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Redemption's Sweet Song

A THESIS
SUBMITTED TO THE GRADUATE FACULTY
In partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of
MASTER OF ARTS IN ENGLISH

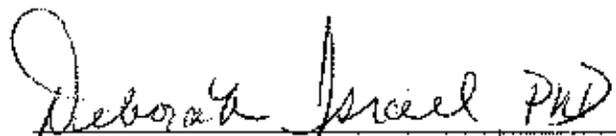
By
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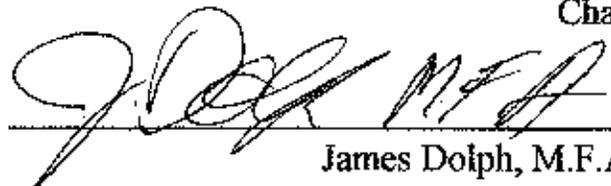
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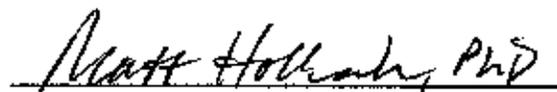


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Chair



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Redemption's Sweet Song A Screenplay

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LOVE MADE THIS POSSIBLE!

Special thanks to the two most important men in my life, Joshua Owen Sneed, a little boy that believes I am the greatest person in the world and Hillard G. Berry, the man that taught me that all it takes is a little love to make it through the toughest battles.

I cannot send out my thanks without mentioning the professors who made a profound impact on my graduate school career, especially James Dolph, M.F.A, Dr. Deborah Israel, Dr. Matt Hollrah and Dr. Amy Carrell.

I would be remiss if I didn't pay homage to those professors from Adams State College who encouraged me to pursue a Masters in English. Thank you to Dr. David MacWilliams, Dr. John Taylor, and Dr. Carol Guerrero-Murphy.

Ultimately, I cannot forget the trio that encouraged me when no one else did...God, my mother, Ruth Ann Sneed, and my grandmother, Petronella Ruby Sneed.

OPENING CREDITS ROLL

Instrumental version of *Oh Happy Day* plays in the background.

A leggy blond dressed in a tank and sweat pants, strolls to a front door. On the other side of the door, a bi-racial man stands with roses in hand, a gold band gleaming in the sunlight. The door opens, the man steps through the door, but the woman starts shouting, waving her arms. The man throws the roses down, turns around, walking back to a silver car. The door slams.

The blond lady returns to her kitchen table, several pictures laying across the table. She picks up a manila envelope, furiously stuffing picture after picture in the envelope. She picks up a black marker writing IMPORTANT on the front. She seals the envelope. She picks up her keys off the table, walks outside and opens her cherry red car door, tossing the envelope in the backseat. She locks the door, covers her forehead with her hand, looks at the steeple of a church afar off.

FADE IN:

EXT. HUGE ROCK AND STONE BUILDING- DAY

PHILENA (Lena) SHILOH, 22, petite, African American woman, long black hair, red fitted skirt suit, purse, Bible in hand stumbles out of a 90's model black Mustang and walks hurriedly to the front door of the church building.

PANORAMIC VIEW OF PARKING LOT BEHIND PHILENA

Philena meets a couple opening the door as she walks inside.

Inside the building stands SILAS POINTER, 35, tall African American man standing next to BRENDA WASHINGTON, mid 30's, average African American woman.

Silas opens the door.

SILAS

Hey there, Sister Shiloh. I see you running late after last night.

Silas laughs heartily.

Philena walks through the door, grabbing Silas' hand.

Brenda shoots Philena a dark glance, raising her eyebrow.

BRENDA

Lena, girl, I ain't mad at you for last night. It was fun. But today is the Lord's Day...

SILAS

We should rejoice and be glad in it. Amen, baby, amen.

PHILENA

Yes, I had fun. But I'm tired, and I hate being late so, I'll talk to y'all later.

Philena lets go of Silas' hand, quickly shaking Brenda's.

CUT TO:

INT. AUDITORIUM IN CHURCH- DAY

Philena walks to a pew, hand clutching Bible quietly sitting two rows in front of her boyfriend, DARREL JAMES, mid- 30's stocky, bi-racial African American man.

The camera pans to the audience. At the pulpit is a large man, MACK WORLEY, late 40's singing.

MACK

"...Everybody will be happy over there"

The CONGREGATION, a sea of black faces, garbed in general Sunday morning attire, sing.

CONGREGATION

Every..body will be happy, will be happy, over there. We will shout and sing His praise, Everybody will be happy over there.

Philena picks up a song book, flipping through the book, nervously. Twitching in her seat, Philena tugs at her skirt.

Darrel coughs loudly, raising his song book, covering his mouth.

Philena turns around, smiling.

Darrel begins moving his lips.

DARREL

You were sooooo good last night baby.

Philena smiles, bowing her head slightly.

PHILENA

Thank you. You were too.

Philena quickly turns around.

The congregation stops singing. Mack walks to the podium, opening the Bible.

The camera pans to the back of the auditorium where Silas is standing with another African American male, REV. JOSIAH TURNER, mid 40's, tall, dark complexion.

Rev. Josiah Turner puts his hand on Silas' shoulder, smiling.

REV. JOSIAH TURNER
Hey Brother Pointer.

Silas shakes Rev. Josiah's hand.

SILAS
Rev. Turner, How do you do?

Silas leans on the back wall.

Two beautiful African American women pass by Rev. Josiah and Silas, nodding politely.

REV. JOSIAH TURNER
(laughing slightly)
Better now. God is good, yes lord
he is.

SILAS
Man, you got one the finest women
in this church at home every night.
Ain't no need at you looking
anymore.

The camera pans to those two ladies now seated on the pews.

One lady, JANET JAMES, early 30's, short hair, tall and curvaceous sits next to Darrel.

The other lady, RACHEL SMITH, mid 20's, sits next to Philena.

The camera comes back to Silas and Rev. Josiah.

REV. JOSIAH TURNER
(whispering)
You right, I got a fine one at the
house, but man, I'd love to hit
that piece of ass right there.

Rev. Josiah points to Philena Shiloh. Philena is now bowing her head as Mack directs the reading of Matthew 5 (Beatitudes).

MACK O.S.
 Matthew 5, verse 8, Blessed are the
 pure in heart, for they shall...

The camera pans back to Rev. Josiah and Silas.

SILAS
 Philena Shiloh. Wow, Rev. Didn't
 know you liked girls like
 that. You missed the wild stuff
 when you stopped by last night.

Rev. Josiah cocks his head to the side, smirking.

REV. JOSHIAH TURNER
 Don't tell me you hit that last
 night. Was that what I came in on?
 Guess I need to preach about
 fornication and damn y'all to hell
 now.

Rev. Josiah and Silas laugh, loud enough for two rows of
 people to turn around. Rev. Josiah bows his head reverently
 as Mack begins praying.

MACK
 Heavenly Father, hallowed be thy
 name.

Mack's prayer fades into the background noise of babies
 crying and people saying Amen, Yes Lord, Hallelujah.

Silas pokes Rev. Josiah.

SILAS
 Hey, can we go to your office for a
 minute?

REV. JOSHIAH TURNER
 Yeah. I need to get my other Bible
 anyway. Has my notes in it.

