to enter these results.

Doctor Saify turns over his left shoulder to look at Penny as he continues.

DOCTOR SAIFY

Once I complete this report, a copy will be sent electronically to JP Chase... Their occupational nurse will review this...according to the company's in-house procedures for whatever they need... Depending on how much they're paying...

Doctor Saify trails off, turning to the computer to enter results. He speaks as he types and waits for different screens to load.

DOCTOR SAIFY

I'll also print a copy of this report for you...with some recommendations... Now...

Doctor Saify turns over his left shoulder to look at Penny as he continues.

DOCTOR SAIFY

I HAVE to recommend certain things to you. Though your sugar is not of concern to me right now; given your family history, I will keep an eye on it. If it changes, I will recommend strict intervention and certain lifestyle changes... Based upon your family history, again, I'll suggest ways to cut down on salt.

PENNY

Yes. Avoid salt.

DOCTOR SAIFY

(turning more fully toward Penny and folding his hands in his lap)

You know...when you're cooking, not to add the salt then?

PENNY

Really?

DOCTOR SAIFY

(pointing at Penny)

YOU can have a salt shaker at your table. Put some on to taste, but don't add it before you cook. Otherwise the salt will sink in, and you'll find it under-seasoned.

PENNY

Hm.

Doctor Saify crosses his legs and takes a sip from the mug with the teabag string hanging over the lip.

DOCTOR SAIFY

I used to be in private practice...

PENNY

Really? I would have LOVED to have you for my doctor.

DOCTOR SAIFY

(smiling)

Thank you.

PENNY

You're very friendly. UNEXPECTEDLY pleasant.

DOCTOR SAIFY

I like to talk with my patients. To take time with them.

PENNY

That's what I like about you!

DOCTOR SAIFY

You know, when I was in private practice the CN would knock on the door at the end of every ten minutes and check to see was I finished with my patient? I hated that.

Doctor Saify spreads his hands, keeping his eyes on Penny.

DOCTOR SAIFY

That's why I'm here. So I can tell  
patients that I drink tea with hot  
lemonade when I feel a cold coming  
on.

Did you know that African Americans are salt sensitive?  
That it takes less salt to agitate blood pressure for them?

PENNY

No... I didn't.

DOCTOR SAIFY

(turning back to his  
computer)

Yes. Now, Mrs. Roberts...

PENNY

(pulling out her cell phone  
and typing)

What's your name again?

DOCTOR SAIFY

T-A-L-I-B is my family name. Saify  
is my first name, spelled S-A-I-F-  
Y.

Do you have a primary care provider?

Doctor Saify checks his paperwork. He and Penny speak at  
the same time.

PENNY

Um... Actually...

DOCTOR SAIFY

You're looking for a primary care  
provider, you said.

PENNY

(relieved)

Yes.

DOCTOR SAIFY

(over his left shoulder,  
looking at Penny)

I can recommend in your area, Grant  
Peters. You can tell him my name,  
if you decide to contact him.

PENNY

Grant Peters, you say? In  
Forestlawn Oaks? I absolutely WILL  
mention you!

DOCTOR SAIFY

(nodding)

Good. That would be fine... They  
take appointments online. And in  
three days or less Doctor Peters  
will answer questions you have for  
him-personally. They have a very  
high tech operation over there. And  
I can tell you the secret to  
avoiding a four hour wait...

Cory returns.

Penny smiles, holding back outright laughter.

PENNY

Yes?

DOCTOR SAIFY

Ask for the first appointment of  
the day. Even if it's a week out-  
unless you are very sick, of  
course. Then do something else...  
But then everything will be in  
order. Your doctor will be on time,  
and he will be fresh...

PENNY

You seem pretty fresh.

CORY

(grinning)

The doctor's alright.

Doctor Saify sobers and turns back to his computer. Cory leaves again.

DOCTOR SAIFY

Now...

Doctor Saify turns over his left shoulder to look at Penny.

DOCTOR SAIFY

I have to ask you certain questions.

PENNY

That's fine.

DOCTOR SAIFY

Do you experience stress? We all do. To what extent would you say that stress affects your life? A lot..?

Penny interrupts with a smile.

PENNY

Very little.

Doctor Saify nods slowly as he examines paperwork.

DOCTOR SAIFY

Very little...

Penny shrugs, smiling.

PENNY

I mean a tree fell on our house.

Doctor Saify turns to look at her, and Penny throws up her hands.

PENNY

We had it cut down, got the stump ground down, and built a new garden bed over it!

Doctor Saify nods slowly and looks back down at his paperwork.

PENNY

And we got a new roof out of the deal! Awesome!

DOCTOR SAIFY

What would you say has been the worst part of this examination?

PENNY

Fasting.

Doctor Saify turns back to the computer fully. Penny tries to smile.

PENNY

I don't know what religious tradition you are from, but in Christianity...we fast so that we can hear God. For clarity... Maybe this is a good thing for me. Maybe I NEEDED to fast today.

Doctor Saify freezes completely-no typing, no moving the mouse, nothing.

DOCTOR SAIFY

(unfreezing)

There are many faith traditions that fast... I no longer do, but at one time, I fasted as a Muslim.

PENNY

(nodding)

Yes.

Doctor Saify turns to face Penny, clasping his hands in his lap.

DOCTOR SAIFY

And Muslims fast for thirty days during Ramadan.

PENNY

(with eyes wide, head going back on her neck)

Thirty DAYS?

DOCTOR SAIFY

Well, you are allowed to eat at sunset. But you fast from everything during the day, even water.

PENNY

Even WATER?

DOCTOR SAIFY

I just couldn't do it. I get very irritable when I fast. I mean, if I need to-for a physical exam or bloodwork that requires it... But I can't do it.

PENNY

May I ask you a question?

Doctor Saify turns his back to Penny and faces his computer. His answer is very polite and unreadable.

DOCTOR SAIFY

Yes.

PENNY

You say you're not a Muslim anymore... But do you believe in a...higher power?

Penny rolls her eyes and holds her breath. Doctor Saify pushes back, stands and heads over to the other workspace before answering. He turns over his right shoulder, speaking to Penny in profile.

DOCTOR SAIFY

Yes. I do... But I don't like religion.

PENNY

Me either.

DOCTOR SAIFY

I don't believe in man-made rules.



PENNY

No.

DOCTOR SAIFY

I mean I do meditate. I do take  
time for myself...

PENNY

I think that's absolutely right.

Doctor Saify nods once and turns back to the workspace.

Doctor Saify turns to face Penny with his hands in his  
pockets.

DOCTOR SAIFY

I think we're about done here. I'll  
print out the report with the  
recommendations. It will be  
something else for you to read.  
I'll print on both sides, so it's  
not quite so long-about eighteen  
pages...

Penny comes to her feet, smiling.

PENNY

I think you're operating in your  
gifts doctor.

Cory reenters the room. He checks the medical drawer.

DOCTOR SAIFY

Excuse me? The results are in.

CORY

Huh? It registered?

PENNY

(grinning)

It did. Doctor, I was saying, I  
think you're operating in your  
gift. Your giftings.

DOCTOR SAIFY  
(looking uncertain)

Hm.

Doctor Saify suddenly moves back to the printer and presses a button. He moves the mouse near his keyboard.

DOCTOR SAIFY  
(sitting down again)  
Don't know what's taking this page  
so long to load...

Penny takes a seat, but not the examination chair.

DOCTOR SAIFY  
You know I am blessed... Gifting...  
I don't know. But I am blessed.

PENNY  
Yes.

DOCTOR SAIFY  
I can walk and talk and feed  
myself.

PENNY  
Yes.

DOCTOR SAIFY  
I'm thankful.

PENNY  
Yes. Gratitude makes a joyful  
heart.

DOCTOR SAIFY  
(looking confused)  
Hm... I'm able to take vacations  
sometimes...

PENNY  
You like to travel?

DOCTOR SAIFY  
(grinning broadly)  
Yes! I want to visit Machu Picchu!

Doctor Saify looks down, thinking about what he wants to say next.

DOCTOR SAIFY  
It's in the Andes... They say that  
there are spiders five feet wide.

Smiling big, Doctor Saify gestures eloquently.

PENNY  
Whoa! You don't smoke do you?

DOCTOR SAIFY  
No, of course not! I will have to  
prepare for the hiking. I want it  
to be a...pilgrimage... I'm  
terrified of spiders.

PENNY  
Then you will face...and CONQUER  
fears.

Doctor Saify studies his folded hands with a small smile.

DOCTOR SAIFY  
I suppose...

PENNY  
Yes. May you be blessed with  
wisdom...and discernment.

Doctor Saify stands, regarding Penny peripherally again,  
this time from his left.

DOCTOR SAIFY  
That is what I value most.

PENNY  
Praise God.

INT. GREAT ROOM-DAY [FLASHBACK]

Penny kneeling before the cold fireplace is folding laundry from several baskets. The TV is off in the sunken basement. No music is playing. The birds are quiet.

A storm is stirring up outside, and Penny is alone, murmuring to herself.

PENNY(V.O.)

When the storm came, my husband was off somewhere with the kids, and I was folding laundry on the blue foam mat I use for exercising and yoga (when I used to do yoga), and it came on strong outside.

The storm outside matched the turmoil inside me. And I think I wanted it over. I hoped it was the end of the world and not just thunder and lightning. Every time I was shaken by what was going on outside, I started to cry out.

INT. PEGGY'S BEDROOM WORKSPACE-DAY

Penny is sitting at her desk, looking out on a winter scene as the sun shines in. She leans away from the window, covering her mouth with her hand, thinking.

PENNY (V.O.)

You have to understand, I'm remembering this. Who knows how much I'm embellishing or cutting out? All I know is that I was literally crying out. I was bawling, like I was dying. And my cries asked God for the answer to Why?

WHY was it all falling apart? WHY didn't He get it over with already? WHY did my kids have to be born during this tumultuous and dark time of the world?

It was a breakdown.

EXT. PENNY DRIVING-DAY [TRAVELING] [FLASHBACK CONT.]

Penny is driving around in the Roberts' white Range Rover when she comes to a stop behind a sedan at a busy intersection in a residential area.

PENNY (V.O.)

I remember driving around town one day, dropping off for preschool and running errands. It was sunny. And the beautiful day mocked what I was feeling inside. I actually thought or said, "It shouldn't be sunny. This is not a time for sunny days." Even the weather was oblivious.

INTERCUT Great room. Penny is standing in front of a TV, arms crossed with a remote in her hand.

PENNY (V.O.)

I cried out and then rushed to turn on my newly-discovered Trinity Broadcasting Network to comfort myself.

The day of that storm did something. I cried. I knelt before God. I felt stripped bare.

INT. BEDROOM OFFICE NEAR THREE-PANEL WINDOW-DAY [FLASHBACK CONT.]

Southern exposure sun is shining in onto a black, folding card table. Every inch is covered with bags of crayons; packaging tape; headphones, artwork from Penny's kids, taped down post-it notes; ceramic animals; crosses her five year old son and seven year old daughter have painted and assembled.

Painted glass artwork from her children, stained wax paper shapes, and sticker art, and more post-it notes are stuck on the windows, too.

Bibles of all shapes frame the card table along with commentaries and a huge concordance. On top of devotionals for children, rolls of tape are stacked on top of each other as holders for markers, pencils, and pens.

Penny is in a black leather, mid-back office chair, typing at a laptop on its cooling stand.

Penny glances and marks-crossing out or checking-notes she's made on open notebooks, empty envelopes, and magazine ordering cards that are overlapped and layering each other in a peculiar order that Penny seems to understand.

Penny is excited and peaceful at the same time.

PENNY (V.O.)

I started taking notes from Joyce Meyer and learning about spiritual warfare and my real relationship with God. I learned, I have the right to call Almighty God "Father." I didn't know that. I put that on a post-it note.

Joyce Meyer also taught me, You don't always have to defend yourself! Stop judging and embrace my own calling. God is impressed with heart motives, not what we do! Forgive, pray and bless my enemies. Trust God. Fit in where God wants me! Humility. Meek equals strength under control.

INT. PENNY'S DINING ROOM-DAY

Penny's sitting at her dining table surrounded by office materials, open reference materials, and open Bibles. She's scribbling onto post-it notes as Angelina sits across from her in a booster seat coloring amidst scattered duplos. There's a TV on in the kitchen. Penny murmurs some of the words coming from the TV, nodding to herself.

PENNY (V.O.)

Joyce Meyer directed me to Scripture in the Bible-"Still your anger. Hold it back"-from Proverbs [twenty-nine eleven.] 29:11. I wrote all that on post-it notes, too. In caps.

## INT. PENNY'S BEDROOM-NIGHT

Penny is leaning into her bedroom to listen to the television and holding her son, Jacob's hand at the same time. She holds up a finger, straining to catch something as Blake shows up with an armful of books, folders, and a pencil in his mouth. Angelina is hopping from foot to foot with an over-sized plush teddy-bear in her arms in front of Blake. Eventually, she lets herself be dragged out of the room, saying something to her kids that can't be heard.

I went from thinking it was so nice for them to LET Joseph Prince-a man whose accent I could barely understand-HAVE his own show...to putting up Pastor Prince post-it notes. As Jesus is, so am I on this earth. [One John four seventeen.] I John 4:17. All caps again. And, My children must not be made to feel "out of fellowship with me." Joseph Prince also said, "I am Christ risen at our Father's right hand. God looks at Christ, finding delight in my new identity through Him." And I wrote that down, citing Romans, but I don't find it...

I kind of believe it though-much more than I did on the day I wrote that down.

## EXT. Penny Driving-DAY [TRAVELING] [FLASHBACK CONT.]

Seeing Penny through the front windshield as she drives and sips coffee.

## PENNY (V.O)

I started talking to God. I would cry sometimes-when I'd think about how far I'd come and how much had changed...everywhere I looked!

My favorite place to talk to God was in the car. Just myself or, the baby and me. She was only two then.

## EXT. PENNY DRIVING [TRAVELING]-DAY

Penny in a red sweater with three-quarter length arms and hair pulled back in a French braid with gold hoop earrings. Penny is looking determined, checking her rearview and passenger side door mirror as she hits the gas and passes another vehicle in a merge. Smiling with quiet satisfaction, Penny turns the music up louder.

PENNY (V.O.)

In the car I could think and not  
startle anyone with my tears or my  
truth. Not that I wouldn't cry or  
pray with the kids in the car.  
That's part of how they learned Who  
God is and how to praise Him.

At the time, I didn't even know any religious radio  
stations, so I just used my cell phone turned up as loud as  
it goes.

I knew there must be some kind of device that plugs into  
the ashtray or something, but I didn't have one in those  
days.

I discovered Christian music. I like contemporary and  
country style. I also like Gospel and Rhythm and blues  
style. My favorite used to be the kind that talked about  
the kinds of things I was going through.

At some point-after I'd been reading the Bible awhile-I  
started to notice that some of the lyrics didn't match with  
the Word. They didn't match what I was reading in the  
Bible.

And, believe it or not, that turned me off. No matter how  
catchy. I realized that I couldn't always understand the  
layers of meaning in some of the songs-until I read more  
Scripture. So, some of the songs that had gone off the  
playlist came back on...

INT. PENNY'S KITCHEN [FLASHBACK]-DAY

Penny sighs and turns off the television, setting the  
remote down on the kitchen table before hustling a troupe  
of kids out to the mudroom. Glancing at the sleeping TV,  
Penny blows out another sigh.

EXT. PENNY DRIVING [TRAVELING, FLASHBACK]-DAY

Penny in a jean jacket over a university softball tee  
shirt. Looking weary, she reaches for a mug and appears to  
curse as she hits the brakes and sloshes some of the liquid  
over her hand and wrist. Leaning over into the passenger  
footwell for something, Penny comes up with a child's dirty  
sock. Rolling her eyes, Penny tries to mop up and keep her



eyes on the road.

PENNY (V.O.)

I stopped watching certain shows.  
Some of that stuck, and most of it  
didn't. I still think TV twists  
something inside me.

Conviction came and certain shows had to go...before they came back. A lot of shows left the DVR lineup, including the news, which was all I used to watch. Soap operas had to go. A lot of movies don't sit right with me anymore. No more secular radio for me.

One thing that's much more permanent and nearly complete is my mouth. God cleaned it up.

EXT. PENNY DRIVING [TRAVELING, FLASHBACK]-DAY

Penny in denim blazer over a wrap blouse with diamond studs in her ears and her hair in a natural, curly fro. Serious eyes on the road, she's got a plastic, two-pocket folder in her right hand. When she can, she glances down and reads aloud from it, speaking over her shoulder to short legs and small feet. There's something grim about her mouth.

PENNY (V.O.)

I grew up hearing and being used to  
cursing. I thought it was cool and  
strong. But it helped make a wedge  
between my husband and me. It made  
our home an unstable and unhappy  
place to be.

I failed at so much before I confessed Jesus... I remember when I prayed that He wouldn't let me fail at this-at being saved and being changed...

INT. PENNY'S SUNROOM [FLASHBACK]-DAY

Penny has a pot cigarette in her hand. She's keeping an eagle eye on the kids as they play outside. Slowly, she closes her hand around the cigarette and hides it behind her back.

PENNY (V.O.)

I only stopped smoking pot with prayer. The Holy Spirit convicted me about it first. And I started to feel myself entering into a negative force field or something when I would approach it.

For a while, I would ignore that sensation. But I started to get such a heavy feeling about doing it-dread and such a certainty that I'd done the wrong thing.

And when I was high, I would pray. But I wouldn't be able to worship and look to the sky. But that was how I liked to pray.

A lot of things go on in the sky that I never noticed before. At that time, God was only in the sky. In my mind...

But when I was smoking and high, I couldn't look at the sky, because I didn't want God to see me. That's how I really realized I had to quit.

I realized that before I even wanted to stop.

EXT. PENNY DRIVING [TRAVELING, FLASHBACK]-DAY

Penny in a hoody and sweatpants, getting out of the car she's pulled over to lean on the side of a road, tears running down her face. Her breath is a visible, icy mist. Looking uncertain and agitated, Penny pushes her hands into the pockets on the front of her hoody. Penny heads toward the front of the car, stops, checks the road, and heads to the back of the car. Once there, she stares at the ground, looks around again, then turns to lean against the trunk abruptly. Blowing out a breath, she looks up at the sky and begins to speak words we can't hear.

PENNY (V.O.)

I asked God to cleave between my flesh and my spirit. I didn't know where or if I'd read that, but I thought I'd read or heard it was possible for Him to do it.

Once I decided that I wanted to quit, I asked Him. I wanted to quit for Him before I wanted to quit for my family or for me. And...He did-cleave between the desire of my flesh and my spirit that was being renewed, remolded...and convicted to repent and turn away from sin.

EXT. PENNY'S FRONT PORCH-NIGHT

Penny is leaning forward with her elbows on her knees under the stars. Quinn comes out, but Penny doesn't look up. Quinn doesn't sit down. Penny is praying.

PENNY (V.O.)

I realized that I wanted to  
memorize some Scripture. I started  
with Isaiah fifty three. I'd picked  
up a few verses before I tried  
Isaiah.

And I do count the Lord's Prayer.