Rev. Josiah and Silas walk to the outside corridor.

CUT TO:

INT. LADIES RESTROOM IN CHURCH- SEVERAL MINUTES LATER

Philena is in a stall while Rachel glances in a full length
 mirror.

Rachel walks over and taps on the stall door.

RACHEL

Girl, it don't take that long. C'mon, stop trippin' and tell me what the dillio is.

PHILENA

Just wait a minute, I want to be sure. You know this will change everything.

Rachel stands by the door when the bathroom door opens.

In walks Janet James, tapping on her Blackberry.

JANET

Girl, what you doin' in here? The preacher is gettin' ready to start.

Janet and Rachel laugh.

Philena flushes the toilet, hurriedly wrapping something in tissue. The toilet flushes again.

RACHEL

Philena, you alright in there?

Janet goes into the stall next to Philena.

Philena comes out of the stall, sobbing.

Rachel puts her arm around Philena, guiding her to a sofa.

RACHEL

You've got to be kidding me, right?

Philena hands her the stick wrapped in tissue.

INSERT: EPT STICK, TWO BRIGHT PINK LINES SHOWING ON SURFACE

Rachel gasps as she puts her hand over her mouth.

Janet comes out of the stall, stopping in front of Philena and Rachel.

JANET

Hey Philena, I heard you were at the house last night. I hate I wasn't there, heard you cracked the guys up.

Janet washes her hands, watching the reflection of Philena in the mirror.

Philena's head remains buried in her hands, while her body shakes from her crying.

JANET

Don't stay in here too long Rachel.

Janet leaves, the door slamming behind her.

RACHEL

Oh my God girl, you're pregnant!!!!

Philena walks to the sink, washing her face.

PHILENA

I know I am. I know. Just when things were goin' good, now this. What the hell am I going to do?

Rachel runs her hands through her hair.

RACHEL

I dunno. Get an abortion is my best advice.

Philena shakes her head, scowling.

PHILENA

That's not an option. Not an option. Darrel will be there for me, I know it. I'll be alright.

Rachel opens the door for Philena.

RACHEL

You know that he's still married to Janet, right.

PHILENA

Married??!!

CUT TO:

INT. CHURCH FOYER- IMMEDIATELY AFTER

Brenda Washington comes around a hallway.

BRENDA

Ladies, we need to be in the auditorium. Rev. Turner will be starting soon.

Rachel and Philena nod their heads.

BRENDA

And Philena, you need this sermon
more than any of us.

Rachel rolls her eyes while Philena bows her head.

PHILENA

I'm sure I'm the only one right?

Brenda struts over to Philena, leaning down and whispering.

BRENDA

No, we've all sinned, but some of
us need a little more help to not
sin. I'm just trying to help you
be a good Christian..that's all.

Brenda's voice trails off as Philena looks toward the floor.

CUT TO:

FLASHBACK

INT. BEDROOM- PRIOR NIGHT

In the background, a jazz record plays softly.

Philena is lying naked on the bed while Silas is setting up
a video camera.

SILAS (O.S.)

How horny are you baby? Tell daddy
what you want me to do.

CUT TO:

INT. CHURCH HALLWAY- MOMENTS LATER

Philena raises her head, her eyes glistening with tears.

PHILENA

Thank Sis. Washington. Guess I, uh
we all need help, to be good
Christians.

Brenda, startled, smiles as Silas and Rev. Turner pass by.

Silas snags Brenda by the waist, gently pecking her on the
cheek. Rev. Josiah bumps into Rachel as she grabs Philena's
arm.

Brenda pecks Silas back, smiling and sauntering into the auditorium.

REV. JOSIAH TURNER

Excuse me, sisters. Hope you're headed back to your seat. I have a spirit-filled sermon waiting for y'all.

SILAS

Amen! Amen, brother.

RACHEL

Rev. Turner, we're headed back right now. You know women are, travel in packs.

Rachel forces a giggle, grabbing Philena's hand, they quickly head inside the auditorium.

Rev. Josiah and Silas walk to an adjacent building.

CUT TO:

INT. AUDITORIUM IN CHURCH- MINUTES LATER

Mack is behind the pulpit leading the congregation in another song.

The congregants are singing "Mansion, Robe, & Crown".

Darrel puts his arm around Janet.

DARREL

(singing)

I want my mansion, robe and a crown...

Janet leans over, nibbling softly on his ear.

DARREL

Yeah, you like it when I sing in my Barry White voice?

JANET

I love it. Maybe later you can sing some Barry White and ...

DARREL

You ain't said nothing but a word, baby.

Darrel rubs Janet's shoulder, smiling.

DARREL

I'm glad you're giving me a second chance baby. You know how much I love you.

Janet turns her head around, sighing.

JANET

I love you too Darrel.

Janet and Darrel join the rest of the congregation in the remaining verses of the song.

DISSOLVE TO:

INT. CHURCH OFFICE- HALF AN HOUR LATER

Silas and Rev. Josiah, in a plush office, watch the services via a flat screen television.

Silas' phone beeps, takes it out and furiously begins texting.

INSERT: PHONE MESSAGE: DARREL IS ABOUT TO HAVE SOME DRAMA, BABYMAMA JUST SHOWED UP.

Silas begins laughing and shaking his head.

Rev. Josiah looks up, looks back to the screen, and then walks over to a cabinet pulling out 3 glasses and a bottle of Johnny Walker Red.

REV. JOSIAH TURNER

Yo, Silas, what are you laughing at?

Rev. Josiah pours the contents of the bottle into the glasses. He hands one to Silas while taking a drink from the other.

Silas shakes his head, taking the glass in his hands, sniffing, nose turning up.

SILAS

You might need to change your sermon, man. All I'm saying.

Silas tosses his phone on the couch and drinks from his glass.

Rev. Josiah puts the television on mute.

Silas grabs a napkin and places his glass on a coaster.

SILAS
You breakin'out the Scotch?

REV. JOSIAH TURNER
Yeah. Emptied out my bottle of
Navarra Red Wine the other night at
the house. Time to restock.

Rev. Josiah pours another glass, motioning the bottle
towards Silas.

Silas shakes his head.

SILAS
Unlike you man, I got to sit next
to my girl. She can't be smelling
all Scotch on my breath.

Rev. Josiah returns to his leather chair, shaking his head.

REV. JOSIAH TURNER
Before I lose my train of thought,
why should I change my sermon?

Silas hands Rev. Josiah his cell phone.

Rev. Josiah rubs his chin.

REV. JOSIAH TURNER
That fool ain't gonna learn is he?

SILAS
Nope, and here's the deal Rev....

There is a knock on the door, causing Silas to stop
mid-sentence.

Rev. Josiah walks to the door, opening it.

REV. JOSIAH TURNER
Speaking of the devil. Get your
ass in here.

Darrel walks in, frowning.

DARREL
Can I speak to you for just a
minute Rev. Turner? Please!

Rev. Josiah opens the door wider and Darrel walks in,
plopping onto the couch next to Silas.

SILAS

(fist bumping Darrel)

Dude, your ass is in some deep
shit. Brenda just sent me a text
and told me who just walked in.

Rev. Josiah examines the television screen. He grabs a pen
off of the desk.

REV. JOSIAH TURNER

Darrel, why don't you look at this
setup you got going on in my
church.

Darrel and Silas turn their heads towards the television.

Rev. Turner points the pen to faces in the congregation.

REV. JOSIAH TURNER

Darrel, you got Sis. Janet on the
pew you were at right, then you got
Sis. Philena like two rows behind
you and then you got the baby mama
sitting two rows behind her.

Rev. Josiah puts down the pen and drinks the rest of his
wine.

REV. JOSIAH TURNER

See a major problem, don't you
playa?

SILAS

Dude, you might as well give Janet
up right now, because she ain't
never coming back to you after this
goes down.

Darrel sits up and rubs his legs.

SILAS (O.S.)

And you know some shit is gonna go
down.

DARREL

I know, I know, I get it. Trust me,
Regina ain't gonna start nothin',
not here.

Rev. Josiah stands up, clearing away the Scotch bottle and
the glasses.

REV. JOSIAH TURNER

Darrel, you can't have this drama up in my church. You know we got them white folks out there trying to pull our loan from us.

Rev. Josiah goes to a closet and pulls out a black robe with a red collar. He puts it on while Silas jumps up to help him.

Silas rubs on his shoulders and discreetly slides his hands inside Rev. Josiah's robe.

Rev. Josiah smiles but then quickly brushes Silas away.

Darrel leans in to look at the congregation on screen.

INSERT:TELEVISION SCREEN, A TALL SLENDER CAUCASIAN LADY MID 30'S, REGINA SNOW, IN A SLEEK BLACK SUIT,MOVES FROM ONE PEW TO ANOTHER.

Darrel continues to watch as Regina Snow glides to the pew where Philena and Rachel are sitting.

Trailing behind Regina is a little boy, DARREL JR., age 5.

Darrel puts his hands in his face.

CUT TO:

INT. AUDITORIUM IN CHURCH- SIMANTANEOUSLY

Regina Snow and Darrel Jr. enter the auditorium. Snap. Click. Regina snaps a picture of Darrel Jr. smiling at her.

INSERT: TEXT MESSAGE PICTURE OF DARREL JR. SCREEN SHOWS: SENDING TO MY MAN.

Brenda Washington walks behind Regina leaning over as Regina sits down.

BRENDA

Regina, what are you doing here? You know better than to show up here. You trying to get yourself hurt?

DARREL JR.

Mommy, where's daddy? I thought you said I could see daddy today.

Regina grabs Darrel Jr.'s hand and bends down to him.

REGINA

In a minute baby, okay. You'll see
your dad, don't worry.

Regina runs her hands over Darrel Jr.'s face and stands up.

Regina pats down her suit jacket.

REGINA

Brenda, it's always a pleasure. I
see you're still on the greeting
committee. Where's your gay
boyfriend, Silas?

BRENDA

Excuse me.

Brenda looks at Darrel Jr.

BRENDA

Darrel, just stay right here
pew. I'm going to talk to your mom
outside for just a sec, okay?

Darrel Jr. sits down quietly.

Brenda grabs Regina by the arm and leads her out of the back
door.

CUT TO:

EXT. BACK PARKING LOT

BRENDA

Now lookahere, Regina. Ain't
nobody scared of yo' white ass,
alright. So don't start your
stuff.

Regina laughs.

REGINA

Brenda, no one is scared you
either. I've talked to Darrel and
he asked me to come today. Does
that meet with your approval?

BRENDA

I know he ain't that damn
crazy. He's back with Janet, so
get it through your head..He don't
want you.

Regina laughs again.

REGINA

We will see about that. I am the mother of his only son, nothing is stronger than that.

Regina looks down at her watch.

REGINA

I don't need to discuss this with you anyhow. Just because he didn't want you doesn't mean he doesn't want me.

Regina heads for the door, Brenda reaches out for her arm.

BRENDA

Just what did you mean by calling Silas my gay boyfriend? You better watch that type of talk around here.

Regina moves back from Brenda, swiping her bangs out of her face.

REGINA

You don't know do you?

BRENDA

Know what?

Regina reaches for the door handle.

REGINA

Darling, you have got a lot to learn about the people you try to protect. Know who you are dealing with before gettin' up in someone's face.

Regina opens the door and walks back inside.

Brenda follows Regina inside the building.

CUT TO:

INT. CHURCH OFFICE-

Rev. Josiah and Silas share an affectionate embrace before walking toward the office door.

REV. JOSIAH TURNER
You know we've got to stop this
now. I'm married... Dee's a good
woman you know.

Silas backs away from Rev. Josiah.

SILAS
Brenda is a good woman too. No
doubt, I'm gonna pop the question
soon. That shouldn't stop us from
enjoying each other.

Silas backs up a few steps, picking up his cell phone from the couch. He opens the door.

Rev. Josiah quickly follows, straightening his robe and collar.

CUT TO:

INT. AUDITORIUM IN CHURCH- MINUTES LATER

The melody of "Singing Redemption's Song" is being played on a piano.

Mack gets up from his seat and goes to the pulpit.

MACK
Before our minister comes before us
to bring us another portion of
God's holy and divine word...

As Mack speaks, he is opening his song book.

Rev. Josiah is walking down the aisle, clutching a portfolio and a Bible.

Several loud shouts of "Amen" and "Alright, brother" stream across across the crowd.

Rev. Josiah sits down on the pew behind the pulpit.

MACK
We're going to cut the piano and
use our voices to sing praises to
the Lord. Amen.

CONGREGATION

Amen.

MACK

Page 153 in the old song book.

Mack holds up a burgundy song book and begins laughing.

MACK

I know we don't use this
anymore. But every now and then,
it's good to praise the Lord with a
song from way back. Amen!

CONGREGATION

Amen, brother, that's
right. Hallelujah.

Mack opens the book and raises his left hand.

MACK

All found. Let us sing."Angels are
singing redemption's
song...wonderful theme, glorious
theme! Shout the glad message and
join in the throng, singing
redemption's song".

The chorus of the song is sung by the entire congregation.

The camera pans the congregation; Regina Snow is sitting
next to Philena with Rachel on the other side.

Regina gets up from the pew, holding Darrel Jr.'s hand.

Philena follows after her.

Rachel turns around, shakes her head.

Mack sings the second verse of the song. The congregation
follows with the chorus.

Mack raises his hand, fist balled tightly, the singing
ceases.

MACK

I don't feel the spirit in y'all's
singing this morning.

A OLDER GENTLEMAN sitting on the front row grabs a
microphone.

OLDER GENTLEMAN
 (deep, raspy voice)
 The spirit is here this morning.

The crowd goes into a frenzy, people start waving their hands, women take off their hats, multiple shouts of "Hallelujah" can be heard throughout the congregation.

MACK
 The spirit is trying to move, but
 we've got some sin standing in our
 way.

The crowd continues its frenzy.

The Older Gentleman begins to hum quietly the melody to "Singing Redemption's Song".

MACK O.S.
 I know there are many of us that
 need redemption. Redemption from
 the evil that is within us

OLDER GENTLEMAN O.S.
 Amen. Amen.

CUT TO:

INT. CHURCH FOYER- SIMULTANEOUSLY

Regina Snow is sitting in the foyer, staring down the hallway.

Darrel Jr. comes running down the hallway from the restroom.

REGINA
 Stop running, Darrel. Be quiet.
 We're in the Lord's house.