INT. FAMILY FRIENDLY RESTAURANT-DAY

Penny sits at a booth with her sister, SHELLEY as JESSICA THE WAITRESS lays out two menus and silverware wrapped in white napkins. Penny watches Shelley as Shelley twists her lips and turns her mug over and sits it on its paper doily. Turning over her own cup, Penny looks up and smiles as Jessica The Waitress turns to pour.

Penny is expectant.

JESSICA THE WAITRESS

Would you like a few minutes?

SHELLEY

Um, no. I'm ready...

Penny is watching Shelley very closely and smiling. But Shelley keeps her face in her open menu. Shelley's brows are up, and her lips are pouty in an expressive, striking, deep brown face.

After a few moments, Penny nods and makes eye contact with Jessica The Waitress. Jessica The Waitress isn't really there with them though, kind of on auto-pilot. Jessica The Waitress' smile is absent. Jessica The Waitress' eyes say

she's barely interested, but not annoyed.

Penny claps her hands together in her lap.

PENNY

Alright... Let's just get to it  
then... I'll...have...the Eggs  
Benedict...

Jessica The Waitress scribbles on her ordering pad.

JESSICA THE WAITRESS

Original?

Penny glances up, mouth open and then throws open her menu,  
searching through it quickly.

PENNY

ORIGINAL..?

JESSICA THE WAITRESS

Canadian bacon. English muffin...

PENNY

Oh.

Penny grins.

PENNY

Yeah! I didn't know there were  
other kinds...

Now Jessica The Waitress seems annoyed. Leaning over, she  
points into the pages of Penny's menu.

JESSICA THE WAITRESS

Well, we have the Original.  
Florentine with spinach and bacon  
on an English muffin. Add mushroom  
and artichoke hearts, no bacon for  
the Veggie-

Penny nods interrupting.

PENNY

I see it here now. Yeah, just the  
Original for me.

Smiling briefly, Penny closes her menu and hands it to  
Jessica The Waitress. She searches for a pin on Jessica The  
Waitress' chest, trying to be unobtrusive, but doesn't find  
one.

PENNY

Thank you. May I ask your name?

JESSICA THE WAITRESS

Jessica.

PENNY

Thank you, Jessica. Sorry.

Jessica The Waitress turns up the corners of her mouth and  
takes a long blink. She's impatient now.

JESSICA THE WAITRESS

And you miss?

Shelley is finally looking at Penny as she closes her own  
menu and hands it to Jessica The Waitress. Shelley's lips  
are turned up in small smile, no teeth showing.

SHELLEY

Junior Apple Pancake...and a warm-  
up, please. Thank you.

Waitress nods, not looking up again as she heads off.

PENNY

I have the strange sense she just  
wanted to get to business. Dispense  
with the niceties.

Penny takes a sip from her coffee and twists her lips.

PENNY

Now I need a warm-up.

Shelley rolls her eyes, letting her smile widen till  
straight, white teeth show.

SHELLEY

I don't know why you always think  
you have to be so nice to  
everybody. You don't KNOW her. She  
don't know you. Nothing personal.  
Just trying to do her job.

PENNY

(brows going up)  
So...it's ANNOYING-my being nice.

Shelley's right shoulder goes up as she looks out the  
window.

SHELLEY

Maybe.

Penny nods, pushing out her lips as Jessica The Waitress  
pours more coffee into Shelley's cup.

Jessica The Waitress turns to let the glass pitcher/  
decanter hover near Penny's mug.

JESSICA THE WAITRESS

Warm-up?

PENNY

(smiling big)  
Please!

Shelley speaks as soon as Waitress is out of earshot.

SHELLEY

This lady at your church acted  
normal till she found out who I  
was--

PENNY

Who you WERE?

SHELLEY

YOUR SISTER... THEN she was all  
like, Gimme a HUG, Sis! Yeah right!

PENNY

I agree. Of COURSE she should hug you either way... Or, not... She-- whoever she was--should have been real--

SHELLEY

But she can't cause it's not NICE to be REAL. I'm sure for some people...you just come off as fake.

PENNY

Me? Because I'm nice...

Shelley

You guys just think if you put a nice face on everything, you can sell it.

PENNY

(head going back on her neck)  
What? NICE folks? What, we have a club now? And you HATE us...

SHELLEY

(with surprising venom)  
Christians!

Penny's eyes go wide with shock. Her mouth drops open. She puts some coffee in it as she realizes Shelley's not finished.

SHELLEY

You don't like me! I'm gay! So but you put on a nice FACE about it.

Penny leans forward, placing her hands on the table.

PENNY

I DO like you!

Shelley rolls her eyes and looks out the window again. She crosses her arms, shaking her head.

SHELLEY

Because I'm your sister you like me. And I love you. We love each other. But I tell you something...

...Shelley points a finger and slits her eyes...

SHELLEY

...I don't know if I like YOU. What you stand for. Your hatred in the name of GOD!

PENNY

So why are we here at breakfast? Because I like YOU? Because we LOVE each other...begrudgingly? Because I supposedly hate you? My sister...

SHELLEY

You know what I MEAN!

PENNY

Yeah... You're saying I think homosexuality is a sin. But you're throwing the baby IN with the bathwater and whipping up your own crazy stew! It's a TEMPEST of crazy coming my way before I get my hollandaise! My coffee's barely working yet!

Penny throws her hands up and crosses her eyes. The shadow of humor crosses Shelley's face like she can't help it.

SHELLEY

I'm GAY, Penny... And you think your sister...who you LIKE...is going to hell. That's true.

Penny shrugs, sitting back, like she's giving up.

SHELLEY

Oh. So what? I'm wrong?



PENNY

You're basically talking with  
yourself in this surreal attack...

SHELLEY

Who's attacking who and telling  
people they're going to hell? Your  
people-

-Shelley is stage whispering with her hands on either side  
of her mouth-

SHELLEY

-the Christians. So, Pen... Am I?  
Going to hell?

PENNY

(stage whispering with her  
hands making a cone around  
her mouth)

This isn't how I talk...

...Penny puts her hands up in surrender around her  
shoulders before letting them play piano on the table.  
Penny looks down and to the right.

PENNY

You know that, Michelle... You know  
I don't talk like this. You can't  
just stuff me into some...packaged  
idea and tie me in a bow.

Penny shakes her head and looks down and to the left.

PENNY

Crazy people on the street do that.  
Politicians do that. Strangers do  
that. We're sisters... I won't do  
that-with you or anyone. It's  
not... It's not what God wants me  
to do. That's what I USED to do.

SHELLEY

Pen, for God's sake can you just  
say it short and sweet? Just answer  
my question?

PENNY

(holding up both hands like  
stop signs)

Listen... I will answer your  
question short and sweet...

SHELLEY

Oh...COME...ON!

PENNY

WAIT...a second, Michelle! GOODNESS  
gracious!

Shelley gives Penny a look, leaning back in her seat.

SHELLEY

Okay. Fine. I'm listening. I just  
wanted you to answer MY question.

PENNY

(pleading with eloquent  
hands)

Sweetie, I WILL. I just want you to  
give me a chance to say it two  
different ways. YOUR way...AND  
mine. Okay?

SHELLEY

Fine.

PENNY

Thank you... Now, as I get my  
breath...

SHELLEY

I SAID, Am I going to HELL?

PENNY

Right... Do you believe in Jesus  
Christ? That He's the Son of God  
and that He died to save you?

SHELLEY

I don't know...

PENNY

(holding up one finger)

Well...that's the key, and so... I don't know.

SHELLEY

Double-fucking-speak! You know you think I'm going to hell!

Penny

(gently)

Shelley... You know what your problem is?

SHELLEY

(nasty)

No, what? Potty mouth? Oh fucking well!

PENNY

You think I'm...

...Penny uses air quotes...

PENNY

..."Christians." You think RELIGION is the Christ. Is JESUS. I'm not. HE'S not.

SHELLEY

What?

PENNY

I'm not a good girl.

Penny bows her head, crossing both arms on the table. Her lips turn up without humor. Her knees bounce together.

PENNY

I've gotten so drunk with friends till THEY had to get their stomachs pumped...and till I SHAT on a chair in my dorm room, thinking I'd gotten up and gone to the bathroom...

I used to FANTASIZE about leaving my husband to be with a man that was a troubled, troubled...

...Penny makes eye contact with Shelley, using air quotes again...

PENNY

...FRIEND of mine. I used to throw things and destroy things in my own house, because my rage was in control in my life. I scared my children. I was addicted to pot- Don't laugh; I know they say that can't happen-till about two years ago.

Shelley flinches, and her eyes shimmer, but not with humor.

PENNY

I was rage on the outside and suicide on the inside.

I had my bags packed to leave at any minute on my marriage. On this life!

I read a lot of self-help books and tried out a lot of the stuff I'd read...

Penny looks away and back, clearing her throat.

PENNY

I'm not going to tell you you're going to hell. You're not dead are you? How do I know what you'll come to believe in the rest of the time you have on this side? You're not stuck in one place! You change. You learn new things.

SHELLEY

(softening, but confused)  
Yeah... But you're...kind of...like comparing...being gay...to being bad. To smoking or meanness. To cheating on your husband...or, WANTING to cheat on him-no offense.

PENNY

You can say whatever you want to about homosexuality. YOU can say it's who you are. I can say it's sin. It doesn't matter.

Penny pauses to let that sink in.

Penny

We all do things we don't think are bad... And we all do things we know are bad. The bad things we do are sin. God sent Jesus to save us from sin-the bad things we do. Putting BEING GAY to one side...do you think you've EVER done anything bad? If so, you need Jesus. That's what I think. And if you start believing that any time between now and the end of this life...you're not going to hell.

Jessica The Waitress slides Shelley's apple pancake in front of her. Silent, Shelley's staring at her sister.

JESSICA THE WAITRESS

And your Original... More coffee?

PENNY

I'm good. Thank you...Jessica!

SHELLEY

(looking up at Waitress)

Thank you.

PENNY

Actually... Can I get a large glass of grapefruit juice? I don't care which kind. White, pink, or red is fine.

JESSICA THE WAITRESS

Grapefruit juice... Anything else?

SHELLEY

I didn't know there was such a thing as white grapefruit juice...

JESSICA THE WAITRESS  
I think we only have red...

SHELLEY  
More napkins, please.

JESSICA THE WAITRESS  
(smiling a little)  
Coming right up.

SHELLEY  
Honestly, I didn't know all that  
stuff about you...

PENNY  
What? You thought I was an angel? I  
had you fooled?

SHELLEY  
I mean... We ALL get drunk and fuck  
up... But... You always seemed too  
STRONG for suicide... Is that dumb?

Penny blinks away tears and opens her silverware.

PENNY  
No. That was my façade... And I've  
had a lot of them.

SHELLEY  
You get along with everybody.  
There's nothing wrong with that.

PENNY  
Thing is, I'm finally, ACTUALLY  
happy...and you think THAT'S  
fake...

Shelley rolls her eyes, shaking her head. She blows out a  
deep breath as Waitress lays down more napkins and thumps a  
surprisingly small glass of grapefruit juice down on the  
table.

JESSICA THE WAITRESS  
Juice. Napkins. How is everything?

PENNY  
Good, Jessica. Thanks!

SHELLEY  
I didn't mean...YOU. I meant  
CHRISTIANITY... It's all a big lie  
we tell ourselves... So we can  
judge others and feel better about  
it.

PENNY  
I could say YOU'RE doing that right  
now-lying to yourself so you can  
feel better.

SHELLEY  
(sitting forward)  
So you know about being gay? I'm  
LYING about that?

PENNY  
You didn't let me finish...  
Michelle, if I said that to you,  
you'd feel judged. You'd feel  
angry...

SHELLEY  
So you're saying it to me first?

Shelley sits back, smiling and shaking her head without  
humor, like she's figured something out.

SHELLEY  
I need some water. Do you have to  
request that now?

PENNY  
No. It's YOU judging ME.

SHELLEY  
Whatever. You say you don't think  
I'm going to hell...maybe. Some  
shit. But you call me a sinner, so  
(MORE)

SHELLEY (CONT'D)

I know you do think I'm going to  
hell, if I don't change-become  
whatever you find acceptable...

...Shelley uses air quotes, turning her head to squint at  
Penny side-on...

SHELLEY

"...straighten up," as Dad likes to  
say...

PENNY

(shaking her head)

I could talk to you about soul ties  
and deliverance and all that  
mess...

SHELLEY

(rolling her eyes)

Deliverance!

PENNY

(holding up a finger)

All I'm GOING to say is that you  
need to find out who Jesus REALLY  
is-without religion. YOU don't have  
to change anything. You ever heard  
that song, "Just as I am, without  
one plea/ But that Thy blood was  
shed for me/ And that Thou bidst me  
come to Thee/ O Lamb of God, I  
come, I come"?

Jesus just wants you to come home. He'll take you  
right...where...you...are.

SHELLEY

Well, I've never heard anything  
like that.

Shelley swipes at a tear, and Penny lets her left hand fall  
open across the table. It's an invitation. Shelley examines  
Penny's open palm for a second before taking it with her  
right and squeezing tight.



PENNY

(nodding)

That's why I can't be in the whole...

...Penny uses air quotes, frowning. She's skeptical.

PENNY

...Christianity thing. It's all finger pointing. It's, um, just bullshit...where we pretend if we don't curse, we're okay with God. Like being "okay" with God is good enough... We make God seem shallow. But He IS eternal life. He knew us before we were born. He chose us and crafted a destiny for us—a purpose with peculiar talents... Christianity comes cheap so we look like anyone else, except for our religious facelift...

I DON'T like your potty mouth, Michelle. And I only curse to make a point—that Jesus is about so much more than that...

Penny takes out her cell phone from her back, right jeans pocket. She uses her right thumb to search it.

PENNY

I was reading the other day while I... There was a pilgrim play at the school, and I was waitin in the car... I keep a Bible in there...

Penny taps the screen of her phone.

PENNY

And I saw this. "And we know that the Son of God has come, and has given us understanding so that we may know Him who is true; and we are in Him who is true, in His Son Jesus Christ. This is the true God...AND eternal life." I was reading a different version, but

(MORE)

PENNY (CONT'D)

the part that...GOT me is the same.  
JESUS...IS...ETERNAL LIFE.

He pours into us and changes our hearts, because He makes our hearts come alive...in a way that we never coulda thought of. We don't realize we're dead till we feel that kind of life. And the life that we get from God...is from His love, which is in Jesus.

Maybe you haven't heard that before, because so many of US don't BELIEVE God loves us. But as much as I love you, Michelle... GOD... God loves you more.

SHELLEY

Hm. If you say so...

PENNY

I do.

SHELLEY

Then why doesn't He accept me?

PENNY

None of us are accepted for what we do.

SHELLEY

You are.

Penny lays her hands flat on the table.

PENNY

Nooooo. We have to believe in what Jesus did. You... You can't make yourself into your...behavior...

SHELLEY

Behavior.

PENNY

Yeah... You're more than your...bedroom activities-choices...

SHELLEY

Are you more than your writing?  
More than your blogging then?  
Because-

PENNY

No. But I'm more than what Quinn  
does or doesn't do to me in bed.  
Our CHILDREN, if you wanna talk  
about anything to do with-

SHELLEY

Bedroom activities. Right.  
That's... This is so demeaning.

PENNY

Okay, but what God made me to do-

SHELLEY

Is PARTLY to love Quinn. I  
love...who I love!

PENNY

Right, but... God... Jesus...said  
that we don't have to marry. It's  
not something we should even SEEK,  
if we're not...

SHELLEY

So why are you married then?

PENNY

Because I want to be.

SHELLEY

So do I.

PENNY

The definition of marriage aside, I  
think there are priorities. We want  
things. There are things we're  
supposed to do... But our choice of  
mate doesn't define us. Shouldn't.

SHELLEY

But why should we put the  
definition of marriage to the side?  
I think it's about love and  
commitment. Just like you do.

PENNY

Except...it's not like I do.

SHELLEY

Why?

PENNY

I'm trying to tell you. It's not  
just that we disagree about how God  
intended to define marriage-

SHELLEY

Damn straight! I'm not gon let  
something I don't even BELIEVE IN  
define my CHOICE as you say...  
Which, it isn't. But let's set that  
TO ONE SIDE.

PENNY

It's also that we disagree about  
how people should define  
themselves! I'm not making my  
choice to marry into myself and  
asking you to accept that.

SHELLEY

How not?

Penny

How so?

SHELLEY

Very mature.

PENNY

The same way that you make yourself  
all about what you like in the  
bedroom and DEMAND that I accept  
every aspect of that!

SHELLEY

Did you or did you not have a  
wedding? Wasn't that a CELEBRATION?

PENNY

I got married. If you don't want to  
get married-

SHELLEY

Pen, I CAN'T always CHOOSE that!

PENNY

Wait a minute. I'm making a point.  
If I want to get married and you  
think marriage is stupid-

SHELLEY

It's not just that Christians think  
gay marriage is stupid! It's that  
it's a sin!

PENNY

I'm not going to DEMAND that you  
declare support or call you a  
SINGLEPHOBE or something stupid!

SHELLEY

If such a stupid thing existed it  
would MARRIAGEPHOBE, Pen.

PENNY

And yes! That's my religious  
freedom!

SHELLEY

But you call it TRUTH!

PENNY

And you call it LIES!

SHELLEY

It's not the same.

PENNY

No, it isn't. For me...that's the struggle... I don't know how God wants me to react to...

SHELLEY

Homosexuality.

PENNY

To a SIN that people want me to applaud. That people make their identity.

SHELLEY

Oh my God.

PENNY

God... JESUS came into our homes, even though we're sinners... But He also told us not to continue in life, sinning. But then another part of me thinks, He could tell me that-not to sin anymore. He could rebuke me-

SHELLEY

You're not GOD, Pen!

Penny points at Shelley.

PENNY

Exactly. Exactly. He could tell me not to sin anymore...because HE'S God. Not me.

Shelley points her fork at Penny's plate.

SHELLEY

Okay... Eat your hollandaise, girl.

PENNY

Eat your personal apple pie there! They measured my waist the other day for my wellness screening, and I dare not put an entire CAKE of apples and butter in front of me.

SHELLEY

I dare, girl. I dare!

PENNY

(slicing into a poached egg  
and Canadian bacon)

I see that!

INT. PENNY'S BEDROOM-DAWN

We see Penny and her husband, QUINN-their faces-from the perspective of the floor on the right side facing the bed. Gray, semi-sheer curtains drape across the windows, filtering the slowly intensifying sunlight.

Quinn's white skin, cobalt blue eyes, and dark hair are a stark contrast to Penny's own warm brown skin, dark brown eyes, and reddish brown hair.

Their right arms-one white and one brown-extend out together and off the bed from mid-forearm.

Quinn is moaning as he lays across Penny's back. He presses his face into Penny's shoulder blade and the curve of her neck, breathing heavily. Penny's breath is more high-pitched, and she's shaking.

Penny and Quinn are sweating.

As Quinn's breathing comes more under control, he braces his weight, lifting up so he can turn Penny in his arms.