Philena steps out of the restroom, visibly weak. taking a seat next to Regina.

REGINA
 So are you okay, Philena? You look
 really tired in the eyes.

Philena runs her hands over her long ponytail.

PHILENA
 I'm pregnant. Just threw up,
 again.

Regina places Darrel Jr. in the seat beside her, but he continues to squirm around.

Regina leans over to Philena.

REGINA

I don't want to pry and you can tell me it's none of my business...but do you know who the father is?

Philena starts smiling.

PHILENA

I know, but I would rather not say right now. I'm not sure if I'm going to keep the baby.

Rachel walks into the foyer.

Philena stands up, rubbing her forehead.

RACHEL

Girl, that man has got them fired up in there. Come back and join us.

PHILENA

Us, who's us?

Rachel grabs Philena by the arm.

RACHEL

Girl, I asked Brenda and Silas to sit by us. Silas came in so late and Brenda just came in from outside.

Rachel shoots Regina a scowl, curling her lips slightly toward her nose

Regina saunters past Rachel and Philena into the auditorium.

Philena stares at Rachel, shaking her head.

PHILENA

I think I'll sit out here. I really don't want to be around Brenda. No offense, I know she's your cousin and all, but I don't like her.

RACHEL
Wow, alrighty then. Catch you
later.

Rachel turns her back on Philena and struts back into the auditorium, throwing her hand in the air slightly.

Philena buries her head in her hands.

CUT TO:

FLASHBACK

INT. BEDROOM- PRIOR NIGHT

Jazz music plays softly in the background.

Philena, naked with a silk sheet slung across her breasts, rolls over, playing with her hair. Propping herself on her elbows, Philena grabs a glass from a nightstand and sips the drink.

PHILENA
(slurring)
I love mojitos. I love mai tais. I
love everything right now.

Silas reclines in a bright blue moon chair and takes out his phone.

SILAS
Yo' man, think ya girl is ready.
Yep, she's good and gone, man.
Alright, hurry up, because I'm
ready to hit this.

Silas plunks the phone down in the chair and stands up, unzipping his pants.

Philena lays back down as Silas hovers over her.

She reaches out to him, kissing him passionately.

PHILENA
(slurring)
You think we should wait for my
baby, right.

Silas bends down and kisses Philena's neck and shoulder blades.

SILAS

He's on his way, baby, don't worry.

Clearing his throat, Silas bends down to Philena again, this time caressing her face.

SILAS

Not having second thoughts, are you?

Philena shuffles around in the silk sheets.

PHILENA

No, no, no. I love Darrel. I do anything for him.

CUT TO:

INT. AUDITORIUM IN CHURCH- PRESENT DAY

Regina grabs Darrel Jr.'s hand and sits on the pew just a few spaces from Darrel and Janet.

Rachel returns to her seat, plopping down next to Brenda.

The singing stops. Random babies crying can be heard while mothers take their babies out of the auditorium.

There is dead silence as Rev. Josiah walks to the pulpit.

Rev. Josiah grabs the pulpit stand with both hands and leans onto the pulpit.

REV. JOSIAH TURNER

The good brother Mack over here has worked this morning. Amen.

CONGREGATION

Amen.

Rev. Josiah pounds his fist on the pulpit stand.

REV. JOSIAH TURNER

The Lord does not want a dead service. He wants his people to be lively. Excited about His Word!

The congregation shout in unison.

REV. JOSIAH TURNER

The Lord wants his people to love him, to worship him...

Rev. Josiah begins to jump around the pulpit, flailing his hands in the air.

Silas claps while Brenda and Rachel stand up and wave their hands.

Philena creeps back into the auditorium, quickly rushing back out.

REV. JOSIAH TURNER

If you didn't come here to praise
the Lord, you need to turn around
and walk out the door.

The congregation continues shouting louder.

REV. JOSIAH TURNER

Because we are here to praise! Here
to praise his holy name because He
is worthy...

Rev. Josiah reaches for a glass of water, throwing back swig.

CONGREGATION

Preach!

REV. JOSIAH TURNER

I said he is worthy to be praised.

Rev. Josiah pounds his fist on the pulpit.

Mack hands Rev. Josiah a handkerchief.

Rev. Josiah grabs hit, shakes Mack's hand, and wipes his face.

Darrel wraps his arm around Janet. Janet smirks at Regina while Regina rubs Darrel Jr.'s head.

Regina scoots next to Janet, leaning over to her.

REGINA

(whispering in Janet's ear)
I wouldn't smirk if I were you.

Darrel Jr. raises his head from Regina's lap.

DARREL JR.

Can I sit next to daddy?

Darrel kneels forward and reaches out for Darrel Jr. Darrel Jr. takes his father's hand and sits down next to him.

JANET

Just what do you mean, Regina? Do we need talk, again?

Rev. Josiah opens his Bible, shuffling papers from a portfolio.

REV. JOSIAH TURNER

If you brought your Bible, raise it high in the air, let me and the Lord see who's serious about his Word.

A sea of Bibles soar in the air. Darrel Jr. raises Darrel's Bible and Darrel chuckles.

REV. JOSIAH TURNER

Turn in your Bibles to Romans chapter 1 verses 21-32. When you find it, say Amen.

Pages rustling and babies crying still fill the auditorium.

MACK O.S.

Amen.

Pages continue to rustle.

Silas picks up the Bible sitting next to him.

Brenda snatches it away, laughing.

BRENDA

Where is your Bible, Silas? Don't play, can't use mine.

Rachel grabs her Bible and hands it down the pew. She leans over, silently mouthing her words.

RACHEL

You can use mine if you want Silas. I think I'm going to check on Philena.

Silas grabs the Bible, then lays it down.

SILAS

(leaning over Brenda)

Nah, you know what, I'll go check on her.

Silas pulls out his cell phone and begins texting.

Rev. Josiah leans on the podium.

REV. JOSIAH TURNER (O.S)
 Because that, when they knew God,
 they glorified him not as God...

Rev. Josiah continues the passage in the background.

Darrel looks over his shoulder at Silas who is walking toward the back of the auditorium.

Darrel leans over to Janet.

DARREL
 Baby, can you be civil with Regina
 for a minute? Need to holla at
 Silas for just a sec.

Janet scrunches her face, taking Darrel Jr.'s hand.

JANET
 Yes, I can baby.

Darrel gets up and leaves the auditorium.

REGINA
 It's okay Janet, at least you know
 he's not sneaking out to see
 me..I'm right here.

Regina laughs and Janet rolls her eyes, running her hand over the nape of her neck.

Darrel meets Silas in the foyer.

Philena comes out of the bathroom, wiping her mouth.

Silas grabs Philena's arm and ushers her to an empty classroom.

Darrel follows Silas down the hall.

CUT TO:

INT. INSIDE CLASSROOM- DAY

SILAS
 So, girl, what's up with you? You
 been in and out of the bathroom all
 morning.

Silas grabs a chair, sitting backwards.

PHILENA

What are you talking about? I'm cool. I can't go to the bathroom?

Silas laughs and Darrel sits next to Philena, stroking her face.

DARREL

Don't worry about Silas, he's just playing with you girl. I didn't expect to see you here though.

Philena touches Darrel's hand.

PHILENA

Hey, Silas, can we have a minute? I need to talk to Darrel alone.