The back of Quinn's head and a tight shot of Penny's face can be seen from above (shoulders up) as Quinn gathers Penny close. Quinn wipes the tears at the corners of Penny's eyes.

A tight shot of Quinn's face (almost from Penny's perspective) can be seen as Penny runs her fingers into Quinn's hair. They kiss.

It immediately gets hot.

Everything is close, only faces (shoulders up) as Quinn and Penny rearrange themselves on the bed.

Penny breaks away from the kiss, turning her head away to the right. She seems emotionally overwhelmed.

We see from Quinn's perspective as Penny speaks, not making eye-contact with her husband.

PENNY  
(shaking her head a little)  
It...scares me a little... This.  
Between us...

We see Quinn braced on his elbows as he brushes Penny's double-strand twist "bangs" away from her face and draws on her cheekbones with his thumbs.

QUINN  
Look at me, Pen.

Penny slowly turns her head to do what Quinn asks, keeping her eyes closed for a moment after. When she opens them, Quinn wipes another tear from the corner of her eye.

QUINN  
There's nothing to be afraid of.

PENNY  
No?

Quinn shakes his head, smiling gently.

QUINN  
No.

PENNY  
Quinn, I know how you feel about...  
Well, I don't know how you feel  
REALLY... Or what you believe about  
Jesus...

Quinn is still listening and keeping his eyes on Penny. Nothing changes, but he's not helping with explanations or encouraging her with his eyes either.

PENNY  
(tentative, but going for it)  
Quinn, I think GOD made us to love  
each other...

Penny waits, breathless for Quinn's reaction, like she expects him to pull away... His reaction can be seen from Penny's perspective, as the sun slowly begins to overcome



the semi-sheers-in the room...and in Quinn's dark blue eyes.

QUINN

(huskily, as a small smile  
spreads his lips)

If there's one thing...I  
believe...comes from God...it's our  
chemistry. It's our love. It's the  
fact that we met...and that you  
gave it a try even though you  
thought kissing me might taste like  
sour milk.

Penny cracks up, arching up from the bed to hug Quinn.  
Quinn grins.

PENNY

You remember EVERYTHING. I can't  
believe I SAID that...

QUINN

(dryly)

Well... I am white...so...I guess  
that makes me...white milk...

PENNY

(snorting with laughter)

Quinn, oh my GOSH, don't ever say  
that again. Let it die. Let it DIE.

QUINN

(dry)

...and you're my chocolate milk...

PENNY

Quiiiiiiiinnn...!

QUINN

(whispering)

...and our hot chemistry...cooked  
up sweet, cocoa babies.

Penny sobers and tears abruptly return to the corners of  
her eyes. She wipes them away herself.

Quinn can be seen from Penny's perspective as he takes a shuddery inhalation. Blue eyes darting like he's discomfited by Penny's emotion, he observes Penny for a moment.

Then he interrupts her tears with his kiss.

It gets immediately hot.

INT. PENNY'S BEDROOM

Penny's sitting on the edge of the bed in a white toweling bathrobe, wet as if from a shower. She's bent over, resting her chin in her right hand.

PENNY (V.O.)

I did think he'd taste like sour  
milk. It's true.

INT. PENNY'S KITCHEN [FLASHBACK]-DAY

Penny leans over the butcher block island, holding up a glass of milk toward Quinn, like a toast. Quinn, in conversation, winks at Penny who covers her smile by taking a sip. She wipes dribble from her chin and turns her back on Quinn.

Quinn's older than me, and when I met him he was already a man, if you know what I mean.

INT. BEDROOM OF A HIGH SCHOOL FRIEND'S HOUSE [FLASHBACK]-DAY

Sixteen year old Penny and RILEY [upper teens, brown-skinned] are sitting on Riley's roughly made bed. Penny's chin is turned toward as she tries to watch television. Their lips smash together.

The first boy I kissed was in college. Before that there was a slobbery mess the boy that threw himself on me called a kiss. I was hanging out with Shelley at her friend's house when her older brother convinced me to come to his room. That was my senior year of high school. It excited HIM, I guess.

INT. RILEY'S HALLWAY [FLASHBACK]-DAY

Riley leans out his bedroom door, saying something to Penny, who's walking away from him. She turns and backs down the hall, staring at Riley but saying nothing.

It wasn't tied to religion with me, but my restraint was religious...in the sense that I strictly held to my rule about saving my kisses for a boy I loved...

EXT. OUTDOOR SUMMER PARTY [FLASHBACK]-LATE AFTERNOON, EARLY EVENING

Penny is sitting at a tall table in a tall chair, laughing and surrounded by talking friends we don't hear. Quinn is talking to friends across the lawn. His eyes are on Penny when she looks up and sees him.

I met Quinn on a holiday, while I was visiting a friend. Her family had invited Quinn's family to a party they were having. He got my number through my friend's brother. After that we double-dated and talked on the phone... Other people made a human shield that kept the fire between us from burning everything down.

The intensity between us scared me even then.

Quinn and I... We didn't make sense on paper. But our souls connected immediately. My vibrant personality. His seriousness. Our shared sense of humor...

And the attraction between us was forceful.

I was a freshman at the time so I had to stay in a dormitory. But I worked full time, too. You aren't supposed to do that, but Mom and Dad weren't about to pay for me to have the apartment I wanted. Back then I lived in the dorm AND the SECRET apartment.

I carried the credit hours I needed and paid for the privacy I wanted by working in a bookstore, training for management. Even then I was stubborn about doing things my way.

Quinn surprised me when he showed up at my tiny apartment, because there was nothing sour milk about him.

He already had a job that called for a suit and tie.

He showed up dressed that way, but he'd unbuttoned the collar and gotten rid of the tie.

I was wearing a sundress, and I was so shy I don't really remember how it happened...

There was dinner. There was talk... There I was...facing a mirror and Quinn behind me. Inside me. I was naked, and his hands were all over me.

It was...not...godly.

He was fully dressed.

We made love till we were hungry and thirsty and the sun was coming up. Quinn went to work with the clothes he'd worn over-after he shaved with my razor. After he combed his hair with my purple Afro pick.

He was at my door again that night...with a garment bag loaded with two suits.

I opened a bottle of Chardonnay dated four years earlier and put on a movie.

Quinn watched it, but I could only stare at him. He tried to watch the movie, I should say.

I put my hands on his hands. They slid up his chest till my hands were on his face and in his hair.

I was kissing him when I felt his palm on my behind beneath my skirt. The tips of his fingers edged the scalloped lace of my undies. I wanted everything to come fast, but Quinn...took his time.

He was gentle.

I remember telling him I wanted to taste him...after. He said there was something he needed to do first.

"What?" I asked him. I was whispering. He scooped me up in his arms and carried me to the bathroom.

"A shower," Quinn whispered back. "I want to taste you, too."

We did that.

I helped him dress. I tied his tie the best I could. I'd never done it before.

About a month into it, he called me from work, and that almost ended it.

I answered the phone, he said, "Hello Pen," and just hearing his voice had me shaking. He could hear it in my voice.

"I love you." I said it by accident. "I mean...I love being with you."

I was trying to clean up my mess, but Quinn was already saying something. I heard,

"I love-" and I couldn't stand waiting even a second to know what he would say.

I hung up, and he came.

He came to my house and stood outside my door.

I leaned against it and told him that it was over. I told him I couldn't handle how big he'd gotten so fast-in me. In my head and heart.

Just hearing his voice made me shake. He was making me weaker. The best I could do was step away...

I'll never forget what he said.

He said, "It can't be. I need what we have... And if you tell me to go away...I'll come back. Every day."

I let him in.

And Quinn changed my life in all the ways I think God meant him to.

Penny sees something and slowly stands.

Quinn can be seen, fully dressed in casual slacks and a button-down shirt rolled up to his forearms. His hair is wet, too, and a towel is draped around his neck.

As Penny takes hold of the ends of the towel, Quinn speaks.

QUINN

I thought the idea was to get OUT  
of bed.

PENNY

Right. So the kids don't starve.

QUINN

YOUR idea, not mine.

PENNY

(grinning)

Right.

Quinn waits a moment before kissing Penny on the cheek. He pulls away, slinging his towel around Penny's neck. He moves away, whipping the comforter and sheets into shape.

PENNY (V.O.)

You're probably wondering, If we  
have this-this chemistry-why was I  
ever FANTASIZING about another man?

Why? Well, because THAT guy thought my crazy was AWESOME.

Probably, because he only saw the "awesome" parts...

The reason I fantasized about another man, is the same reason I never believed that man ACTUALLY loved me. Because he didn't really know me. He loved what I SHOWED him.

We can fight-Quinn and I. My husband who turns me to mush in the bedroom.

When we fight...Quinn can disappear while he's standing right there in front of me.

He LEARNED to do that-to disappear.

MONTAGE-VARIOUS

A) INT. PENNY'S GALLEY KITCHEN-DAY

In the kitchen, double-hung rows of square windows take the place of upper cabinets, filling the space with natural light. Pale flooring and countertops add to the room's

(MORE)

## A) INT. PENNY'S GALLEY KITCHEN-DAY (CONT'D)

brightness. Quinn's washing dishes by hand and setting them in a dish drying rack. Across from him, Penny is using the space beside the oven to fold up the griddle's legs. ANGELINA, their three year old daughter is banging a pot and pan. Their newly-turned eight year old daughter, BLAKE is coloring quietly at the eat-in kitchen table. JACOB, their five year old son is on his hands and knees, pushing a line of trains through his parents' feet to the mudroom door and then back out the kitchen exit.

Penny and Quinn smile secretly at each other, their eyes lingering even as smiles melt in the heat.

## B) INT. PENNY'S GREAT ROOM-DAY

Penny standing with her back to the sunken basement, facing Quinn whose back is to the burning fireplace. His hands are in his pockets, and he's a statue, merely reflecting the obviously out of control anger of a hissing, spitting, cursing Penny. She's pointing at him, like she's frustrated with his ostensible calm.

Quinn looks disgusted by Penny's antics.

At the fuzzy edges of it all, there are distressed little people running in circles-their children.

Penny throws down a glass in her hand, looking up with demonical eyes, crazed for the reaction she thinks she's finally forced upon Quinn.

Quinn's hands move in his pockets. He turns to look at their children for a long moment and looks back at Penny. His breath hissing out with seething emotion, Quinn brushes by Penny to grab his jacket and leaves the house.

He swings the door open but doesn't let it slam.

The children have stopped their anxious circling and are staring at Penny, except for Jacob. He's in the bay window, crying and banging on the glass for his father, Quinn.

Take me with you, he's saying, even though there's no sound to the words. Take me with you! Take me with you!

C) PENNY'S UNIVERSITY DORM ROOM-NIGHT

Quinn in a wool winter trench coat and hat is throwing a remote against a wall. It explodes and falls behind the loft bed where Penny's staring at him in her nightgown. He closes his eyes and backs out of the room.

D) PENNY'S UNIVERSITY DORM RESTROOM-NIGHT

From above, Penny can be seen in the same nightgown, dropping her diamond engagement ring down the toilet and flushing. Breathing heavily, she squats down to grab it, relieved its weight kept it from going easily. Crying, she eases down the stall wall and looks up to the sky as if for help.

END OF MONTAGE

EXT. PENNY'S BACKYARD DECK-DAY

Their three kids are in and out of the pool with water guns. Angelina is mostly in the pool. Quinn, who was in that blow up pool with them is now laying back-sunning himself on a fancy deck chair.

He looks over at Penny as she joins them from their three-season room and smiles. He's squinting. Using his left hand, he shades his eyes.

Time stops for Penny.



PENNY (V.O.)

I prayed for God to come into the cracks in my husband's heart and shine the Holy Spirit. I wanted Quinn saved-from hell...and from being wrong all the time.

First I was relying on Romans [ten thirteen.]10:13. "For whoever shall call on the name of the Lord shall be saved." Then I heard even better news, "And they said, Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ, and you shall be saved, and your house." That's Acts [sixteen thirty-one in the American King James version of the Bible.]

Acts 16:31 (AKJ).

Something you should know about me: I don't know much; I know just enough about God to believe and pray and act as if He can fix big messes that are too much for me-even to think about. I can ask Him to pull me out from rubble I've been digging myself underneath for decades.

When I don't even know where I am, I can ask Him, and He'll answer the call.

Joyce Meyer said one day that she kept asking God to fix Dave (her husband), and one day God said, "But he isn't the problem." "Well, who else IS there?" She asked aloud.

I don't know if she really said or thought that. I'm a skeptic, but I'm okay with taking the coating on the pill that made it go down easier, if it helps. Or, if it leads to Someone who can-help...

I DO know that my...obliviousness, my judgment, my self-righteousness has been just as hilarious-in retrospect, of course.

I always half-thanked God, half-feared that I'd never broken a bone...

My sister and I both kind of believe in curses. Jinxes. It's not godly to believe in those things, in case you didn't know.

My sister's arm WAS broken.

After I saw how itchy a cast is, I realized it wasn't worth the momentary coolness of having people write on it and wearing the sling. She could not wait to have that thing off. And her arm had wasted away, lost some of its color and muscle tone...

Thing is, I had a lot of brokenness, spiritually.

When the storm came-inside and out... When that straw I was telling you about finally broke my back, I had to face it that my husband wasn't my problem.

It was harder to accept that Quinn couldn't fix me, because Quinn isn't my source. My Deliverer. My Preserver. My Savior.

And like my sister's cast, the toughness, meanness, vengeance, rage, depression, judgment, isolation, fear, and idolatry I'd painted over my brokenness had left my spirit atrophied.

The American King James version of the Bible says, "And you, being dead in your sins and the uncircumcision of your flesh, has he quickened together with him, having forgiven you all trespasses..."

Colossians [two fourteen through fifteen.]<sup>2</sup> (AKJ).

I don't exactly know when I was saved, but if it was when I confessed Lord Jesus Christ almost two years ago, then maybe my spirit was actually dead till then.

Joseph Prince says that even when the Holy Spirit comes into a person who accepts Jesus Christ by faith that the mind, which has been "boss" for so long tries to battle with the new direction the Holy Spirit is trying to take you in.

The prompting of the Holy Spirit and not the call of the world is supposed to guide you after you receive Jesus as your Savior.

I wish I could say that the Holy Spirit dominates, but that implies a lack of choice.

God has given us all free will. Whether we realize it or not, we always choose. And with every choice, we submit. We

bow down to the world and its prince, satan.

Or, we bow down to God and the King of kings, Jesus Christ.

Beth Moore first presented this notion to me on LIFE Today with James and Betty Robison. When I first heard her—a little after the straw broke my back—I didn't realize how big she is.

I just thought she was adorable and easy to listen to. I still remember one session she was ministering (and I should) called "Remember not to Forget" out of Deuteronomy [eight.] 8.

She talked about Galatians [two] 2 during that session, and I still remember "yet not I."

I'm not the one who started changing Quinn any more than I'm the One who's changing me.

INT. PENNY'S CAR-DAY [TRAVELING]

Gray, gloomy day. Rain coming down. Penny rolls to a stop and drops Jacob and Blake off at their private school under the brick overhand before driving through pillars and slowly back onto the neighborhood road that leads to a busy, four lane street.

Penny glances at her cell phone several times. It's sitting on its head in an empty cup holder with two sticks of different brands of lip balm.

It looks like Penny would grab the phone if it wasn't connected to a car music cable and blasting one of her favorite songs, "More and More" by Israel Houghton.

Penny gets all green lights into her right turn onto another major four lane street.

She begins to talk out loud.

PENNY

Thank you, Father...through Jesus.  
For favor, which I claim. In the  
Christ. Seated in heavenly places  
and blessed with all spiritual  
blessings... I thank you for being  
with me...

Penny hesitates, lips moving silently as she thinks.

PENNY

Yes, I guess it's correct to say  
you're with me, because you're IN  
me. I have the Holy Spirit...

Penny pauses again, head moving a little to the right. It's not a negation. Penny's lips are moving silently again. One hand plays piano in the air. Penny mutters words that need a translation. There is none.

PENNY

I am with you even until the end of  
the age... I am with you...ALWAYS,  
even until the end of the age...

Tears come into Penny's eyes, and she blinks hard.

PENNY

Jesus is truly God. He is eternal  
life. God WITH me and IN me...  
Eternal life is in me and with me.  
Wisdom is in me. Righteousness.  
Justification...

Penny licks her lips and blinks as more tears come. Penny rolls her lips together, inhales deeply, and then bites her lip.

Penny has made a decision.

PENNY

Help me...be what I need to be for  
Quinn. Help me be quiet when I need  
to be. Help me SAY what I need to  
say...

Penny's lip begins to tremble and hot tears wash down her face. Penny's trying to speak and can't. She tries...and tries again. She closes her eyes and another wash of tears comes. Penny tries to stop her lip from trembling by pressing her lips together and rolling them.

Penny opens her eyes and mouth, but there are no words for a long moment. Penny glides through a green light.

PENNY

(murmuring)

Thank you, Father through Jesus  
Christ...by the Holy  
Spirit...for...for...making me a  
better and better reflection of  
Jesus...

Another wash of tears comes as Penny continues in a  
breathy, emotional voice...

PENNY

I see what you're doing in Quinn's  
heart already. He prays with me. He  
says the name of Jesus... I  
remember when it terrified me to  
WRITE it, let alone SAY it, so...  
Neither one of us ever wanted to be  
in church, and now we BOTH are...

I just...need Your help...every day... So Quinn...can see  
You... And BELIEVE...

I don't want to criticize and boss him around-even when I  
WANT to criticize and boss him around. Not that I can tell  
Quinn how to act anyway...

Penny licks her bottom lip and looks to the sky before  
looking back to the road.

PENNY

You're with me, so I shouldn't be,  
but...I am. I'm afraid.

Penny clenches her teeth.

PENNY

Quinn will die without You. I  
just...want Him to BELIEVE that he  
can be new...and have ABUNDANT  
life! Right now! Help me...be  
patient...and trust YOU. Help me  
lay it down...

I need You to do what You did with pot...and come between  
my flesh and my spirit...permanently!

Penny's wet eyes follow three birds as they fly across a stacker rainbow.

PENNY

Thank You, Father through our Lord  
Jesus Christ...for hearing my  
prayer.

INT. AN AMALGAM OF HOMES AND APARTMENTS PENNY'S KNOWN-DAY  
[PENNY'S DREAM]

It's a dark, stark, not quite dingy studio apartment with a sink but no dishwasher. Everything is close.

PENNY (V.O.)

I've had a lot of dreams that I've  
shared since God found me. I wanna  
say, since I found God.

But that doesn't really happen.

Sometimes I don't know what to do with them-my dreams. I write dreams. My novels come from dreams. I blog daydreams and visions. I see scripts...

Last night I dreamed about my dad.

I've dreamed about him since my salvation, and usually all I could remember was enough to write his name on a post-it note I kept on my desk for that purpose.

I would add names of people I'd dreamed about...and cross them off as I did what I thought God wanted me to do concerning them.

I remember a time Dad's name went down on that list.  
CROSBY, all in caps.

I had a perplexed frown on my face at that time, and the only thing I did was call him.

It was enough.

THIS time I dreamed that my dad...and I were on hard drugs.