Silas smiles, walking over to Philena, leaning on her shoulders.

SILAS

Ahhh, come on. Baby, we don't have secrets. Not after last night.

Darrel chokes with laughter.

DARREL

Dude, let me holla at her for a second. Watch the door to make sure ain't nobody bustin' up in here.

Silas shakes his head.

SILAS

No problem, dawg. Maybe I should check on your other situation?

Silas opens the door and walks out.

Philena turns to Darrel and rubs his leg.

Darrel smiles and kisses her, but Philena pulls away.

DARREL

What's the matter baby?

Darrel pushes a strand of hair away from Philena's face.

PHILENA

Are you still married?

Darrel pulls away from Philena and hangs his head between his legs. He looks up, frowning and sighing heavily.

DARREL

Girl, I told you, I am divorced. Damn, who you been talking to this early in the morning?

Philena leans onto the table.

PHILENA

Rachel told me you were still married to Janet. And then I saw her sit next to you. Is that why you thought I wasn't going to be here? So I wouldn't find out?

Darrel gets up and paces around.

Philena starts tapping her black leather pumps.

PHILENA

So, are you still married? Why was she sitting next to you? And why was Regina here? She stalking you?

Darrel goes back to the chair and sits down, grabbing Philena's shoulder roughly.

DARREL

Look, I told you last night, been telling you for a while now, me and Janet are over. But she's still hanging on until the paper's final.

Philena moves away from Darrel as he moves his chair closer to Philena. He begins to massage her shoulder.

DARREL

I love you and I want to be with you and only you. Regina, she's the mother of my boy, she's going to be around, she's a member here too.

The door creaks open and Mack wobbles inside.

MACK

Y'all know you missing a good lesson by the Rev. this

(MORE)

MACK
 morning. Now, you don't want me to
 tell him y'all ain't in there, do
 you?

Mack smiles as Darrel gets up and shakes his hand.

MACK
 You know that will hurt your
 chances with the deacon vote coming
 up.

Darrel starts coughing loudly

DARREL
 I'm just helping a sister out. We
 won't be but a minute.

Darrel shushes Mack with his finger.

DARREL
 Trying to keep the whole deacon
 thing on the d.l.

Mack laughs, taking a handkerchief to wiping perspiration
 beads from his round face.

Philena looks down at her hands, picking at her nails.

MACK O.S.
 Sister Shiloh, don't let this
 brother bother you too much. You
 call on me if he keeps you hold up
 in here, alright.

Philena looks at Darrel.

PHILENA
 I'm good. I'm a big girl. But
 thanks.

Mack laughs again.

MACK
 (whispering to Darrel)
 She a live one...you might be in
 trouble.

Darrel pats Mack's shoulder as he closes the door.

Darrel sits down in the chair next to Philena.

PHILENA

So, you're tryin' to be a deacon.
That's cool. They let married men
who cheat and have baby mamas be
deacons now?

Darrel frowns and grabs Philena's hands.

DARREL

Baby, don't get all stupid with
this alright! Ain't nothing going
on that you don't know about. I've
been honest.

Darrel leans over to Philena and kisses her.

PHILENA

Look, there's something else I need
to talk to you about. I'm uh...

Tap, tap, tap. A series of knocks pound against the door.

Silas barges inside the classroom.

SILAS

Hate to break up the love fest, but
we need to get back out
there. Rev. Turner starting to
call folks out and you know how
that goes.

Darrel rolls his eyes and gets up from the chair.

DARREL

C'mon babygirl. You know we don't
need Rev. Turner turning on us for
not being there.

Philena stays seated, fiddling with the small heart-shaped
diamond ring on her ring finger.

Silas steps inside the classroom and grabs Philena's hand
pulling her out of the seat, wrapping his arms around her
waist.

SILAS

Lena, Lena, Lena. I know we had it
jumpin' last night, but we at
church so you got to put your game
face on, girl.

Silas bends down and gently kisses Philena.

Philena pushes Silas away and grabs Darrel's hand.

Darrel shakes his head, kissing Philena's cheek, stroking her hair.

DARREL

We don't need to bring up last night right now. Alright.

SILAS

(laughing)

Darrel please. It's just us here, ain't no need in frontin'. But for real, let's go.

Silas heads out of the door, Darrel following him with Philena in hand.

CUT TO:

INT. CHURCH FOYER- IMMEDIATELY AFTER

Philena stops short in the hallway near the bathroom, dropping her hand from his. She runs inside the bathroom door, covering her mouth.

Regina walks into the foyer, pulling Darrel Jr. by the hand.

SILAS

(in a high pitched whisper)

Hey Regina girl, looking good.

Regina ignoring Silas, frowns as she saunters into the bathroom. Darrel Jr. attempts to pull away to run to his father.

Silas pats Darrel on the back. Darrel looks over his shoulder at Regina and Darrel Jr. disappearing behind the bathroom door.

SILAS

You know some shit is going down today, right? That bitch ain't happy. She's gonna act a damn fool.

Darrel sighs heavily, sitting down on a chair in the foyer.

DARREL

Man, I didn't think last night was going to piss her off like that. She knows what's up.

Silas sits next to Darrel, picking up a bulletin to cover his mouth.

A few random men pass by, bowing their heads politely.

Rev. Turner's voice becomes more audible over the intercom.

SILAS

I don't think any of your women
know what's up. You got Janet
hanging on by a strand, baby mama
coming up in here and you know she
know don't nobody want her white
ass here...

Darrel puts his hand over his mouth.

DARREL

Can you lower your voice a little?
I mean damn. I don't want everyone
to know my business.

SILAS

And, you got ole' girl so fucked up
that she probably still throwing up
tequila shots.

CUT TO:

INT. LADIES RESTROOM IN CHURCH- DAY

A stall door opens and Darrel Jr. stumbles out.

DARREL JR.

Mommy, can you zip these please?

Regina zips up Darrel Jr.'s pants and takes him over to the sink.

Philena is washing her face at the sink basin next to Darrel Jr.

PHILENA

You are so cute.

DARREL JR.

(smiling)

Thank you.

Regina rubs Darrel Jr.'s hand dry, taking him to the door.

REGINA

Go see if your dad is still in the
foyer. If he is, go sit with him.
I'll be out in a minute.

Darrel Jr. smiles at Regina and Philena and while trying to open the bathroom door. Philena dries off her hands and opens the door for Darrel Jr. He walks out.

DARREL JR. (O.S.)

Daddy.

Regina walks over to Philena, gently rubbing her back.

REGINA

Look Philena, you sure you're okay? I've had morning sickness but I've never seen anyone throw up this much.

Philena looks at Regina, wiping her eyes.

PHILENA

I drank too much last night.

Philena begins to sob quietly, sniffing.

PHILENA

Like I don't even remember how much I drank. I feel like crap.

Philena doubles over, clutching her stomach with one hand, the other reaches out for Regina's hand, which Regina takes.

REGINA

Well, you're pregnant, you can't drink like that anymore. You really shouldn't drink any alcohol at all.

Regina hugs Philena and then look towards the door.

REGINA

Who else knows about the pregnancy? Hopefully not Rachel. I just don't trust her.

Philena pulls back from Regina and crosses her arms.

PHILENA

What are you talking about? Rachel's my best friend. Why are you mad at her?