I've been so trashed with alcohol that God HAD to have saved me from being poisoned and dead. I used ecstasy once, and it was horrible. It distorted my mind. My pupils

dilated, and I prayed through it, till the normal world came back to me.

Pot was my thing.

But in the dream, I had a needle.

I tried to prick myself, but the needle broke on my skin. Like the skin of my inner left wrist was too tough to get through.

In the dream, I saw my dad scrape some white powder into something and roll it up for smoking. He told someone, "Don't worry about what I'm doing."

He'd been cleaning up, too-washing dishes and putting them away. I think that reassured me in the dream. I mean, I think it conveyed to me a sense that he was still in control.

I remember Jeremy Pearsons (sitting in for the Copelands on Believer's Voice of Victory) saying, "I got this," is the theme song (or something) for pride.

Anyway, it was dark where we were-in the dream. It was as if Mom was gone, and I didn't have a sister.

In the dream I had a feeling like Dad and I were living together-like there was no Quinn. No Blake, Jacob or Angelina...

I think that reassured me, too-that we had each other. Even in the dream I was telling myself we weren't in a crack house or anything...

EXT. GRAY CITY-HEADED TOWARD EVENING

Broken down buildings, cracked sidewalks, bus benches, and slow-moving people give the sense of hopelessness.

PENNY (V.O.)

Then I followed my dad out into the sunny day of the dream. Again, nature was oblivious.

Dad was standing, talking with a man. He was a crack dealer. I knew it in the way you know things in dreams.

The dealer had dark skin. He was neat. He would have drawn nothing but good attention to himself. Personable. Bright-eyed...

Like the devil.

He was talking with my dad, trying to convince him to fall down or jump up into the next tier of usage. He wanted him to come get some crack.

At first my dad was talking strong back to him, saying he didn't want anything to do with him. But the dealer kept on talking. Then my dad sat down beside him on the bench.

Something hit me in my gut in the dream.

My dad pulled out a belt and pulled it tight around his right ankle, and I realized it was so much further into darkness than I knew...or, wanted to accept before.

THE DEVIL

(to CROSBY, Penny's dad)

You've got a problem with that leg.  
You need something stronger.

PENNY (V.O.)

I don't know if I saw Dad get up  
and walk away with him, but when I  
saw Dad was gone, the needle  
appeared in MY hand.

After it broke (I guess I broke the needle), a bus pulled up next to me.

A group of girls in brightly-colored dresses-pink, violet, yellow, and ruby-with knee-length, ballooning skirts (like "The Adventures of Ozzy and Harriet") got off and made a half-circle around me.

They acted like they didn't see the needle as I dropped it.

OZZIE AND HARRIET ANGELS

(speaking as one, beckoning)

Get on the bus with us.



PENNY (V.O.)

I think they represented my church  
and the divine connections I've  
made since being saved.

INT. CITY BUS-EVENING [TRAVELING]

Surreal colors-vivid spots of light in the otherwise dark  
landscape. A sense of the supernatural perplexes the gloom.

PENNY (V.O.)

Suddenly me and all the Ozzie And  
Harriet Angels had laundry in our  
hands. It was as if the driver  
accepted our dirty laundry in the  
place of money.

All the Ozzie And Harriet Angels had tiny containers that I  
could have held in one hand. They set them down neatly and  
headed toward their seats. I had two huge, overflowing  
baskets, like the kind on my bedroom floor and piled up  
(clean and waiting to be folded) on our folding table. My  
dirty laundry clunked down beside theirs, and I took my  
seat.

EXT. DOWNTOWN IN GRAY CITY-EVENING, NIGHT APPROACHES

People rushing about, trying to complete their activities  
before the city shuts down.

PENNY (V.O.)

Later, I got off and followed a  
lady through the downtown of a big  
city-a mail worker.

MAIL WORKER

It's so hard to do my job when I  
start my day late.

PENNY (V.O.)

She dropped something, and when I  
picked it up, it was pictures of me  
and Quinn and Jacob and Blake and  
Angelina. Shelley, Mom, and Dad...  
Quinn's sister, Andrea, her husband  
Mitchell, and their son, Toby...

I didn't look happy in any of the pictures, and none of the photos made me feel good.

INT. PENNY'S BEDROOM-DAWN

Penny in a coral camisole startles awake, coming all the way up and throwing the sheets away from her reflexively. Her movements reveal pale blue pajama pants covered with matching coral starbursts.

Quinn turns over slowly, not sure what's happening.

As Penny brings her fingers to her head, realizing she's been dreaming, Quinn scoots closer to Penny.

Slowly, he eases nearer to Penny until her left side is against his chest. He brings his left arm across her and puts his chin in her hair.

PENNY

I been having these DREAMS, Quinn.

Penny shakes her head, and Quinn eases away, not letting go but trying to see Penny's face. She's staring at nothing, talking fast.

PENNY

You weren't here for the one  
about... I don't know what it was  
about... The beginning... The  
Fall...

QUINN

You mean the Bible?

Penny blows out a breath and twists her lips, shaking her head.

PENNY

I... I don't wanna...make  
EVERYTHING about the Bible...

QUINN

But for you it is.

Penny jerks her head up, searching out Quinn's eyes. He moves quickly, avoiding the smack of his chin and Penny's forehead. He calmly stares down at Penny as she searches

his eyes.

PENNY

Are you making fun of me?

Quinn frowns. It disappears quickly.

QUINN

God is important to you.

Penny's lips compress with regret, but she holds it back.

PENNY

Does that annoy you?

QUINN

It inspires me.

Penny studies Quinn. He stares back.

PENNY

Okay... Well... I was dreaming  
about Dad...

Penny closes her eyes as Quinn starts to brush her hair  
back from her face and rubbing her back.

QUINN

Mmhm..?

PENNY

Well, we were like...on drugs...  
And you know about me and Dad...and  
addiction... It was... AWFUL. And I  
think God saved me. I think He  
wanted me to know that He accepts  
all my, literally, dirty  
laundry...and then...

...Penny gestures eloquently with her hands...

PENNY

...He took me out...of the place  
where I used to live. The  
unhappiness I used to live in...

...Quinn wipes the tears that are gathering at the corners  
of her eyes. He uses his hands to frame her face and kisses

her mouth sweetly...

QUINN

You're okay, babe. You're okay.

Penny takes hold of Quinn's wrists, looking into his eyes with wide eyes of her own.

PENNY

I know...

Penny blows out a deep breath and wipes another stray tear.

PENNY

I think I have to go see 'em  
tomorrow... After I drop off the  
Littles...

QUINN

Your dad?

PENNY

(shrugging)

Well, whoever's over there, I  
guess-at Dad's house.

QUINN

Okay, babe, Come back to bed.

Quinn pulls Penny back against him, using his left hand to smooth her hair away from her forehead and remaining awake even after Penny falls asleep.

INT. EXPRESSIONS IN HAIR BY LISA HAIR SALON-DAY

Women under hair dryers and watching television are eating popcorn and bagged carrots. Stylists waiting for their customers to move on to the next stage are checking cell phones, talking loudly in the back room where food is officially allowed, according to a small red and white sign. They're smoking out front in the cold in open, fur-lined, puffy coats and aprons. One woman is getting her nails buffed by a technician popping gum and zoning out aside from a stray question here and there. At an exposed, mirrored booth projecting from a wall, Lisa is using a hydraulic foot pedal to lift her client up higher.

Lisa's cell phone buzzes on the granite workspace beside her. Lisa answers.

LISA  
(singsong)  
Hello! This is Lisa! How can I help  
you?

EXT. PENNY IN HER CAR-DAY [TRAVELING]

Penny in her car, holding her cell phone in one hand speaking to her car speakers.

PENNY  
Hey, girl!

Lisa's voice speaks out of Penny's car speakers.

LISA  
(less sparkly)  
What up, Pen? You okay or can I  
call you on my break?

PENNY  
Well...

INTERCUT Lisa

LISA  
(concerned)  
Tell me.

INTERCUT Penny

PENNY  
Nothing... I just had this dream...  
About Dad...and drugs...

LISA  
Oh. Mmhm. Not good.

PENNY  
Right... And I had this...THING  
with Michelle the other day...

INTERCUT Lisa

LISA

Oh! How is Shelley? That's my GIRL!  
She doin okay at school?

PENNY

Dean's List good!

LISA

That's GREAT...

INTERCUT Penny

PENNY

Thing is, she HATES me.

INTERCUT Lisa

LISA

(head going back on her neck)  
Huh? THAT'S not true! That girl has  
always looked up to you, Pen!  
Always!

PENNY

Well, she SAID, she hates me...

LISA

She just...doesn't...know how to be  
with you...if she's gay... It's  
probably HER trying to decide YOU  
don't like HER...so she can feel  
less...or... I don't know... Like,  
she's trying to prepare herself for  
you to say...

INTERCUT Penny

PENNY

(interrupting, agitated)  
...that I don't love her anymore?  
Because I'm a Christian, which she  
REALLY hates?

INTERCUT Lisa

LISA  
(nodding, calm)  
Yeah! Exactly.

INTERCUT Penny

PENNY  
Well... I don't hate her! How can I  
HATE what Jesus loves? And still  
call myself a Christian?

INTERCUT Lisa

LISA  
Not trying to be funny-okay, a  
little-but you DON'T call yourself  
a Christian.

INTERCUT Penny

PENNY  
(smiling a little)  
No, I don't... Yeah... Anyway...

LISA  
Lots of people DO-hate gay folks.  
Like it's the special sin that  
binds the body...instead of love.  
Instead of Jesus.

PENNY  
I used to feel that way-before I  
got the Holy Spirit... Before I  
believed in Jesus...

INTERCUT Lisa

LISA  
See?

INTERCUT Penny

PENNY  
Anyway... I keep thinking about  
what she said...

LISA

Shelley?

PENNY

Michelle mentioned something Dad is always saying to her-the way he always tells me to get my hair straightened...

LISA

What?

PENNY

"Straighten up."

INTERCUT Lisa

LISA

So he likes everything straight.

INTERCUT Penny

PENNY

Michelle with a man... My hair less ETHNIC... HATE that word... So I guess I'm headed out to the boondocks to see the fam... I'll let you get to work.

LISA

Kay. Love you. Kiss Shelley for me.

EXT. WHITE WASHED COTTAGE BELONGING TO PENNY'S MOM, NAUDIA AND PENNY'S DAD, CROSBY-DAY

Penny pulls up and parks abruptly on the crushed-shell driveway.

Penny gets out of her SUV and slams the door, shivering in denim overalls and a white crewneck tee shirt.

Older folks are raking leaves in the quiet neighborhood area. In a flannel jacket and leather gloves, NAUDIA is gathering leaves around her garden beds for compost. An ambivalent expression comes across the lovely, brown-skinned woman's face as she watches Penny pulling Angelina out of the middle car seat in the back.



NAUDIA is upset and thrilled at the same time. She takes off her gloves, waiting for PENNY to hand her her youngest granddaughter.

ANGELINA in her arms and right her hip wipes the upset from NAUDIA'S face. She leans in, eyes on ANGELINA as Penny throws her arms around them both and kisses her mother on the cheek.

NAUDIA  
So you heard?

PENNY  
What? No. I didn't hear nothin. I just came by to see Dad! What's going on? Is everything okay?

NAUDIA  
(keeping her eyes on Angelina)  
Fine... Fine... Shelley just movin out...

ANGELINA  
(loud)  
I want yogurk! Gimme...  
Gimme...some yogurk, Gramma!

NAUDIA  
(grinning)  
Okay! Okay! My baby want some yogurt?

ANGELINA  
Yes!

PENNY  
(to Angelina)  
How do you ask?

ANGELINA  
Pweeeeeease?

NAUDIA  
Come on, baby...

PENNY  
Mom, can you watch her for a  
second?

NAUDIA  
Of course!

INT. FOYER OF NAUDIA AND CROSBY'S HOUSE-DAY

PENNY enters the front door, after watching NAUDIA and ANGELINA disappear around the side of the house where there's an entrance to the enclosed porch.

Inside, PENNY looks around the staircase, holding onto the banister to lean out into the hallway that leads to downstairs dining area, a restroom across from an office along the hall, another doorway, an eat-in galley kitchen, and finally the back room.

The back room is not insulated or pretty enough to be called a sunroom or three season room. It's more of a storage area for PENNY's family. There's a short winding staircase back there that leads up to the upstairs apartment with its own kitchen, full bath, and living room-where SHELLEY has-had-been staying.

PENNY hesitates till she hears her mother and daughter. Then she makes a beeline for the back room's spiral staircase.

INT. CROSBY AND NAUDIA'S UPSTAIRS APARTMENT-DAY

The curtains above the kitchen sink are open. The salt shaker is sitting beside a lonely placemat on the kitchen table, apart from the pepper shaker. A plate is in the sink, ready for washing, and a saucepan of cloudy water is on the front left burner.

PENNY rolls her eyes, shakes her head slightly, and leans a hand on the back of one of the three chairs at the table.

The sound of plastic crinkling seems to startle PENNY. She straightens and heads for the bedroom on the floor.

With the window on the north side, it's surprisingly dark, even though the blinds and curtains are pulled up and drawn back.

SHELLEY has her back to the door and PENNY. In a white vee neck tee shirt under a fuzzy gray crew neck sweater and bare feet, PENNY sees bright purple undies peaking up above Shelley's low-rise skinny jeans.

SHELLEY, who usually wears her hair in a soft, silky cap of natural curls against her head, flips a curtain of straight black hair over her shoulder between packing and catches sight of PENNY.

Aside from a skeptical lift of her brows, SHELLEY's expression doesn't change.

PENNY, from the bedroom doorway, is the first to speak.

PENNY

I was going to follow my usual post  
drop-off routine... Head home with  
Angelina. Snack. Cartoons.  
WRITING...for me... I woulda MISSED  
this. What IS...this?

SHELLEY turns back to the bed upon which she's stuffing things into bags and boxes.

SHELLEY

Weave.

PENNY holds up a finger like she's bumped up against something she was looking for.

PENNY

Lisa coulda done that for you. By  
the way, she says, Hi.

SHELLEY looks away, holds open her bag as if she's looking for something, then stalks around the end of the bed to snatch open the outward folding doors of the closet. Inside there are empty hangers and a big box that says it's an air purifier. What looks like a comforter or a puffy coat is stuffed into it.

SHELLEY flips her hair over her shoulder again, and kneels down to pick it up.

PENNY crosses her arms, pushing out her lips. PENNY is agitated.

SHELLEY

What are you doing here anyway?

PENNY

I thought you'd never ask.

Shaking her head and blowing out a breath, PENNY tries to calm down. She stares out the lone window as she speaks.

PENNY

I had a dream...

SHELLEY

(scornful)

Oh really?

PENNY

I thought I was here for Dad,  
because it reminded me of something  
you said about him.

SHELLEY swallows audibly and clears her throat. She throws her hair back over her shoulder again and freezes. PENNY waits till SHELLEY turns around to say anything else.

SHELLEY turns, arms crossed. She's staring at the floor, off to her left. Like she's forced, she makes eye contact with PENNY. SHELLEY licks her lips, shakes her head, and looks out the north window.

SHELLEY

What?

PENNY takes a deep breath and holds it as long as she can.

PENNY

Straighten up.

SHELLEY

Did mom tell you I'm moving in with  
my girlfriend or something?

SHELLEY looks at PENNY.

SHELLEY

Is that why you're here? An  
intervention?

PENNY

No. But it hurts my feelings...

SHELLEY

That ' I'm gay?

PENNY

That you were gonna leave without  
even telling me.

SHELLEY looks out the north window again.

SHELLEY

(swiping at a tear)  
I'm tired of being a bad habit that  
needs breaking.

PENNY

(flicking tears away from the  
corners of her eyes)

I...I...

PENNY reaches out for SHELLEY who  
seems miles away already.

It's painful for both sisters.

PENNY

What are you gonna say if I tell  
you, I used to think about being  
with women?

SHELLEY's shoulders drop, and she rolls her eyes.

PENNY

No seriously! Back when the president was about to change history, I had a super crush on Rachel Maddow.

SHELLEY is trying not laugh, trying to hide a smile behind her hand.

SHELLEY

I never know when you're joking...

PENNY

I'm not JOKING! I loved her glasses and her style and her smarts. I defended her on HuffPo!

SHELLEY laughs against her will. PENNY is about to smile, but caution tells her to let the humor evaporate.

SHELLEY sobers. Her eyes become sad, and the light goes out.

PENNY

What, Michelle?

SHELLEY

You know what you're doing? You're calling me a bad habit again—something YOU got over. Now, you want...

PENNY gestures violently with her right arm and trying to cut off the words pouring out with a pointing finger.

PENNY

THAT'S not true!

SHELLEY

...me to straighten up, too. Like Dad.

PENNY

(tears standing in her eyes)  
I love you...

...whispering...

PENNY

...but I can't WIN with you.

SHELLEY

I wish...your love felt less  
like...attempted conversion. You...

...using her fingers to number off as her chin begins to  
wobble with emotion...

SHELLEY

...are a LIAR. An ADDICT. A wanna-  
be CHEATER. A DRUNKARD...

...PENNY blinks one eye and tears blind her, washing down  
her face. Only SHELLEY wipes her tears...

SHELLEY

But you find JESUS...and somehow  
that puts this distance in your  
eyes. Because I'm GAY. You want to  
FIX me. Save me. I honestly think  
we were closer before Jesus got in  
the way.

PENNY

I think you just understood me  
better then. Misery loves company.

PENNY rolls her eyes, throwing up her hands and regretting  
the words before they're even all the way out.

SHELLEY

So now I'm miserable? Thanks.

SHELLEY goes back to packing.

PENNY

No. I... But I...don't know how to  
love you and believe what I  
believe.

SHELLEY's moving things around the room, staging them for  
the move downstairs.

SHELLEY

Try calling. Try visiting.

PENNY

Phone works both ways, and only one  
of us has three kids.

SHELLEY's laughter is scathing.

SHELLEY

Whatever. You're the one who claims  
to believe there's a BOOK that  
teaches you how to do it. The  
BIBLE, right? It teaches you how to  
love? Right.

There's silence for a long moment.

PENNY clears her throat, wiping her face with the back of  
her right wrist.

PENNY

God restored the Brokedown Palace  
of my life... For the first time in  
a long time, I can't point at  
something and say, THAT'S why I'm  
not happy.

SHELLEY

Why?

PENNY

Cause I'm happy... I was always  
restless. Nothing and no one could  
satisfy me...

SHELLEY interrupts.

SHELLEY

Till God.

PENNY doesn't back down.



PENNY

That's right.

SHELLEY

That's cute.

PENNY

Nothing cute. That's the power of  
God unto salvation.

SHELLEY has her right side to PENNY, and looks at her side on. They're both surprised by PENNY's words.

SHELLEY turns away to stuff more things into a bag. She drops the bag off by a small open, cardboard box and pauses.

SHELLEY

You don't think you could be a  
BETTER-more supportive-sister?

PENNY

(punching a fist into a palm)  
If YOU do...I do.

SHELLEY rolls her eyes.

SHELLEY

Don't just agree with everything I  
say.