REGINA

Who's mad? I'm not mad, I'm just warning you. I got burned by her cousin Brenda. And Silas is a joke.

Regina mumbles something inaudible under her breath.

Philena uncrosses her arms, throwing her tissue away.

PHILENA

What do you mean by Silas is a joke?

REGINA

People aren't always what they seem to be in the church, okay. Silas is...how I can say it nicely, he's a...

The door opens, Rachel bursts in the bathroom. Brenda follows her inside.

BRENDA

Apparently the intercom is not on in here this morning.

Rachel stands on a chair and turns on a switch.

REV. JOSIAH TURNER (O.S)

Wherefore God also gave them up to uncleanness through the lusts of their own hearts, to dishonor their own bodies between themselves: Ah, you know I got to stop there.

Collective shouting blasts through the intercom. Rachel turns down the volume switch.

BRENDA

Y'all need to be inside before he starts calling names. He has already been preaching some good stuff out there.

Rachel gets down off of the chair and walks over to Philena.

REGINA

Well, if the sermon is so good, why aren't you out there with your fiance' instead of being in here, preaching?

Brenda laughs and smirks.

BRENDA

Honestly, Regina, I needed to find Silas. He stepped out for a minute. They're getting ready for the vote and all.

Regina heads toward the door.

REGINA

That's right, the deacon/elder vote is today. Good luck with that Brenda.

Regina walks out of the door.

Rachel straightens her dress in the mirror while Brenda reapplies her makeup.

Philena smooths down her hair.

RACHEL

Girl, that woman is a trip.

Philena moves away from the mirror.

PHILENA

Rachel, I need to talk to you girl. Privately.

Brenda closes her makeup case and turns around facing Philena.

BRENDA

Rachel, I'll be at my seat. Trust, Philena, your little secret is safe with me.

Brenda opens the door and it shuts loudly behind her.

Philena's eyes bulge out, a scowl creeping across her face.

PHILENA

Did you tell her?

Rachel smiles and washes her hands. She turns back to Philena.

RACHEL

Look, I didn't tell her anything. She did guess that you were preggers though. I couldn't hide that.

Philena shoves Rachel slightly.

PHILENA

You promised. Oh god, oh god. She's going to tell Darrel. Oh god.

Rachel straightens her skirt.

RACHEL

Look, Brenda is not going to tell Darrel or Silas for that matter. She said you going to have enough drama as it is from Janet and Regina.

PHILENA

Didn't you say Darrel was still married to Janet?

Rachel stares at Philena, her mouth turned up slightly.

RACHEL

Thought you told Darrel anyhow.

Philena walks over to the door, holding it open with her foot.

Rachel follows Philena, opening the door wider, looking over her shoulder.

RACHEL

You didn't want to listen to me when I told you not get with him. Now you in the same crap Regina got stuck in.

Philena and Rachel step into the foyer.

CUT TO:

INT. AUDITORIUM IN CHURCH- DAY

Rev. Turner is standing below the podium, steadily wiping his face with an handkerchief.

Philena and Rachel make their way back to their seat.

REV. JOSIAH TURNER

Now look at what Paul is saying to this church right here. These people were doing everything under the sun, you name it. And calling themselves, Christians.

Shouting explodes throughout the auditorium while people jump out of their seats.

CONGREGATION

Amen, brother. Preach.

Rachel sits next to Brenda and Silas while Philena with Regina on the same pew as Darrel and Janet.

PHILENA
 (whispering to Regina)
 Is Darrel still married to Janet or
 are they divorced?

Regina covers her mouth and giggles silently.

REGINA
 Girl, did he tell you he was
 divorced? So that's who you're
 pregnant by.

Philena eyes glaze over.

PHILENA
 Do you know about last night, too?

Regina cocks her head to the side and frowns.

REGINA
 This man has done it again. Just
 freakin' great.

Rev. Josiah paces down the middle of the aisle, holding a microphone.

REV. JOSIAH TURNER
 Can I get real and talk about these
 Romans for a minute.

CONGREGATION
 Amen. Go ahead and preach.

Rev. Josiah walks back up to the pulpit and leans on it.

REV. JOSIAH TURNER
 The Romans were living wild, but
 came to worship every Sunday. Can
 I talk about it?

MACK O.S.
 Talk Rev. Preach the Word.

Janet leans over and smiles at Philena.

Silas and Brenda are laughing and waving their hands.

SILAS (O.S.)
 Amen, brother. Amen.

Regina looks back at Silas and rolls her eyes.

REGINA
 (whispering)
 Faggot. He needs to shut the hell
 up.

Regina gets up, grabbing Darrel Jr. and walks to the nursery.

DEE TURNER, tall slender early 30's African American lady,
 gets up from the front pew and slides out to the nursery. As
 she walks out, the congregation quiets down.

REV. JOSIAH TURNER
 Amen. Let me stop for a minute.
 There's a woman of God right there.
 God blessed me when he gave her to
 me.

CONGREGATION
 Amen. Amen.

Dee turns around and flashes a smile, tipping her bright red
 hat.

CUT TO:

INT. CHURCH NURSERY-

Dee enters the nursery behind Regina and Darrel Jr.

Regina reaches for the intercom switch turning it off.

Darrel Jr. sits and plays with a fire engine truck.

Dee sits down next to Regina.

DEE
 Regina, it's so nice to see you,
 again.

Regina turns her head to Dee.

REGINA
 Today's such a special day. Didn't
 want to miss the vote. You know I
 believe some brothers here
 shouldn't be deacons.

Dee lays her hand on Regina's lap and bows her head,
 mouthing words but no sound coming out.

Darrel Jr. continues playing with his engine, Regina motions
 for him to be quiet.

DEE

Regina, I don't know you well, but I've known Darrel all my life. He's a good guy and just got caught up in something.

Regina knocks Dee's hand away from her lap.

REGINA

Dee, if you only knew. And I'm sad that you still see Darrel as your play brother, when he's actually a grown man.

Regina pauses, looking at Darrel Jr.

REGINA

Never mind. It doesn't matter now, because there's a new one on the horizon.

Regina opens the curtain and points to Philena's silhouette passing by the nursery window to the foyer.

Brenda's stumpy legs follow Philena out of the auditorium.

DEE

You can't be serious, Regina. He is working things out with Janet. He's not cheating on her, I'm sure of that.

Regina closes the curtain and smiles.

REGINA

Dee, Darrel and I still have a relationship outside of being parents. He tells me everything.

Regina shakes her head, closing the curtain. Dee lifts the red fishnet veil, whipping off her red hat. Their eyes meet each other slowly as they both stare at Darrel Jr.

CUT TO:

INT. INSIDE CLASSROOM- DAY

Philena walks into an empty class and buries her head on the table.

Brenda walks in behind her, shutting the door loudly.

BRENDA

Guess you can't handle the preacher
talking about immorality, huh
Philena?

Philena perks up, poised, wiping a single tear from her eye.

Brenda stands on a chair, turning the intercom switch on.

REV. JOSIAH TURNER (O.S)

When you're fornicating, committing
adultery, walking around as the
Bible says in verse 28, walking
around with a reprobate mind.

Philena takes her ponytail down, running her hands through
shoulder length black tresses. She rolls her eyes as she
listens to the intercom.

Brenda grunts while standing beneath the intercom, staring
at the small screen that shows a blurred picture of the
auditorium.

REV. JOSIAH TUNER (O.S.)

Verse 29 goes on , I mean not just
fornicators, but full of envy,
murder, inventors of evil things,
disobedient to parents...whispers,
you know that means gossip,
Amen. Then there's the covenant
breakers, people without natural
affection, unmerciful, and get this
one, women burning in their lust
after one another and men working
that which is unseemly.

BRENDA

Amen.

Philena cocks her head to the side, stretching her legs out
in front of her. She picks at a small snag in her
stockings.

While Rev. Josiah continues speaking over the intercom, the
screen whites out.

CUT TO:

FLASHBACK

INT. BEDROOM- PRIOR NIGHT

Jazz music plays softly in the background.

The door opens and Darrel walks in, shirt off, pants slightly hanging off his hips.

Silas lifts himself off Philena, walking over to Darrel and fist bumps him.

SILAS
She's good and ...

Philena rolls around the bed, wrapping the silk sheet around her body.

PHILENA
Baby, I want some dick.

SILAS
...good and gone.

DARREL
Baby, just hold on a minute.

Darrel laughs and points at the camera.

DARREL
So, the thing is on, right?

Silas goes to the camera, adjusting the height.

SILAS
Yeah man, It's on and ready. You ready bruh?

Darrel shakes his head. He walks over to Philena and lays next to her.

Philena reaches up and kisses Darrel's neck, his face, his lips. They are moaning in unison.

They begin to gyrate, Darrel on top, then Philena on top.

Silas adjusts the camera. He stands up and glides over to the bed. He grabs Philena pulling her back onto the bed.

PHILENA
This feels so good.

Silas stands in front of Philena while Darrel grabs her buttocks. The trio rock back and forth in unison, groaning in passion.

CUT TO:

INT. KITCHEN - PRIOR NIGHT

Rachel and Brenda are cleaning the dining table.

Loud moans and groans float from the upstairs bedroom to the kitchen.

Brenda turns the water on in the sink and piles dishes into the dishwasher.

BRENDA

You think if I turn this up, I can
drown out their moans?

Rachel laughs hysterically while taking a bottle of wine and pouring two glasses.

Brenda reaches for her glass and sips it.

RACHEL

Why don't you go up and there and
check on everything.

Rachel sips from her glass of wine.

RACHEL

I can't believe that you agreed to
let Silas film them. How do you
know he won't jump in?

Brenda plunks her glass down and thumbs her fingers on the table.

BRENDA

Girl, you know Silas as well as I
do; he was going to do it
anyway. And I trust him, he's got
all of this...

Brenda wiggles around, shaking her hips.

BRENDA

He's not going to cheat on me with
that piece of trash.
Rachel drinks the rest of her wine.

RACHEL

She's my girl. She don't know what's really up with Darrel and Janet, you know, so she's all messed up over him. I tried to talk her out of it.

The moans grow quiet; then dead silence.

Brenda and Rachel exchange glances. Brenda takes off upstairs to the bedroom.

CUT TO:

INT. CLASSROOM- MINUTES LATER PRESENT DAY

Brenda sits next to Philena as she blows her nose.

REV. JOSIAH TURNER (O.S)

When people are out here professing godliness and living like this, what kind of example is that?

The congregation is shouting.

BRENDA

Like I told you this morning, you need this sermon girl. At the invitation, you need to get up and ask for forgiveness.

CUT TO:

FLASHBACK

INT. HALLWAY OUTSIDE BEDROOM- PRIOR NIGHT- SECONDS LATER

Brenda stands in front of the door, straining to listen while her hand is gently turning the knob.

CUT TO:

INT. BEDROOM- PRIOR NIGHT SIMULTANEOUSLY

Philena stumbles out of the bathroom with a sheet wrapped around her petite body.

She falls back onto the bed. Silas rolls over, slaps her buttocks, smiling.

Darrel rolls over, grabbing his jeans, pulling them up.
Darrel strolls over to the camera and presses a button.

DARREL

That's a wrap. Man that was hot.

Silas walks over to the camera, taking it off the stand.
Philena rolls over, snoring.

DARREL

We wore her out, didn't we man?

Brenda comes into the bedroom, immediately walking over to Silas, wrapping her arms around his bare chest.

BRENDA

Baby, is it over? And why don't you have a shirt on?

Silas kisses Brenda.

SILAS

(laughing)

No director of an amateur porno is keeping his shirt on.

DARREL

Or pants...nah, I'm just playing.

Brenda looks around the room. She peers over at Philena's limp body.

Brenda taps Silas on the back.

BRENDA

Guess he wore her out, huh?

Silas and Darrel exchange glances.

SILAS (O.S.)

Yeah.

DARREL

Yeah.

CUT TO:

INT. CLASSROOM- PRESENT

Philena slants her eyes at Brenda.

PHILENA

You got any idea what really
happened last night? Do you?

Brenda laughs and pats Philena on the lap.

BRENDA

Look Philena, I heard the moaning,
the groaning, all of that. I know
Silas agreed to film you and no
that ain't right. But girl, you
are no victim.

Philena sniffs and throws her tissue away.

The intercom buzzes loudly for a moment.

Brenda and Philena put their hands over their ears.

REV. JOSIAH TURNER (O.S)

Yes Lord, that's the Devil trying
to hide the Word of God. He knows
I'm right about it and he wants to
quench the spirit.

Philena moves toward the door, looking at Brenda over her
shoulder.

PHILENA

Agreed to film me, that's all he
told you?

Brenda nods her head and smiles as she turns off the
intercom.

Philena slams the door, walking back to the auditorium.

CUT TO:

INT. CHURCH AUDITORIUM- EARLY AFTERNOON

Philena slides back onto the pew right behind Janet and
Darrel.

Janet turns around and smiles, wrapping her arm around
Darrel's head, massaging his neck.

Rachel trips over several people as she moves toward
Philena. Silas throws his head back ,whispering to Darrel.

RACHEL

Girl, you okay? You've gotten up a lot and and church ain't over yet.

Philena shrugs her shoulders, twisting her hair into a loose knot.

PHILENA

Who cares? Church ain't why people here anyhow.

Rachel leans over to Philena whispering, but Philena moves away.

Philena pokes Darrel in the back of the head.

Darrel ignores her while Janet turns around.

JANET

If there's something you want, come up here and say it. Don't disrupt the service for everyone.

Rev. Josiah paces back and forth between the center aisle and the pulpit, placing the microphone on the pulpit stand and grabbing a headset.

Rev. Josiah struts back down from the pulpit to the center aisle.

Philena bites her lip, shaking her legs.

REV. JOSIAH TURNER (O.S)

Brothers and sisters, I've got to bring part 1 to a close here. I can tell people get bothered by this lesson.

Regina and Darrel Jr. walk back into the auditorium, sitting right behind Philena.

REV. JOSIAH TURNER

Let's all stand. Mack, get a song ready for the altar call.

Rachel looks at Philena.

RACHEL

So why are people here? And where's Brenda?

PHILENA

Brenda followed me out here. I really don't know where she is now and I don't care.

Mack makes his way up the pulpit steps.

REV. JOSIAH TURNER

I want all of you out here to look inside yourselves.