PENNY

I DON'T. I'm not.

SHELLEY

What do you call it then?  
Appeasement?

PENNY

I'm not the same old me, Michelle.  
I'm...

...The two react to hearing their mom, NAUDIA, calling out...

NAUDIA

Shelley? Car's here. Dad's hitchin'  
it to the trailer!

SHELLEY

(rolling her eyes)

Yes, MA'AM!

SHELLEY salutes.

SHELLEY

(muttering)

Last time I'll ever fucking say  
THAT...

PENNY

Well...it won't be the last time  
you're disappointed with people.  
Cause we'll never completely think  
or do or say or whatever...like you  
want us to...

PENNY shrugs. SHELLEY shakes her head.

SHELLEY

(vehement)

I don't want faketry...

PENNY interrupts.

PENNY

Yeah you do!

PENNY realizes she's getting upset and holds up her hands  
like stop signs. She looks around at the chaos in the room.

SHELLEY

Of course! I don't agree. I don't  
act like you want me to... You run!  
Just LIKE a Christian! Fake, fake,  
fake! Scared Christians saying they  
love you, tellin you to change, and  
runnin when it gets hard.

In the hallway, PENNY sees her daughter through the window  
over the kitchen sink. ANGELINA's in NAUDIA's arms out in  
the garden.

PENNY takes a deep breath.

PENNY

The irony is, You're packing...and  
moving, because you hate us right  
now. Or whatever you think you  
feel... Right or wrong...

SHELLEY opens her mouth, but nothing comes out.

PENNY

And I DO love you. I'm sorry  
about...DAD... And I'm sad you're  
going...

PENNY shrugs and walks away, feeling tears. The sound of  
PENNY's booties covers the sound of SHELLEY speaking, as  
she wrings her hands.

SHELLEY

I don't hate you.

Shaking her head, SHELLEY puts her hands on her hips,  
turns, and bends down. Grabbing two boxes, one in each arm,  
SHELLEY grunts to standing position and heads downstairs.

INT. NAUDIA AND CROSBY'S DINGING ROOM-LATE AFTERNOON

PENNY and her mother are seated at the long oval dining  
room table with a dark chestnut, rustic finish. NAUDIA, at  
one end of the table has taken cups for tea from the  
mahogany buffet and hutch anchored to the wall behind  
NAUDIA's seat.

PENNY's curled up on her seat, considering her tea while  
NAUDIA sips.

PENNY's cell phone is on the table beside her cup and  
saucer.

PENNY is tired and upset. There's an irritated look on her  
face as she thinks.

PENNY clears her throat.

PENNY

Dad didn't have to pick up the  
kids. I...

NAUDIA clears her own throat, turning her saucer  
counterclockwise two inches with her left hand before  
putting her hands in her lap. Her light brown eyes are  
bright.

NAUDIA

Not at all. He loved doing it. It's  
our pleasure.

PENNY

(distracted)

Oh, okay... Well, I called... So  
the school should be expecting  
him...

PENNY looks up into her mother's concerned eyes, nodding  
vigorously as if the movement will wake her up.

NAUDIA

Quinn likes..?

PENNY

(rolling her eyes good-  
naturedly)

LOVES...

NAUDIA grins and claps her hands  
together. Her tone is luxurious  
with pleasure.

NAUDIA

Good... Mushroom risotto and filet  
mignon then... Red wine, of  
course...

PENNY

(smiling a little, weary)

Of course.

Penny's nodding at nothing when Naudia surprises her by  
placing her hand over hers.

NAUDIA

So we were playing-the baby and  
I...

PENNY

Mmhm...

NAUDIA

She took my phone. Then she offered  
it to me...in EXCHANGE for some  
orange soda pop... I gave her a  
sip, and she took my phone back...

...laughing delightedly to herself...

NAUDIA

...She thought she was in trouble  
with me... And when I was trying to  
calm her down...

PENNY

(interrupting)

If she did something wrong, Mom,  
she should be put in timeout. You  
can put her in TIMEOUT, Mom. It's  
not...

NAUDIA withdraws. PENNY keeps her hands on the table,  
staring down at the table and her cell phone.

NAUDIA

It's GRAMMEE'S house...

PENNY

True.

NAUDIA

Grammee's rules.

Penny raises her brows, keeping her eyes on her fingers  
where they're playing the piano on the dining table.

PENNY

Okaaaaay...

NAUDIA Naudia clears her throat.

NAUDIA  
Anyway...Angelina asked me, Does  
Daddy love me?

NAUDIA puts her fingers to her throat, scandalized and emotional.

PENNY's listening expression says she's not surprised.

NAUDIA  
Anyway, I told her, Of course! Yes,  
Daddy loves you! So...

Naudia looks up, but Penny says nothing.

NAUDIA  
She asked, Does my Blake love me?  
Does my Jacob? My Mommy..? The  
whole family... THEN...she asked  
me, Does my PILLOW love her or  
something like that...

NAUDIA shakes her head, perplexed.

NAUDIA  
I told her, Jesus loves you. And  
she gave me this big, beautiful  
smile.

NAUDIA smiles, in love.

NAUDIA  
You won't believe what she said.

PENNY smiles in a way that says she will believe.

NAUDIA  
She said, Santa's gonna bring us  
presents!

NAUDIA laughs loud and deep. PENNY smiles a little.

NAUDIA  
I love that child. Soft spoken with  
a streak of wild... My kind of girl  
all day long!

PENNY nods. Silence grows up around them.

NAUDIA

You girls get to BE so much more  
than my generation ever got to...  
Than I ever got to be...

PENNY's expression twitches. She freezes, waiting to react  
to whatever's coming.

Her immediate reaction is to object to what she senses is  
coming. She stills the instinct.

NAUDIA

Now you've become some...spiritual  
GIANT among us...

NAUDIA looks off toward the screened-in porch that can be  
seen to her right through the archway cut into the wall,  
which helps make the dining space feel formal.

NAUDIA

And I try not to be jealous...

...face falling...

NAUDIA

...that I didn't get to have all my  
fun... That I was just a good girl.  
A good wife. A good mother... While  
your father...

NAUDIA looks down at her cooling tea. PENNY's hands lay  
there like dead bodies for a second before she drags them  
back into her lap. Beneath the cover of the table, she  
scrubs them both together.

NAUDIA

Well... You and your sister are  
young. You've had...wild, daring  
lives... YOU have a  
fabulous...SUCCESSFUL husband...

PENNY

Mom... I don't know where you're  
going with this exactly, but it  
seems like...you think my life has  
been awesome... Like you've missed  
out-on my...ADVENTURE...

...holding up a finger while she keeps her eyes on her own tea cup...

PENNY

...Let me assure you...it has NOT  
been some fun trip. A PRETTY, wild  
ride, Mom...

PENNY looks up into her mom's eyes, allowing her to see the darkness of her memories there. NAUDIA is silent.

PENNY

I'm not going to go into it all...  
But I will tell you... Glory to GOD  
I even HAVE a life right now...  
That I can appreciate it... That  
I'm not an addict...ANYMORE...

NAUDIA

(shocked)

What?

PENNY

Yeah... So maybe it's my fault that  
I know how to put on such a nice  
façade for the world, but I  
guarantee you that what I did GET  
TO do was suffer. And make other  
people suffer... And that's what  
Shelley's doing right now, too!

NAUDIA flips a dismissive hand at PENNY's vehemence as shock dissipates.

NAUDIA

It's easy to say that-when you've  
gotten to live and to be a bad  
girl... You get to know what that  
was like...and have a husband like  
Quinn...AND children like Angelina,  
and...and...Blake...and Jacob.

PENNY

You don't know how that sounds...



NAUDIA

Well, however it SOUNDS, YOU don't know...what it's like to come home and know you can't go to the hospital where your daughter is delivering her child...because your husband is stinking drunk and raving in the basement! You don't really know who I am! You just think you do!

PENNY

We all feel that way, Mom...and...

NAUDIA

(raising her voice, almost to a shout)

AND it's TRUE!

PENNY

Yeah, it IS, Mom. It IS. I'm not saying...

NAUDIA's chair scrapes back as she sails shakily to her feet. NAUDIA pushes her chair into the table, jerks her cardigan into place over her button-down shirt, brushes her loose, curly bob over her ears, and blows out a tremulous breath.

Careful not to make eye-contact with PENNY, she smiles and speaks.

PENNY watches her like a specimen under a microscope.

NAUDIA

I better clean up and get a snack ready for the babies.

PENNY

I can do that...

NAUDIA

(shifting her glance over to Penny)

Can you? Then I could freshen up...

PENNY  
(smiling, holding back a  
sigh)  
Yeah!

NAUDIA  
Thank you.

NAUDIA smiles awkwardly and stalks out of the room. PENNY keeps wide eyes on the dining table until she's sure it's safe. Then she rolls her eyes and drops her head onto her folded arms.

PENNY  
(whispering to herself)

O...M...G!

INT. NAUDIA AND CROSBY'S DINING ROOM-EVENING

Seated at the dining table are CROSBY, NAUDIA, BLAKE, JACOB, ANGELINA, QUINN, and PENNY. They can be seen from different angles as they pass dishes.

QUINN cuts BLAKE's filet while PENNY tries to encourage JACOB to try the risotto. NAUDIA lifts ANGELINA out of her booster seat to come eat green beans from her lap. CROSBY pours another glass of wine for PENNY and for himself.

NAUDIA watches him carefully. PENNY watches NAUDIA. And QUINN is watching PENNY.

PENNY (V.O.)  
I acted like I didn't understand,  
but I couldn't shake that word-  
jealousy.

INT. QUINN'S SISTER, ANDREA AND HER HUSBAND, MITCHELL'S  
LIVING ROOM-DAY [FLASHBACK]

Quinn is on his knees, ruffling the fur of and greeting ANDREA and MITCHELL'S chocolate Labrador Retriever on his knees. Jacob pets him, too, while Angelina dances around excitedly, hopping from foot to foot. Andrea sits very close to the action with her legs curled to her side.

Andrea's blonde hair is spilling over her left shoulder as she smiles widely at her nieces and nephew. Andrea's

rubbing her own pregnant belly while she watches them with big, cobalt blue eyes.

Squatting behind her, Mitchell's right hand is rubbing gently up and down Andrea's shoulder as he looks on the scene, too.

Penny, looking at everything, is the only one who is not smiling.

Penny hangs her purse up on a peg, steps back, crossing her sandaled feet at the ankle.

Quinn glances up at her, his eyes not matching the lingering smile on his lips. Quinn reaches back with his right hand to clasp Penny's bare calf, just above the place where the straps up her leg end.

Penny's lips roll together. She crosses her arms behind her, grabbing her hand, and looks out the window over her right shoulder.

PENNY (V.O.)

Something about my sister and  
brother-in-law made me want to be  
like them. I wanted to have what  
they had. I coveted it. I doubted  
it.

And at the same time, there was a part of me that was desperate to believe what they had might be real. The PEACE. Because if it was real, I might be able to find a way to PEACE in our home.

INT. HALLWAY RIGHT OUTSIDE PENNY'S BEDROOM-NIGHT

After dinner at Penny's parents' cottage, the kids are asleep. Quinn and Penny are whispering, smiling and laughing low and intimately.

Quinn has his right hand resting a little below Penny's lower back as he uses his left hand to open the door behind him.

QUINN

(husky)

I love these overalls.

PENNY

(smiling as she whispers)

I remember.

Facing Quinn, Penny's back can be seen with the low light from the partially opened bedroom door in the dark hallway.

Penny reaches down, crossing her arms in front of her to pull her tee shirt off through the straps of the denim overall jumper. Her bra follows.

Quinn uses one hand to unsnap a strap of Penny's denim overalls. As it falls apart, Quinn lifts Penny up against him.

They kiss.

It immediately gets hot.

They fall through the doorway, Quinn closing it firmly behind them.

PENNY (V.O.)

We had sex-great sex. We were happy...sometimes. But there was a whole lot of instability. The gleam in my children's eyes was fear, even when they were happy, not joy. Because when my kids were happy, they were waiting for it to come to an end.

The gleam in my eyes was restlessness.

INT. BEDROOM OFFICE NEAR THREE-PANEL WINDOW-DAY [FLASHBACK CONT.]

Southern exposure sun is shining in onto a black, folding card table. Every inch is covered with bags of crayons; packaging tape; headphones, artwork from her kids; taped down post-it notes; ceramic animals; crosses her five year old son and seven year old daughter have painted and assembled, etc..

Painted glass artwork from her children, stained wax paper shapes, and sticker art, and more post-it notes are stuck on the windows, too.

Bibles of all shapes frame the card table along with commentaries and a huge concordance. On top of devotionals for children, rolls of tape are stacked on top of each other as holders for markers, pencils, and pens.

Penny is in a black leather, mid-back office chair, staring down at her desk.

She sees nothing as the sun shines down on her.

The cursor can be seen blinking behind a sentence fragment, I remember when I still sat in a high chair and my dad fed me spaghetti or...

PENNY (V.O.)

My mom thought I GOT to be the prodigal daughter... To eat with the pigs and squander the blessings of time and innocence and trust... But when you GET TO be the prodigal, you also get to have friends you don't like. You get to have a husband who has to close his heart to protect himself from you. You get to have children who never know who you're going to be from day to day.

Quinn's sister, Andrea wanted to go to the Holy Land. I wanted to go, too. She started a journey through the entire Bible, reading every day. I tried to read my Bible, too. I gave up, but Andrea finished. I fought with my husband whenever we weren't in bed.

Even our public façade had cracks that revealed the ugly home life that was so much a part of our time together as a family.

Andrea and Mitchell went to church.

So I got it in my mind that we needed to try church again. This time, we went to THEIR church.

INT. MEGA CHURCH SANCTUARY FILLED TO THE BRIM-DAY  
[FLASHBACK]

Penny, Angelina, Jacob, Blake, and Quinn moving slowly, guided by an usher to a pew where Andrea and Mitchell are already standing

Singing with a band like a concert is going on up on the stage with the pastor breaking in with lines of Scripture here and there.

Andrea and Mitchell smile excitedly as Penny and her family squeeze in between them.

Andrea stays to the left of Penny with Blake smiling up at her Aunt (Andrea) between them. Mitchell stands to the right of Quinn. Angelina stands up on the pew, while Jacob sits down between his parents, looking bewildered.

Penny is overwhelmed. Quinn seems okay.

PENNY (V.O.)

It was a mega church, but I thought the doctrine was right. The worship was uplifting, though it overwhelmed me at the time. The preaching and teaching style was compelling.

But you know what really got me? My sister and brother-in-law tithed EVERY Sunday. The amount boggled my mind. Ten percent of their income, divided into the weeks of the month is a lot of money! And, come to find out, they weren't even members! But my in-laws, Andrea and Mitchell didn't flinch.

They gave me my first taste of obedience and sacrifice. And by the grace of God, they loved each other...in a way I wanted to live my love with Quinn... It's hard to explain what we had then, but I've always known Quinn was the one for me. We just hadn't figured it out beyond the bedroom...

But Andrea and Mitchell lived in what I now call "God's consecrated vision of marriage."

I felt sorry for Quinn-that he had to see that his sister had gotten it right...while he was stuck with my crazy.

Stuck with my pride.

As much as pride was a problem for me, I know I wasn't the One who came between me and my addictions-to pride and having my say. To judgment. To vengeance. To rage. To rebellion.

I DIDN'T know all that stuff was sin.

I thought lying was sin, but I didn't think lying was that bad. I thought the only REAL sin was murder, and I hadn't done that.

I sometimes wonder, Why? I think about all of the things that I've done. I think about all of the times I've thought I was about to turn it all around. And I see now the ways that God has been planting seeds in my life. Or, He's been dropping crumbs.

As I drifted, I would come upon a handful of these broken pieces. I would pick them up and put them in my pockets. Then one day, in my fear and desperation, I found them and ate them-I confessed the name of Jesus Christ.

I said the Sinner's Prayer.

I'd looked for churches and tried some out as an adult. I'd gone to Sunday School as a child. I'd come to the point where I believed I didn't need church.

Subconsciously, I'd come to a point where I believed I didn't need God.

But even after we quit making our sporadic trips to their big church, I would get my taste of God by watching online videos of Pastor James MacDonald's sermons.

The few times I'd been there, I don't remember an altar call or anyone leading us in the Sinner's Prayer. Back when we'd gone, I don't think I'd even known what an altar call was.

It's when the pastor offers salvation through confession and prayer during a church service. Sometimes, they CALL you to raise your hand, to stand, or to come up to the front to receive prayer. I think it only happened once during the nearly two years we attended what became our

home church.

If you've ever watched classic episodes of Billy Graham revivals, then you know what I'm talking about-when people would come streaming down from the stands.

That always gets me.

Anyhoo, there came a day when, as the video sermon was finishing up, Pastor James MacDonald said something like, It's on my heart to extend the opportunity for salvation.

He said the Sinner's Prayer.

More important, I said it with him.

I'd never said that before. And Romans [ten nine] 10:9 was something I'd never understood-that is, if I'd ever even HEARD it.

Now I'd say the gift of the Holy Spirit might have been given to me in December or in January, about two years ago- whenever I said, "Jesus is Lord." When I believed in my heart that God raised him from the dead...

THAT'S when jealousy started to shrivel and die inside. Because my heart was no longer fertile ground. Because...my heart was new.

EXT. AMPLE PARKING LOT FOR POPULAR TRACK-DAY

Close enough to see the track through the trees from the gravel lot, Penny and Lisa are catching their breath as they lean up against the passenger side of Lisa's Mazda 3 16 [three sixteen] sedan.

Both women are wearing cuffed fleece handwarmers, neck gaiters, and hats over sweat-wicking mocknecks and tights.

Lisa's hands are in the pockets of her jacket. Penny's vest is unzipped.

Penny leans, hands turned in on her thighs as she tries to catch her breath.



LISA

First run in over a year... Three miles is AWESOME, my friend.

Penny grunts, shaking her head.

LISA

You need some water.

PENNY

I NEED some coffee.

LISA

(grinning)

What made you join me this morning, love?

PENNY

(shaking her head)

Remember I told you I was going by Mom and Dad's house? It didn't go so well...

LISA

What happened?

PENNY

I saw Shelley...

LISA

Yeah?

PENNY

I told her you said, Hi.

LISA

Uh huh?

PENNY

SHE said she was leaving town-moving in with her girlfriend.

LISA

What?

PENNY

Thing is... I'm...HAUNTED by it,  
Lisa. Haunted! I know what I  
believe. I know it's true. But what  
Shelley said was true, too...

LISA

(pained)

What did she SAY?

PENNY

She said...I should know how to  
love her-if I believe in Jesus...  
And I know I SHOULD know... I know  
there's a way to love her... I just  
don't know how to do it. There's a  
way to DO it though...

Penny wipes tears from the corners of her eyes, pushing her  
hat off her head and pulling off her gloves.

PENNY

I'm repeating myself.

LISA

You're upset. Awwwww, Pennnnn...

Lisa takes Penny into her arms. Penny lets her arms hang  
down at her sides for a moment, before lifting their weight  
so her hands are holding Lisa's elbows. She lays her  
forehead in Lisa's neck.

LISA

Our knowledge is fragmentary, and  
our prophecy is incomplete and  
imperfect...

PENNY

(interrupting)

Our teaching is fragmentary.

LISA

But when the complete and perfect  
comes, the incomplete and imperfect  
will...

PENNY  
(whispering)  
Vanish away.

LISA  
(nodding)  
Vanish away.

Lisa pulls back, keeping her hand on Penny's shoulder.

LISA  
You know that's why I get what  
Shelley goes through right?

PENNY  
Why?

LISA  
Because of my scarlet letter D.

Penny frowns as her head goes back on her neck. She's skeptical and confused.

PENNY  
(shaking her head)  
Huh?

LISA  
Yeah! Because I wouldn't let Jason  
beat me to a pulp or crash a car  
into a pole with me...IN that  
car...AGAIN...

Penny gestures emphatically with her left hand.

PENNY  
Wait... How did I never know this?  
I mean you're saying people had a  
problem...?

Lisa keeps talking to the world like the sticky play button  
on her recorder has been pushed.

LISA

And what, with Jay being a MAN OF  
GOD and all...

PENNY

What?

Lisa tips her head to the side, pushing her lips out. One  
hand goes to her hip as she thrusts it out.

LISA

Don't be naïve, Pen! I was straight  
up DISOWNED by church folk! Our  
church..? They didn't want nothin  
to do with me after the divorce!

PENNY

Are you serious?

Lisa

Yes!

PENNY

Why? No offense, but... Jason  
turned out to be p-r-e-t-t-y crazy.

LISA

Yeah, no kidding! But because I was  
not about to sit through CHURCH  
COUNSELING with my abuser; and Jay  
served the church; he had a job; he  
came home at night; a-n-d he wasn't  
cheating on me, I was supposed to  
live my life as a doormat.  
Or...dead. Whichever...

PENNY

That's crazy!

LISA

That's hard-hearted Christians.

Penny lets her head slowly drop back on her neck. She drops  
her hands at her sides.

Penny is exasperated.

PENNY

Okay... I'm sorry, and I agree that how you've been treated is wrong. But Christians are not the problem with this world.

LISA

Christians are the problem when they don't act like Christians.

PENNY

Lisa-

LISA

The Bible says, most people's love will grow cold. Pen-

Penny straightens, going on alert.

LISA

It has... Love...has grown...cold. My FAMILY stopped inviting me to things. Like I don't notice...

Patrick's family is...DISAPPOINTED... Like I put a spell on their precious son... I mean I DID bewitch him...

Lisa turns a closed-mouth smile down at the corners. Penny isn't smiling at all.

PENNY

You never said they don't like you.

LISA

(shaking her head)

They just think he could have done better than sloppy seconds.

PENNY

Wow.

LISA

(nodding)

Yeah... I mean, it's almost like...some folks would rather I be beaten, dead, or alone-but not happy.

That man had me sleeping in another bedroom...

...gesturing with her hand...

LISA

...because HE SAID I snored. HE  
SAID I tossed and turned too  
much...like a parent tells his  
child. Right?

...extending her hand, fingers beckoning agreement from  
Penny who shakes her head and nods at the same time.  
Penny's mouth is hanging open.

LISA

Right. You don't have to say it. He  
treated me like his CHILD, sending  
me to my room. The thing is, I was  
PREGNANT...

...Lisa points to her stomach.

...with his child. And now I can't have Patrick's or anyone  
else's because He killed that dream...and our BABY...when  
he ran us into that pole!

Lisa is nearly shouting, and her eyes are glassy with  
tears. Penny glances around, biting her lip at the people  
who are staring.

When Penny puts her hand on Lisa's shoulder and squeezes,  
the stuck play button that was keeping Lisa talking  
unsticks.

Lisa blows out a big breath, wipes her eyes, covers her  
mouth with her fist and talks into it.

LISA

I don't care... It's true. If  
you're gay... If you're divorced...  
Even Christians don't want you.  
ESPECIALLY Christians. Believers.  
Whatever.

PENNY

It's not that... Thing is, we all  
sin, but it's...

Penny blows out her breath, reaching for words.

PENNY

If I shout at my kids or throw a  
parakeet across the room or break a  
glass... I can put my makeup on and  
dress the kids up and kiss my  
husband as we get out of the car in  
the church parking lot!  
And...voila...no one knows  
how...UGLY it truly is, you know?  
And then...WE can almost pretend it  
never happened. We can TELL  
OURSELVES, This...never happened.

Lisa's lips are pressed flat, the corners of her mouth  
trembling.

Lisa smiles a little and wipes tears away at the same time.

LISA

Throw a PARAKEET, Pen? Really? I  
never know when you're joking...

PENNY

(tilting her head to one  
side, sighing)  
This is no laughing matter. I'm not  
making a joke about you and  
Jason... I know you loved him.  
Maybe still do...

LISA

I did. I don't now. Thank you,  
Penny. I...know you're not trying  
to be funny.

PENNY

I know. And you had-HAVE-a baby  
together.

LISA  
HAVE. In heaven. Yes.

Lisa wipes her eyes.

PENNY  
Yeah...

LISA  
Anyway... It's over.

Lisa gestures eloquently with her hands, crossing out the past.

LISA  
And I'm not the only one who's been  
looked down on, because I'm  
divorced.

PENNY  
But...

LISA  
No buts... EVERY divorce is  
painful. There are bonds that have  
to be forcefully broken. There are  
losses. Whether you're the one who  
supposedly...

Lisa makes air quotes.

LISA  
...broke it up... CAUSED the  
divorce...

...shakes her head...

LISA  
... We're all just people. And it  
hurts. And when people JUDGE THAT,  
it's like getting raped...when  
you're already doing a life  
sentence in prison.



PENNY

Wow.

LISA

Yeah. I mean...I'm not a cheerleader for divorce, and I'm tired of people treating me like I am... Because I am-DIVORCED.

PENNY

You think that's what Shelley's going through?

LISA

I think we mess up that one saying and hate the sinner for the sin. And I think...

...clearing her throat and putting her hands in her pockets...

LISA

...we-Believers-should just remember to love the sinner also known as, EVERYONE.

Both women turn outward, leaning back on Lisa's sedan again. Penny and Lisa stare at nothing.

Penny blinks hard, and Lisa look out to the right, wiping her chin on her shoulder.

The reach blindly for each other hands, and there's comfort in the awkwardness and sadness.

EXT. INTERSTATE HIGHWAY-NOON [TRAVELING]

The Roberts clan is driving down a highway.

QUINN

(dry, grinning)

It's Pine Tree Central out here.

## MONTAGE-VARIOUS

A) Quinn opening SUV trunk. He searches impatiently through bags. He holds up a huge Elsa doll. Blake claps and nods, saying something we can't hear. Quinn gestures, raising a brow. Blake reluctantly hands over the iPad to Angelina. Quinn hands her the Elsa doll, closing the trunk.

B) Angelina has the tablet, holding it in her chubby hands as her brother, Jacob looks on.

C) Penny hooks up her cell phone to the music cable cord.

D) Blake encourages Quinn to join in her celebration of her doll's first ride in the car.

Alternative rock plays for a while, competing with Blake's shouting of the theme from the animated Disney film, Frozen.

Penny looks at Quinn and smiles.

## PENNY

Guess I should put on something else.

Quinn tilts his head, shrugging. He glances over at Penny.

## QUINN

I don't think so.

## PENNY

It's fine?

Quinn nods slowly, unshakable in his certainty. Penny smiles as she changes the song.

## PENNY

(Shrugging)

It's a bit much...

At that moment Angelina and Jacob join in Blake's Disney movie shouting.

The corner of Quinn's mouth turns up as he nods. He stares ahead as he speaks.

QUINN

It is... You're right.

Penny snorts.

PENNY

(Grinning)

I think I might just turn it off.

Quinn, seeming indifferent, shrugs one shoulder.

PENNY (V.O.)

He's annoyed. I've done it again. The Holy Spirit told me (and has been telling me) to LISTEN to Quinn-not just in bed. But when he says something, I need to listen-with my actions-instead of smiling and doing whatever I want. I know without any prodding from the Spirit of God, that I shouldn't ask Quinn's opinion-if I'm gonna nod and do whatever I want. It's a matter of respect. But it's also a matter of obedience.

I've hated that word a long time. OBEDIENCE. I've been hard-headed a long time, too.

It's as hard to break bad habits as it is to start good ones... But now I KNOW something I never knew-not for most of my life... Chapter three and verse one of the First Epistle of Peter says a wife's submission can win over a husband who doesn't believe the Word of God. Who doesn't believe the Bible. So now-given I don't know where Quinn stands on the Bible, which he doesn't read-obedient behavior means more and more to me... SOMETIMES I ACT that way.

EXT. EXITING THE INTERSTATE-LATE AFTERNOON [TRAVELING]

The Roberts' white Range Rover can be seen exiting right from the interstate highway from above.

INT. PENNY'S BEDROOM-LATE AFTERNOON

Various suitcases and bags are emptied into an archipelago of zip locked toiletries and folded, unused clothing.

Penny is on her knees, looking weary and determined to finish unpacking.

Something occurs to her, and she comes up on one knee to check one of the plastic, two-pocket folders she's arranged at the foot of her bed.

Penny uses her right forefinger to draw down the front of the folder, frowning. She flips it open, pulls out two documents, one half-sheet of paper and one full, two-sided sheet.

Penny's hands go to her hips as she calls out loudly.

PENNY

Jacob? Jacob? No TV till we get  
your homework done! You've got one  
sheet to do for tomorrow! Jacob?

Quinn appears, freezing at the doorway without entering.

QUINN

Have you seen Angelina's bottle?

Penny shakes the bags in front of her and uses her flattened palms to rub against the inner pockets of the rolling case. Shaking her head and pursing her lips, Penny comes to her feet. Her hands are still on her hips.

PENNY

Nope. But I'm SURE I grabbed it  
before we left. Also...

QUINN  
(shrugging)  
Time for Ange to go off it  
anyway...

PENNY  
Jacob has homework. Yeah, but...we  
should try to find it anyway,  
right?

QUINN  
Homework? I don't know, Pen! Does  
she even DRINK from it anymore?  
It's mostly a habit she has, and  
she likes to chew the nipples to  
hell!

PENNY  
Okay. Whatever. Can you do it with  
him?

QUINN  
Do what?

PENNY  
Homework. Jacob has a sheet.

Quinn shakes his head, throwing up his hands. Penny goes  
back to what she's doing.

QUINN  
Jake? I know... Let's get our  
homework done first, okay, Big Guy?

Penny sighs. She's relieved.

INT. PENNY'S HOUSE-GREAT ROOM, NEAR FIREPLACE-DAY

Penny's waiting to see if Lisa will answer her cell phone  
and getting some general housekeeping done at the same  
time. Her birds are singing loudly to the rock music Penny  
has on low near their alcove (which would normally be used  
for an upright piano or buffet and hutch).

INT. INSIDE LISA'S CAR-DAY [TRAVELING]

Lisa's on her cell phone in passenger seat. Her husband, Patrick is driving.

Lisa unlocks her cell phone and accepts the call.

LISA

Hey, Pen! How ARE you?

INTERCUT Penny

Penny pauses near the cold fireplace, pushing the button that turns off the vacuum. Clicking it into the upright position, Penny throws the cord out of her way and switches to the broom.

Laughter breaks through Penny's surprise.

PENNY

(laughing)

Well, don't you sound happy?

INTERCUT Lisa

LISA

I SOUND like I'm about to spend five nights in the Bahamas! And better me and Pat than you and Quinn! God KNOWS y'all would be back with Baby Number Four!

They both crack up.

PENNY

Y'all not gon have no fun?

LISA

Yes! But we have BUSINESS on the brain.

Lisa pinches her fingers together emphatically, speaking into the phone like Penny's right there in the car with her.

LISA

I don't know WHAT you and Quinn be  
thankin bout!

INTERCUT Penny

They crack up. Penny laughs so hard she has to wipe tears  
from the corners of her eyes.

INTERCUT Lisa

Lisa grins and winks at her husband.

LISA

Anyway!

INTERCUT Penny

PENNY

Anyway! So you guys are obviously  
on your way out of the country.

INTERCUT Lisa

LISA

Headed to the airport NOW.

INTERCUT Penny

PENNY

(sobering)

And this is so you guys can be back  
for Christmas...to what-WORK?

INTERCUT Lisa

LISA

I told you we have BUSINESS on the  
brain, girl! Around Christmas is  
when a lot of chaos springs up in  
the marketing world. And a whole  
lot of people need their hair and  
nails done! So...It's either  
Patrick and I have Christmas  
before...or after... His work can  
travel better than mine... I'm  
praying we can leave that at home-

(MORE)

LISA (CONT'D)  
for the most part...while WE enjoy  
Turks and Caicos. Half Moon Cay  
then Nassau...

Lisa sighs luxuriously, massaging Patrick's shoulder and  
neck with her left hand.

LISA  
Right, babe?

PATRICK  
(winking)  
Right.

LISA  
How was your Two-Thanksgiving  
Extravaganza amid Blake's birthday  
party? Correction, PARTIES?

INTERCUT Penny

PENNY  
(sighing)  
I'm still finding glasses with red  
wine in them on the fireplace  
mantle...a week after  
Thanksgiving... And I don't think  
you're supposed to leave a can of  
whipped cream out on the counter  
either. So...

INTERCUT Lisa

Lisa pulls a face.

LISA  
Y'all need to go ahead and spring  
for housekeeping. YOU don't have  
all day to do it.

PENNY  
I AM at home...



LISA  
To WRITE, not to CLEAN.

INTERCUT Penny

Penny smiles big and slow.

Penny

You do my heart good. Because God has blessed me with you  
to remind me...

INTERCUT Lisa

LISA  
Of what you're called to do. Glad  
to be His servant in that. You lift  
me up, too. You know that!

INTERCUT Penny

PENNY  
I love you.

INTERCUT Lisa

LISA  
I love you, TOO.

INTERCUT Penny

PENNY  
Anyway... You're right-about the  
housekeeping. The cleaning...

LISA  
It's true. The only thing you can  
do worse than come back to a dirty  
house...is wait till it's late in  
the day and...

PENNY  
Come back to a dirty house.

INTERCUT Lisa

LISA  
Come back. EXACTLY!

INTERCUT Penny

There's a lull. Then Penny changes the subject.

PENNY  
You really sound bubbly...

LISA  
I am! Well, how was it at Quinn's  
parents' place?

PENNY  
Fine. Great!

INTERCUT Lisa

LISA  
Yeah?

INTERCUT Penny

PENNY  
Yeah... I mean... I don't need  
philosophy with my turkey. Or  
politics with my dessert. Or...just  
generally to be dragged back into  
my bad old days that way, you know?

LISA  
Oh no! Were you guys arguing? Tell  
me it aint so.

PENNY  
(nodding, embarrassed)  
Almost...

INTERCUT Lisa

LISA  
What are they? Republicans?

PENNY

If anybody's a Republican these days, it's ME, Lisa... But I try to stay out of that stuff... Why do we have to talk about abortion and reproductive rights and illegal immigration at Thanksgiving?

LISA

Habit.

INTERCUT Penny

PENNY

(pouncing)

That WORD keeps coming up!

INTERCUT Lisa

LISA

(head going back on her neck)

Politics?

INTERCUT Penny

PENNY

(shaking her head slowly)

Habit.

INTERCUT Lisa

LISA

It controls so much of everything we do and say. A lot of times, we don't even have to THINK about what we believe. We just say what we've always said. We hate who we've always hated. We support whoever has the letter in front that we're used to.

INTERCUT Penny

PENNY  
(hedging)  
Well...

INTERCUT Lisa

LISA  
Not ALL of us. Not in EVERY case,  
but... A lot of the time, we do  
what we're used to. It feels safer.  
THAT'S when rebellion would  
actually be a GOOD thing.

PENNY  
Yaaaaaaasss! Lisa! You are so...

LISA  
Not as dumb as I seem?

Lisa laughs as Penny objects.

LISA  
I know who I am, Pen. I've ALWAYS  
known-since I was a little girl. I  
may not have told you, but I always  
knew you were, like, brilliant. But  
I also knew-SAW-that that was  
HARDER for you... I knew that I  
didn't have that... And if I wanted  
to be successful, God was going to  
have to make up what I couldn't  
cover. In a way, that strengthened  
my faith-because He always did-  
cover what I couldn't.

PENNY  
(slowly)  
I've always seen you as  
disciplined. And practical.

LISA  
(shrugging)  
That gives me too much credit.

INTERCUT Penny

PENNY

(day-dreamy)

Meanwhile, I was looking at myself.  
And when I wasn't looking at me, I  
was looking at Dad... Did you know?  
I know how to step like my  
dad...till I SEE him as I move  
around the floor? I'm a little girl  
all over again when I step-watching  
him play his records... Being  
programmed to be like him in yet  
another way. Learning to step...the  
way even my mother never could...

"Brilliant..."

Penny shakes her head, flicking a tear from the corner of  
her eye and sitting down on the chaise.

PENNY

You know what? Being "brilliant"  
and not knowing God made you that  
way is like having parents who are  
addicts...and not knowing there's  
something wrong with them  
disappearing for weeks. Or, leaving  
you alone while the authorities  
evict you, piling up all your stuff  
in sheets and throwing it over the  
ledge of your high-rise, cinder  
block apartment...

Not knowing what God meant for you to be and why He made  
you the way He did is like loving the death that winter  
brings. It's like finding the love and beauty in  
dysfunctional, addicted parents-because all your memories  
and your history were painted on that sad canvas... So you  
don't know any better. But you end up stunted in your  
growth...

INTERCUT Lisa

LISA  
(sounding shocked)  
Is that how..?

INTERCUT Penny

PENNY  
(nodding)  
Dad... His brothers and sisters-all  
six of them... Their parents were  
drunks. Grandma was raised by a  
whore so she didn't know any  
better. They had inter-family  
prejudice going on, based upon the  
lightness or darkness of skin...  
The federal government geniuses  
created the perfect foundation for  
some of the most dangerous gangs in  
the country to anchor themselves in  
his generation-by putting poor  
people on top of poor people in a  
place where grown men weren't  
allowed to be around, and women who  
received government "assistance"  
weren't allowed to be married. So a  
strong man-a Hitler-rose up to lead  
all those fatherless young men. And  
he took them right to the devil...

Anyway...

INTERCUT Lisa

LISA  
Wow...

Nodding, Lisa crosses her left arm under her breasts and rolls her lips together. Lisa glances over at Patrick. He makes eye contact before looking back at the road. He glances from her to the rearview mirror to the road, watching Lisa peripherally. Lisa rubs her hand over her short 'do with her left hand, platinum rings glittering, and bites her lip before she says anything else.

LISA

So...what unfolded during this  
Thanksgiving? These...Thanksgiving  
trips...

PENNY

(interrupting)

Yeah... It was a lot. Politics at  
the Roberts' place... Grimms' Fairy  
Tales at the Parks' residence. And  
I mean grim!

LISA

Pen! Are you okay?

INTERCUT Penny

Penny opens her mouth to answer. Her mouth opens wider and  
wider, waiting to be filled with words. Ultimately, she  
takes a deep breath and blows it out. Her eyes are wide as  
she leans her elbow on her knees.

PENNY

I been having dreams... Strange  
dreams...

LISA

Stress.

PENNY

(shrugging)

I don't wanna say whether it's bad  
or good... It might be good-the  
dreams, as an outlet...

Penny rubs her double strand twists back from her forehead  
and tries to smile.

INTERCUT Lisa

LISA

Would it help...to write about it?

INTERCUT Penny

PENNY

I'm a writer. That's what I do.

INTERCUT Lisa

LISA

Heard from Shelley? Was she at  
Thanksgiving?

INTERCUT Penny

PENNY

Not ours... Someone called, and Mom  
stepped away at dinner... But she  
never said anything about it... So  
either it was Shelley, and she  
didn't want to speak to anyone else  
or...

Penny slaps her left thigh.

PENNY

I don't know...Anyway!

LISA

Anyway...

PENNY

I better finish cleaning up...

INTERCUT Lisa

LISA

A'ight then, love. We'll be praying  
over you and Shelley and the whole,  
blended clan up yonder...

INTERCUT Penny

Penny closes her eyes and flicks tears from the corner of  
her eye.

PENNY

Thank you. Enjoy the Bahamas! Love  
you, too!



LISA

Love you! God loves you more.

PENNY

Amen.

INTERCUT Lisa

LISA

Amen.

INT. PENNY'S BATHROOM-DAY

Penny in her white bathrobe, starburst pajama pants and coral camisole is leaning over the quartz bathroom vanity, with her hands on either side of the sink.

Penny's examining her face.

PENNY (V.O.)

Have you ever looked into the eyes  
of someone you know and seen  
that...something or someone is  
holding them back-inside  
themselves? Have you ever looked in  
there and seen a cataract dimming  
the light and color inside?

That's what I used to see every time I looked into the  
mirror-in my own eyes. So I tried not to look.

You know how weird that is-brushing your teeth...or your  
hair, putting on make-up and lip gloss...and never looking  
into your OWN eyes?

INT. CROSBY AND NAUDIA'S HOME

Panning through the dining room. Close up of several  
pictures displayed on an antique blue credenza above its  
beautiful geometric-shaped Chinese Chippendale fret work.

There's a picture of Penny at about four years old with her  
hair braided back from her head and tipped with white  
beads. She's wearing a blue and white checked handkerchief  
blouse tied at her shoulders and blue jeans belted by a  
stretch belt whose turtle head is biting its own tail. The  
retro look of the picture is earned, not an effect.

Beside the picture of Penny is one of Shelley with her chubby little hands on her knees. Shelley's handkerchief blouse is yellow and white. Her hair is a silky afro of sweet curls that's a little lighter than her perfect, dark skin.

PENNY (V.O.)

There are these adorable pictures  
of us at Mom and Dad's house. What  
I remember the most is Shelley's  
eyes. Big, dark eyes FULL of light.  
FULL of the mysteries of heaven.

I think we're born knowing we come from God. I think the mysterious wisdom I see in Shelley's eyes in that picture... That I saw in Blake's eyes the first time I held her-even before I knew how to swaddle her properly and before I got the bright idea to read her "Lord of the Flies" in the sunlight through our bay window-is their unspoken knowledge of the divine...

Babies come into the world...having come FROM a world. But they can't tell us about it. Because once they've learned our language, they've forgotten their home...

EXT. CROSBY AND NAUDIA'S COTTAGE-LATE AFTERNOON

Penny is wearing a black jersey, tight blue jeans and has draped a stylish leopard print jacket over her shoulders as she sits on the steps in front of her parents' house. They lead up to beadboard exterior framing; a whitewashed outdoor sofa dressed in purple and black chevron pillows and soft pink throw; and rustic stools over the plank floor of her parents' covered wraparound porch.

Penny scrunches the curls of her afro, thinking.

Penny laces her fingers around her right knee and leans back.

The shot pulls back and up from Penny, until we're looking down on her contemplation.

From above Naudia and Angelina can be seen walking around the yard.

As Crosby's Mars Red Mercedes-Benz GLK350 pull onto the pink-gray crushed shell driveway, downy woodpeckers and finches scatter and take flight.

Penny comes to her feet, arms crossed as Crosby slams the SUV's door.

From above, Naudia can be seen standing at alert. Naudia looks like she would take flight, too, if she could.

NAUDIA

(extending her hand to  
Angelina)

Come on, baby! Let's go get some  
hot cocoa!

ANGELINA

(running over, curls  
bouncing)

I wanna apple, Gramma! Angie wanna  
apple!

NAUDIA

Okay, baby...

ANGELINA

Don't cut it! Don't-don't cut my  
apple! Don't cut my apple, Gramma!

NAUDIA

(smiling as Angelina grabs  
her hand)

Okay, baby. Grammee won't cut it.

ANGELINA

(pulling Naudia's hand)

Let's walk, Gramma! You walk!

NAUDIA

(in love)

Alright, baby. Let's go.

DISSOLVE/CUT TO:

## MONTAGE-VARIOUS

## A) INT. PENNY'S BEDROOM-NIGHT

[FLASHBACK]

Penny is a baby (between one and two years old), standing up in her crib. An orangey nightlight is on to her left as BABY PENNY leans over her crib, baby talking to the puddle of baby blanket, baby toys and bottle on the floor.

BABY PENNY bounces around on her toes as she sees YOUNG CROSBY crawling into her room with a big grin on his face.

His gold crucifix pendant glitters from his neck.

## B) EXT. PENNY'S FRONT YARD-AFTERNOON

[FLASHBACK]

Penny is seven or eight years old. As she walks up to the house, YOUNG CROSBY stands up from the porch steps, smiling. There's a jar in his hand.

Laughing, he listens to the rapid-fire exposition pouring out of YOUNG PENNY.

YOUNG CROSBY gets down on his knees in the front yard and shows YOUNG PENNY the jar. His gold crucifix pendant glitters from his neck.

YOUNG CROSBY points out a grasshopper leaping from the grass to the sidewalk.

YOUNG PENNY claps her hands together as grinning YOUNG CROSBY lifts the cap of the glass jar and then twists it back on.

## C) EXT. PENNY'S FRONT PORCH-EVENING

[FLASHBACK]

Penny is between twelve and fourteen years old. TEENAGE PENNY and YOUNG CROSBY are sitting on the porch steps in a similar contemplative pose. TEENAGE PENNY

(MORE)

C) EXT. PENNY'S FRONT PORCH-EVENING [FLASHBACK] (CONT'D)  
is wearing shorts and a tank top.  
YOUNG CROSBY is wearing a dark blue  
patrolman uniform. His cap is on  
his knee.

There is a sense that something bad has happened.

END OF MONTAGE

PENNY (V.O.)

Crosby-Dad-was Jesus for me growing  
up. Before Jesus became God to me,  
Dad fulfilled His role. He anchored  
me to the idea of God, even when  
present darkness tried again and  
again to yank me away.

I respected Dad for so many reasons-right and wrong. My  
respect kept me from judging him for things I could (and  
some would say SHOULD) have...

Dad's a Vietnam veteran. But he started off a poor kid on  
the wrong side of government-law. Cops.

He's brilliant. I'd say that about him. He reads anything  
he can get his hands on. He can draw.

A tough façade drapes over and almost hides a startlingly  
sensitive soul. Sadness. Pain. Regret.

He's Catholic. He was going to be a priest... But at some  
point... I sense he came to the point where he believed  
that God exists, but that He can't really be bothered...

This world-hard times and evil-can do that to you. I  
probably should say, DOES that to you.

I remember having a Flintstone bottle, the guy who wore the  
orange rag with the black dots. All I can remember from  
that show is Bam-Bam and Barney Rubble, who had the black  
dots for eyes (the only one on the show with eyes like that  
for whatever reason). I remember it being dark and my being  
alone, but not afraid. Maybe I remember night and day, but  
I remember being in that corner where the crib faced the  
door to the room along the wall. I think I remember my dad  
getting on the floor and crawling up to the crib, but I'm

not sure. I remember when I still sat in a high chair and my dad used to make me little kid foods-spaghettios with chopped hotdogs in it and TV dinners.

That was a time when Dad listened. He had patience for me then.

I've always liked the music that Dad liked. I don't know if it struck me then or if it's just something that I realize now... But dad always liked that sad, Rhythm and blues music ...

He listened to Marvin Gaye and he listened to LTD. But he has an un-opened Madonna album and some Bruce Springsteen (no, it was Rick Springfield)... Well, maybe I opened it without his knowing; but by then he didn't care about albums anymore anyway, which I never could quite understand-how he just 'forgot' all about them.

It was strange when Dad got into Bobby Brown and Guy, because we (Shelley and I) were really into that at the time.

Books, well, there was no shortage of books in my family. I don't know why they had that S.E.X. book in plain view of children who knew to be curious about the word they heard their parents spelling around them all the time. The word was in the title.

I saw lots of books in my parents' house-lots as far as I was concerned. And I read The Color Purple. And I read The Shining. And that's when I got into Stephen King books...and books that had lots of sex in them too.

My mom didn't really read romances like I do-did, but she read enough for me to sink my teeth into and get hooked.

Well, then we stole the porn videotape from Uncle Cliff's house. I think I felt more exhilarated than guilty about that entire business, but there was some guilt. And I felt some sickness in my stomach and in my private parts when I watched the graphic black bodies twisting and sucking and moving around on the videos-a similar sickness to what I felt when I eventually got caught watching them and lectured by my DAD-but I mostly felt a tingling and wetness and unsure pleasure when I watched these things.

Porn was not the thing for me-not the kind that you watch anyway. I'm a reader...

I don't mind directness, but there is something to what is not said and what is not seen.

Stealing Uncle Cliff's video was not the end of stealing for me. No.

Quinn and Shelley know my history of stealing really started at a local grocery store. A super store. A beautiful store.

I would take the books from the shelves and stuff them into my layered clothing-not many at first and then as much as I could carry-and shuffle to the bathroom where I would layer the bricks of reading material against my belly like a suicide bomber.

Any guilt I felt, if I felt any, was almost completely obliterated by the high of stealing added to the pleasure of reading. I think what made me the most sick about this period of my life was the fear.

And what was going on at school-where I would read some of this stolen treasure in locked restroom stalls.

I was a high honor student when Dad first got out of the military. When we first moved to this state...

I stayed smart after we moved, but my grades slipped. I went from high honors and accolades to nothing and nothing. It was a hard adjustment in every way.

I wore intricate braids with beads. This was before Alicia Keys, and my uniqueness wasn't popular.

No, the black kids hated everything about me-my proper speaking, my good grades, my aspirations, my association with whites, everything.

So I was secretive, and I found no pleasure anymore in the things that I had. Instead, I read.

But pleasure was tempered with violence. Before my parents decided that it was a good thing that I was reading, they decided to beat me for reading such provocative material.

My mother will never forgive herself. She will always wonder if she was a good mother to me. But she was. Of this fact, there can be no question.

I was ready for Quinn. Let's just put it that way.

By then I'd been hardened by this fallen world, and I called myself strong. Most of that was my blindness. Very little of it was lying to myself.

Today I write and am like, Whoa! Sooooo much TRUTH right... in FRONT...of me! Even if truth doesn't make readers think it's any good...truth is what makes writing worth anything. The heart of truth is what gives anything you have value.

So I wrote Dad a letter asking him about Shelley. He invited me over to talk about it, and we sat down on the porch...

EXT. CROSBY AND NAUDIA'S COTTAGE-LATE AFTERNOON

Having met Crosby as he engages the door locks with a click, Penny walks away from the SUV with her dad. Crosby and Penny head toward the steps in front of her parents' house. They lead up to beadboard exterior framing; a whitewashed outdoor sofa dressed in purple and black chevron pillows and soft pink throw; and rustic stools over the plank floor of her parents' covered wraparound porch.

Penny sits down. Before he joins her, Crosby ruffles Penny's hair like a puppy's head.

Penny glances up at him with wide, uncertain eyes. He smiles, not showing teeth and sits down.

Crosby wraps his arms around his knees. Penny leans her chin on hers and stares down at Crosby's hiking boots.

Penny and Crosby stare out at nothing.

CROSBY

I would have picked up the kids for dinner...



PENNY

(shrugging)

Mom said she wanted to... But, um,  
Dad? Did you get my letter?

CROSBY

Yeah... What did you want me to  
say?

Crosby looks at Penny sharply. Penny keeps her chin on her knees and her eyes on Crosby's boots. Her voice is low and lifeless as she answers Crosby's passion.

PENNY

Dad, Shelley's gone. What are we  
doing wrong?

CROSBY

(gesturing eloquently with  
his hands)

I love my daughters, both of you.

I've parented you the best I can.

Crosby pauses, frowning fiercely.

CROSBY

I've loved you. I've disciplined  
you. As you've gotten older...I've  
tried to tell you the truth...

Crosby tries to shrug off some deep, emotional conflict. Eventually he touches his chest, squinting even harder. His hand arcing up with the emotional tension inside his heart.

CROSBY

But I'm just a man, Penny. I've got  
my own damned demons!

I can't always outrun them...but I try! I don't know what's  
going on with your sister. I don't think she wants to SEE  
me right now!

I don't know what I can DO about that, except PRAY!

Your sister doesn't LIKE me right now. If you wanted to  
know about Shelley, you should have asked your MOM! She's  
been CALLING her.

Taking a breath and shaking his head disgustedly.

CROSBY

My parents-Momma and Daddy-were  
some damn drunks! They were  
negligent!

Crosby gestures emphatically with his right hand along his  
own thigh as he looks back at the past.

CROSBY

They did the best they could...  
They taught us...the best they  
could! But they didn't teach us  
basic HYGIENE, Pen! We learned that  
stuff in the military!

So...what I'm saying to you... The only thing I know is  
that I'll DIE believing Jesus is the Son of God!

I can't answer your questions.

Penny flicks tears out of the corners of her eyes, trying  
to make herself as small as she can. Crosby ruffles her  
hair again.

CROSBY

(sounding regretful)

I love you, Baby Girl. You're so  
much like me... But you've changed.  
I see the differences. And they're  
good. It's not good to fly off the  
handle or to be...MAD all the  
time...

The standoff between me and your sister...That might not  
change. She may NEVER be satisfied with me... I HOPE she  
comes HOME...

Michelle and your mom have a very special connection.

Cosby shrugs.

CROSBY

She might not.

Penny leans her forehead on her right fist with her elbow just above her right knee. She looks at Crosby peripherally.

PENNY

Do you believe in the Holy Ghost?

CROSBY

I don't believe in...going to church to pay my debt to men... I don't believe in religious extremism. I don't think churches can tell a woman what to do with her body. I don't believe God is only MOVED when I quote-unquote SEW SEED...

PENNY

(frowning, gesturing with her fingers)

No, I'm talking about...the Holy Spirit...

Crosby stares at Penny with very little comprehension on his face. Crosby is perplexed.

So is Penny.

PENNY

The third person of our triune God...

Crosby rolls his eyes.

PENNY

Well, I don't know what you believe about the Holy Spirit, but don't be deceived. The Holy Spirit IS God. Just like Jesus IS God. And the Father IS God.

CROSBY

So now God is three People?

PENNY

God has always been Father, Son,  
and Holy Spirit... but lots of  
people...don't know that the Holy  
Ghost, Holy Spirit...is a Person of  
the Trinity...

CROSBY

Is this in the Bible?

A muscle jumps in Penny's face. She opens and closes her  
mouth, shrugging.

PENNY

Well, the Bible says in Genesis  
that God decided to make us in  
THEIR image... Then God said, "Let  
us make mankind in our image, in  
our likeness..."

CROSBY

So there's three gods called God?

PENNY

(shaking her head wearily)

No. There's One... Like, think of  
it this way... The Bible says when  
you and Mom got married...you  
became one flesh. That you united  
into one....

Penny holds up two fingers and then crosses them in the  
air.

PENNY

Still you and Mom, but you're  
one... Still two fingers...

Penny uncrosses her fingers.

CROSBY

And?

PENNY

And... You know what? I've always looked to you. And I'll always respect you... But I guess I have to get it... You're NOT gonna be able to tell me everything I need to know, not even about God.

CROSBY

Of course not!

Crosby gestures to his chest. He's shaking his head and frowning.

CROSBY

Did I make you think that?

Penny sits up and rolls her lips together. Penny crosses her arms.

PENNY

No... I just thought that...all on my own. I idolized you. I've always idolized you.

CROSBY

(dry)

I thought that was supposed to be a GOOD thing-for a daughter to look up to her father...

PENNY

Yeah...

Penny stops staring at nothing and glances over at Crosby.

PENNY

But that's the thing... We forget... We forget...what's...the root...and what's...the fruit...

Crosby's expression is an almost audible question.

PENNY

I looked to you to find God... I should have been looking to God...to understand what my relationship should be like with you. WHY my relationship should be a certain way...

CROSBY

Well how are you supposed to know that?

Penny jerks her head toward Crosby, like she's shocked. And then she begins to smile and shake her head. She ruffles her own hair.

PENNY

You know, Dad, it's hard... I guess I'm always thinking I'M...only gonna learn things from YOU...

CROSBY

I sense you editing and picking your words carefully... Is this it then?

PENNY

Is this what, Dad?

CROSBY

Is this the moment you realize Dad's Santa and God is NOT your dad?

Crosby sounds sad and old. Penny looks away.

PENNY

I don't know... I just wonder...is it right...to tell Shelley she oughta straighten up...when..?

Penny looks Crosby in the eye.

PENNY

Dad, God saved me from...a  
crazy...terrible...just, WICKED  
life... And I wasn't even ready to  
turn away from some of things I  
needed to turn away from-so I could  
have...

Penny lifts her shoulders, trying to use her hands to show  
something words can't express.

PENNY

...everything He means me to have.  
Everything He made me for... He's  
doing GOD-SIZED things through me  
and in my life, Dad! I didn't get  
my life straight and in order like  
the What Would Jesus Do stickers,  
Dad.

Penny frowns, shaking her head.

PENNY

It was ugly, Dad. I was ugly. What  
I did...

Penny shakes her head again.

CROSBY

Some things are wrong, Pen. They're  
not good for you.

PENNY

A lot of things are not good, Dad.  
Drinking...

Penny's eyes slide away as she folds her hands between her  
knees. Her tone is still emphatic.

PENNY

But, Dad, Jesus is the Alpha and  
Omega... He's the beginning and  
end... He's the beginning of  
freedom and the end of addiction.  
He's the beginning of dominion,  
Dad-in CHRIST!

Penny's nearly bouncing on the porch step.

PENNY

He's the end of this world's  
dominion over us.

CROSBY

So you want me to be politically  
correct with your sister?

Crosby's tone hides something sly in its dryness, and  
Penny's lips flatten.

PENNY

We're gonna all say what we're  
gonna say.... And we're gonna  
believe what we're gonna believe.  
All I know is that God didn't get  
through to me by reminding me day  
in and day out how out of line I  
was in His eyes...

CROSBY

What are you saying? What are you  
saying that your sister needs?

PENNY

Hope...She has to know that there's  
hope... Cause she's deep in with  
her lifestyle... And we're all deep  
in our own lifestyles... But  
nothing can keep us from the love  
of God, Dad. We couldn't EARN His  
love, and we're never outside of  
His love!

CROSBY

(frustrated)

But how can you SAY that, Penny? I  
know you know your Bible! I know  
you're smart! You're smarter than  
I'll EVER be... What? You want me  
to tell Shelley her hair looks  
nice? You want me to tell her she's  
smart? That's EASY encouragement!  
BIBLICAL encouragement is: Shelley,

(MORE)



CROSBY (CONT'D)

you are rebellious toward God. You have a choice, though. You can bow down to God's leadership. You can have the life you were meant to have and use your pretty face and your intelligence to do what HE made you to do!

Penny shakes her head with her eyes closed.

CROSBY

the truth is the truth! Wrong is wrong! I'm not doing any favors to anyone by Mollycoddling...

PENNY

(holding up one finger)

But Dad... We need to edify folks. We need to preach the Gospel...which is not hell! It's grace and mercy... It's love and eternal life that was sent for us BEFORE we believed!

CROSBY

And HELL is for those who don't want that! Who don't BELIEVE that! That's part of it, too, Pen!

PENNY

Right. But, Dad, hell is NOT for people who believe homosexuality is okay. It's not for liars. It's not for thieves or even murderers- UNLESS they don't believe in the HOPE of JESUS.

Remember...we're ALL Barabbus-the sinner who was saved from judgment...while Jesus, who NEVER did anything wrong...went to the Cross, laid down His life, poured out His soul, and had His body BROKEN...for all who will BELIEVE that that sacrifice MEANS what it MEANS.

CROSBY

Okay. What are you saying? What..?

PENNY

(interrupting)

I'm SAYING we need to stop worrying that if we love Shelley-fully-that we'll be in tacit agreement about everything she believes. We don't have to be afraid that ANYTHING can stop God from breaking into her heart. Because...God can do ANYTHING!

I think Jesus loves her RIGHT NOW. I KNOW He does. We're the ones who are shaky... And I don't want us to be a foggy reflection of Jesus for her so she thinks our...shortcomings...

CROSBY

(under his breath)

OUR shortcomings...

PENNY

...mean she can't know Jesus and have heaven!

CROSBY

You ARE a writer...

Penny shakes her head, lips pressing flat. Penny doesn't know how to take Crosby's words. Crosby smiles a little, but Penny's expression reflects the shadows in his eyes.

Penny is anxious about arguing with her dad.

CROSBY

I guess...I'm a simple man. And I don't know what you mean...by love her FULLY? Do you know what's in my heart? How am I not doing that?

PENNY

The most important thing is to talk to Michelle, Dad. So SHE knows what's in your heart.

CROSBY

I guess you don't understand, Pen.  
She's not TALKING to me.

PENNY

Okay... Well, you might find this  
too artistic, too...

CROSBY

I never said you were too artistic.  
I said you're a writer...

PENNY

Okay... So, I guess that means I'm  
over-the-top in how I talk. Can't  
help that. But I can tell you that  
my sister doesn't think I love her  
with my eyes. She says there's  
distance in my eyes when I look at  
her. We don't let EVERYTHING people  
do make us distant. We pick and  
choose what we're too good to  
touch. I get it. I GET that! But at  
the end of the day, Don't we want  
to be touched...without distance?  
Don't we want acceptance and love?

CROSBY

What does that MEAN? If she gets  
married to another woman do I have  
to attend? Do I have to SUPPORT  
that? Because...

PENNY

She came to my baptism. And she  
hates church. She doesn't believe  
in Jesus yet. Or, she doesn't KNOW  
if she believes... But she came!

CROSBY

Because it doesn't MEAN anything to  
her! She thinks it's all a joke,  
and she's just humoring you!

Penny twists her lips, shaking her head.

PENNY

Okay. Okay. What if she is? Isn't that loving?

CROSBY

It's mockery.

PENNY

Okay... See...

CROSBY

And it would be a mockery if I pretended to support and love everything she's doing.

PENNY

You do it with me.

CROSBY

(shocked)

What?

PENNY

You do it with me! I don't do everything right, but you love me! I've never felt distance from you or seen that in your eyes!

And I think it's twisted logic to say that Shelley's support was mockery. It meant something to me. Yeah maybe it meant nothing to her, but it meant something to me...

CROSBY

Twisted logic?

PENNY

Look, people can believe stuff that is...totally HURTFUL...and still love us. They might not be TRYING to hurt us or offend us... I had a lady say that my kids were sick because of "unconfessed sin" on my part one time...

CROSBY

Damn religious fanatic!

PENNY

But, Dad... I could almost  
physically FEEL how much she loved  
me and my family as she prayed for  
us...

You're not perfect. Shelley's not perfect. I'm not perfect.  
That lady was not perfect.

CROSBY

But..."UNCONFESSED SIN"?

PENNY

I'll say this, we all have  
conscientious objections. But we  
don't have to have distance in our  
eyes... We have to PRAY for God's  
grace. And He'll hear our prayers,  
because it's HIS will for us to  
have a change of heart and believe  
in Jesus. It's HIS will for us to  
experience His love.

Crosby holds up both hands in surrender near his shoulders.

CROSBY

Look, both of you-both of my  
daughters-have these ideas of who I  
should be... How I should be...

Penny opens her mouth to object.

CROSBY

Wait a minute now... I've listened  
to you lecture me, and I'm your  
father... Let me get a word in  
edgewise here.

Penny takes a long sip of breath and holds it.

CROSBY

Thank you... Now, Pen, I might not  
ever be that man. But I trust God.  
And after that, I love you-Mom.  
Michelle. You.

Crosby gently brushes the subtle cleft in Penny's chin with  
his thumb.

CROSBY

I'm really proud of you. I'm proud  
of my family. And...You've given me  
a lot to think about.

I do think you should consider whether this culture is  
changing you... Or, are you gonna shine your light in this  
present darkness? Because doing what's right doesn't always  
feel good.

Penny looks like she wants to say something, but she holds  
her peace.

CROSBY

I know I won't deny The Christ is  
the Son of God... I also won't let  
you...or anyone-not even your mom-  
tell me I don't love the heritage  
the Holy Father entrusted me with  
when He sent you and your sister.

Crosby looks away first as they hear the sound of tires  
crunching on the crushed-shell driveway.

EXT. CITY STREET-DAY

Penny is walking down the street (looking thoughtful) in a  
coat or sweater. As she reaches for the handle of a glass  
storefront door of a coffee shop, she hears a voice.

JESUS

Penny.

Smiling distractedly, Penny looks around like she expects  
to see someone she knows. Penny sees a young man (about  
thirty years old) wearing a tee shirt and jeans.

Penny's disconcerted.

## COFFEE COUPLE

Excuse us.

Penny's lashes flutter. A smile touches her lips and melts as she forces her feet away from the entryway.

The young man who had been standing diagonal from her in the opposing lane of pedestrian traffic, just watching her, is now in Penny's lane.

A few feet away, he seems to be waiting.

Blinking away tears, Penny starts to walk.

But Jesus doesn't move. Instead, He lifts His hands toward Penny's face. Penny opens her mouth but says nothing. Jesus uses his thumbs to wipe the tears from the corners of Penny's eyes.

Penny's eyes watch Jesus like she knows Him and doesn't. Like she's afraid and sure He's no threat.

## PENNY (V.O.)

There were souls within souls  
inside his brown eyes. I saw them  
there. I saw Him like I can  
sometimes see things...

I see things sometimes... I don't know if anyone else sees what I see sometimes... I don't know if I really SEE-with my EYES.

Sometimes the things I see are spiritual things that only the Spirit of God allows me to see.

I had a feeling of falling as I turned and saw those eyes...

But it started even before that-when He said my name. His voice echoed inside me, and I heard many things-love and knowledge and other things that are hard to describe... Weight. Authority. Power.

And I turned and saw...a dissonant image-except for the souls within souls in His eyes.

I knew, and I doubted who He was at the same time. I guess that's the flesh...fighting with the spirit-what it feels

like.

But even my flesh knew better, and when He turned to walk with me... The synchronicity of our movement raised goose bumps on my flesh like the high, final note of "Climb Every Mountain."

He walked with me, until I changed my mind. I started off wondering what He wanted. From me... To tell me... But the sense grew and grew inside of me till I felt tears again...

He had come to help me. In answer to my prayers-spoken and unspoken.

About the time I realized that, I realized I was probably in a vision or dreaming.

EXT. PATH-DAY [ANIMATED]

As they walk, the sidewalk becomes a dirt path. Lamp posts become trees. Grass grows in over the narrow path, bordered by tall grass that's gone to seed.

Jesus lets his hands brush through the wild heads of the fuzzy tops.

The trees develop apples.

Penny sees some apples on the ground, but none of the apples are bruised or rotten-looking.

Ladders appear. They are leaning against the trees. There are apple picking baskets of all sizes and shapes tucked inside each other and dotting the orchard.

Out of the corner of her eye, Penny realizes that while Jesus is still wearing jeans and a tee shirt; He is obviously glowing. There's a shepherd staff in his hand with a crook at the head. It looks ancient.

Jesus speaks as if He and Penny have been talking, picking up in the middle of an idea.



JESUS

I am telling you what I saw when I was with my Father.

PENNY

But...is there...? Is there something...ESPECIALLY important...that you said...that we should know? A nugget?

JESUS

I will not judge those who hear me but don't obey me, for I have come to save the world and not to judge it. But all who reject me and my message will be judged on the day of judgment by the truth I have spoken. I don't speak on my own authority. The Father who sent me has commanded me what to say and how to say it. And I know his commands lead to eternal life; so I say whatever the Father tells me to say.

Penny combs her right hand through her hair.

PENNY (V.O.)

I realized right then something else—that my hair was straight. I hadn't straightened it in many months. The last time I'd had it straight enough to run my fingers through it like this was years ago. The straight hair was confirmation I was dreaming.

I stared into the living eternity in Jesus' eyes and realized something else.

I don't know how long it took me to understand it—how it worked...but Jesus was waiting for me.

And He would answer my questions with Scripture.

Jesus turns, using the shepherd's staff to hike. He extends His hand to Penny.

They hike in silence. The narrow path continues with apple trees on either side.

PENNY(V.O.)

The trees-apple trees-make sense to  
me. They make me smile in a way...  
Because God knows.

I've been reading books about apples to Jacob and Angelina.

Penny looks down and there is an apple picking basket hooked onto her bent left arm. There are apples in it-small, perfect, red apples.

PENNY (V.O.)

But there are apples of all kinds  
in these trees. And the fruit in my  
basket is smallish-like the fruit  
on the ground.

I've been considering these trees-lush, supernatural trees... I even smell something like apple pie in the air...

The biggest apples are at the top.

I'd need a ladder to get to those.

The Holy Spirit helps me to understand, and suddenly I know something else.

Even the things I'm seeing in this place-this waking dream-speak to me.

The narrow path we are to walk is as shepherds with shepherd staffs, working for His harvest.

I haven't seen anyone except Jesus... Well, I'm not sure whether I have or not... The more I think about it, I think I have seen other people here. But...the presence of Jesus makes them shadows of shadows in comparison.

Still, I know that I know, We're supposed to pull everyone we meet onto the narrow path with us.

I'm pretty sure the fallen fruit is edible... And the low-hanging fruit represent grace and material prosperity. But none of that stuff's the goal.

That's what the ladders are for; like Jacob's ladder... It ascends to heaven...and even better fruit. None of the fruit is BAD, you understand?

Because every gift of God is grace and all goodness comes from Him.

But as we mature in our faith, growing in obedience to the promptings of the Holy Spirit, we ascend the ladder; and the fruits we find are larger and riper.

We are the workers in the orchard. We walk the paths and minister God to all we meet. And, in His time, we will ascend the ladder.

As we grow in obedience, we become like the trees that worship Him constantly with their branches, which reach heavenward. And their fruit is the product of the Holy Spirit renewing and remolding our own spirits.

A-n-d the fruit of grace, including the ability to obey, becomes larger and sweeter as His favor increases upon us.

I think all this in an instant.

Jesus is waiting.

EXT. CROSBY AND NAUDIA'S NEIGHBORHOOD-AFTERNOON

In sync, Jesus and Penny turn to continue their walk. They can be seen from behind.

In front of Jesus and Penny is a sidewalk lined with cottages, manicured lawns, windmills, and rock gardens.

PENNY (V.O.)

We're on the sidewalk I used to  
race my bike up and down seven days  
a week. My Strawberry Shortcake  
Bike with the streamers on the  
handlebars. The bike I got at my  
birthday party-back when you had to  
invite even the outcasts to your  
party... Back when our hearts were  
soft enough to dig up some love for  
those outcasts once you were forced

(MORE)

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

to invite them and they were forced  
to give you a gift.

I don't remember any parents lingering at that party...

I do remember my "crush," red-headed "T.J." riding by my house on a scooter after the party was over-smiling and waving...

We moved not long after that... I used to wonder what would have happened and how I would have turned out if we hadn't moved.

I used to think I'd have been better. Maybe I thought I would have married T.J.. But I can look back and see... As idyllic as times were then, I'd already started pretending. I'd already decided I had to be class clown and dance to entertain and to be liked by people...

Penny glances at Jesus. His shepherd's staff is gone, and His hands are in his jean pockets. He's looking at his feet.

PENNY

Can I ask..? Why... BECAUSE? Why  
BECAUSE He had done no violence..?

Jesus answers without moving his lips. The sense that Penny is dreaming becomes more concrete as the world becomes more abstract.

Jesus' answers are a voice-over narration to various visuals.

A pile of standing stones become temple guards and Peter the Apostle. They turn to regard a two stacked stones, which become Jesus facing an arrangement of stones and garden bulbs, succulent plants and groundcover arranged beneath a wooden trellis.

Penny looks across the street where another garden vignette has become Jesus surrounded by a crowd of men with swords and clubs.

He speaks to another man who lowers his sword.

JESUS (V.O.)

Those who use the sword will die by the sword. Don't you realize that I could ask my Father for thousands of angels to protect us, and he would send them instantly?

The vignette becomes pebbles and plants again. Jesus' voice comes again, and Penny jerks her head back to the trellis scene.

JESUS (V.O.)

You have said it. And in the future you will see the Son of Man seated in the place of power at God's right hand and coming on the clouds of heaven.

For a moment Penny stares open-mouthed at Jesus beside her. He turns to look at her.

PENNY (V.O.)

It's hard to call the endless depth of his eyes brown...or even EYES at this point.

I can...FEEL the reason we are to think of Jesus as our friend now...

But all I can think is, This...is...GOD.

PENNY

So...BECAUSE...He-YOU-didn't call upon the angels...You did no violence..? And because You answered truthfully-that You were-ARE-the Son of God...when You could have saved Yourself...with a lie or, with the force of your angel army..?

Jesus nods once. Gentle affection mixes with authority in a way that could be confused with distance on His face.

Jesus speaks out loud this time.

JESUS

He was assigned a grave with the wicked, and with the rich in his death, though he had done no violence, nor was any deceit in his mouth.

Penny's eyes abruptly fill with tears, and she looks like a little girl.

PENNY

But what can I say to my sister?

INT. COFFEE SHOP BOOTH-EVENING

Penny startles awake from where she's fallen asleep on her crossed arms. Her cell phone is buzzing around the table near a cold cup of coffee.

Snatching it, Penny checks to see who's calling. As she answers it, she looks around frantically.

PENNY

Mom?

NAUDIA

Well... You know I already had the baby...

PENNY

Angelina! Mom! What...?

NAUDIA

They called when you were more than thirty minutes late...

Penny scoots to the edge of the booth, accidentally sending her purse onto the ground. As she reaches for it wildly, her keys follow her down.

PENNY

Oh, Lord Jesus!

NAUDIA  
Actually Quinn called...

PENNY  
(slapping a hand on the table  
and then pressing it to her  
forehead)  
Damn it!

NAUDIA  
Pen, DAD went to get 'em! It's  
okay!

PENNY  
Quinn...

NAUDIA  
Well, they called him first, and he  
called us after he couldn't get a  
hold of you...

PENNY  
Mom, I gotta call him. Can I call  
you back? You got the kids?

NAUDIA  
We HAVE them. Everything's FINE.  
You call Quinn, baby.

PENNY  
(hanging up summarily)  
Okay.

When Penny checks her recent calls, she sees she's missed  
about fifteen.

A barista passing by hands Penny her keys, which she's left  
in the aisle.

BARISTA  
Are these yours?

PENNY  
Oh my goodness! Thank you SO much!  
I...

BARISTA

(smiling a little)

No problem... Is this yours, too?

Barista hands Penny a small black Bible with a red ribbon placeholder. It says, New Testament and Psalms in gold writing.

Automatically, Penny takes it. Before she can answer, the Barista walks away.

With an expression of dread mixed with excitement, Penny turns flips through the Bible.

PENNY (V.O.)

None of the pages were marked. It was brand new. Pristine...till I got to the third Chapter of John. Verses twelve through nineteen were highlighted.

I kept the red ribbon in its place and checked the rest of the book. The Psalms came after Revelation in the little black Bible.

No highlighting or markings appeared anywhere else.

Penny reads the highlighted words out loud, tears streaming down her face. The words we hear are actually a narrative voice-over that doesn't match the silent movement of Penny's lips.

PENNY (V.O.)

I HAVE SPOKEN TO YOU OF EARTHLY THINGS  
AND YOU DO NOT BELIEVE; HOW THEN WILL  
YOU BELIEVE IF I SPEAK OF HEAVENLY  
THINGS? NO ONE HAS EVER GONE INTO  
HEAVEN EXCEPT THE ONE WHO CAME FROM  
HEAVEN-THE SON OF MAN. JUST AS MOSES  
LIFTED UP THE SNAKE IN THE WILDERNESS,  
SO THE SON OF MAN MUST BE LIFTED UP,  
THAT EVERYONE WHO BELIEVES MAY HAVE  
ETERNAL LIFE IN HIM. FOR GOD SO LOVED  
THE WORLD THAT HE GAVE HIS ONE AND ONLY  
SON, THAT WHOEVER BELIEVES IN HIM SHALL  
NOT PERISH BUT HAVE ETERNAL LIFE. FOR



GOD DID NOT SEND HIS SON INTO THE WORLD  
TO CONDEMN THE WORLD, BUT TO SAVE THE  
WORLD THROUGH HIM. WHOEVER BELIEVES IN  
HIM IS NOT CONDEMNED, BUT WHOEVER DOES  
NOT BELIEVE STANDS CONDEMNED ALREADY  
BECAUSE THEY HAVE NOT BELIEVED IN THE  
NAME OF GOD'S ONE AND ONLY SON. THIS IS  
THE VERDICT: LIGHT HAS COME INTO THE  
WORLD, BUT PEOPLE LOVED DARKNESS  
INSTEAD OF LIGHT BECAUSE THEIR DEEDS  
WERE EVIL.

Penny looks up [into the camera],  
shutting the book. Lights out.

The End.