Rev. Josiah points to his heart, grabs his handkerchief and wipes his face.

He looks up at the sky, pointing upward.

REV. JOSIAH TURNER

Jesus, help along here. We in this house are like the Romans. We've been out here running wild in this church.

There is a tapping from the pulpit.

REV. JOSIAH TURNER

I see y'all out here, going to the clubs, out there being promiscuous, babies having babies. I'm sorry church, I have to talk about it.

Brenda squeezes onto the pew next to Silas.

Silas whispers into her ear. She looks down at Philena and Rachel.

REV. JOSIAH TURNER

I want us to come back to the Lord today. Let us start this new chapter in our history with a clean slate. Brother, you got a song yet?

Rev. Josiah looks behind him at Mack.

Mack nods his head.

MACK

Page 432. Have you been to Jesus for the cleansing power? Are you washed in the blood of the lamb?

The congregations joins in.

CONGREGATION

Are you fully trusting in his grace
this hour? Are you washed in the
blood of the lamb? Are you washed,
in the blood, in the soul-cleansing
blood of the lamb. Are your
garments spotless ...

People move out of their seats toward the front pew.

As the song continues, Mack motions his hands for the
congregants to sit down.

Rev. Josiah walks toward the front of the auditorium.

The singing becomes a hushed whisper.

REV. JOSIAH TURNER

Don't stop coming forward. I know
I didn't get through my lesson
plan. That's what Sunday night is
for.

Silas walks forward to the front of the auditorium.

Janet walks forward, tears in her eyes.

CONGREGATION

Lay aside your garments that are
stained ...

Rev. Josiah puts his hand balled into a fist. Mack holds up
a balled fist and the congregation immediately stop singing.

Mack sits down on a pew behind the pulpit.

Dead silence.

REV. JOSIAH TURNER

We're going to listen to those up
here. Don't waste your chance,
tomorrow is not promised.

A STATELY BLACK MAN, late 50's, balding, glasses, walks from
the side of the auditorium to the front. He grabs the cards
from Rev. Josiah and takes a microphone.

STATELY BLACK MAN

Amen. We want to thank Rev. Turner
for another wonderful sermon. We
only have two cards from members
that want to give a testimony.

The Stately Black Man motions for Silas to walk up.

Silas grabs the microphone, clearing his throat.

SILAS

Good morning brothers and sisters. I just want to ask for prayer for myself and my family. As I endeavor to be an example as a deacon, I ask for you all to pray for me that I grow into the type of leader God would have me to be.

Brenda smiles while Silas speaks.

BRENDA

Amen.

Silas hands the microphone back to the Stately Black Man and sits down while the congregation claps and shouts.

Rev. Josiah stands in front of Silas, patting Silas on the shoulder.

REV. JOSIAH TURNER

This is what I'm talking about. Brothers that want to be examples.

Rev. Josiah squeezes Silas' shoulder. Silas flinches and scoots over a little on the pew.

Rev. Josiah steps back.

The Stately Black Man coughs nervously.

STATELY BLACK MAN

We also have Sister Janet James who wants to say something.

Janet stands up and takes the microphone from the Stately Black Man.

JANET

Brothers and sisters of the church, I just want to ask for your prayers...

Janet's eyes well up with tears.

REV. JOSIAH TURNER

Take your time baby, take your time.

Janet sniffs, her lips tremble slightly.

Rev. Josiah motions for the Stately Black Man to get a tissue.

The Stately Black Man hands Janet a tissue. She wipes her eyes.

Amid the crowd, a RANDOM FEMALE VOICE speaks out loudly.

RANDOM FEMALE VOICE
It's alright baby. C'mon take your time.

JANET
I need your prayer that I continue to grow stronger and that my marriage grows stronger. That Darrel and I keep finding out how much we love each other.

RANDOM FEMALE VOICE
Amen, sister. Go head.

Janet hands the microphone back to the Stately Black Man and sits down.

Silas reaches over to Janet and she leans on his shoulder, sobbing.

The Stately Black Man waves the microphone around.

Darrel fidgets in his seat, rubbing his head.

Brenda bows her head, sobbing quietly.

Philena reaches out to Darrel. Darrel turns around and knocks her hand away.

STATELY BLACK MAN (O.S.)
Before I ask everyone to stand for prayer, is there anyone else wanting to give a testimony?

Rev. Josiah leans over and speaks to the Stately Black Man. He hurriedly sits down.

Mack's heavy footsteps echo as he returns to the pulpit.

REV. JOSIAH TURNER
Now is the time for salvation. Don't be ashamed.

Rev. Josiah marches down the aisle.

Darrel gets up, walks to the front, sits down next to Janet.

CONGREGATION
Amen. Praise God.

REV. JOSIAH TURNER
Anyone else? Sin can get ahold on
us, take us further than we
intended to go, stay longer than we
ever intended to stay.

Mack hums the tune of "Amazing Grace" softly.

Philena leans back in her seat, tapping her foot on the
floor.

RACHEL
(whispering to Philena)
Don't go up there, you know if you
do it's gonna be some drama. Just
stay put.

PHILENA
(tearing)
Why did he go up there to her? Why
is he acting like they're still
together?

Rev. Josiah walks back to the front of the auditorium.

REV. JOSIAH TURNER
Change your life, give it to
God. He can and will forgive all
sin. Ain't no sin too big or too
small, too bad that HE won't
forgive. Don't worry about what
other people are gonna say. Anyone
else?

Rev. Josiah pauses.

Random people get up, leaving out of auditorium.

REV. JOSIAH TURNER
This is prayer time. We can take
our time right now. All the
walking needs to stop unless you
coming this way.

Rev. Josiah motions his hands forward.

REV. JOSIAH TURNER
This is the time for you to get
your hearts right with the
Master. I know there's more people
here that need to come forward.

Rev. Josiah looks at Mack, who promptly stops humming.

Dead silence.

REV. JOSIAH TURNER

God is pleading with you, come down
front. Even if you don't say
anything, make it known to God and
his angels that you're a sinner
saved by His grace. Amen. Come on
down, we will take the time to
listen to you, to pray with you and
pray for you.

Philena wipes tears from her eyes.

Regina reaches for Philena's shoulder and gently rubs it.

Rachel knocks her hand away.

RACHEL

(facing Regina)

Don't start. She's fine, alright.

PHILENA

No, I'm not. He's up there with
her. I don't get it.

RACHEL

I told you they're still
together. He ain't leavin' her no
matter what.

Philena scoots forward in her seat.

Regina leans forward, grabbing her shoulder tightly.

REGINA

Don't get up right now. Just hang
tight.

Dee Tuner walks to the front of the auditorium. The Stately
Black Gentleman hands her the microphone.

Philena fidgets more in her seat, scooting to the edge of
the pew.

Regina forces her shoulder back to the pew.

REGINA

I told you not yet. Let them get
to the vote, alright. Just trust me
on this one.

Philena turns around with tears glistening in her eyes.

PHILENA

Okay.

Dee Turner smiles to the congregation.

DEE

Church family, I just want to ask for everyone to continue praying for our young men and women. Pray for me that I can be an example for how wives should love their husbands..

Regina leans back from Philena, crossing her arms.

REGINA

(muttering)

Just wait, Dee. You just wait. You won't be sayin' that after...

Rachel turns around, staring at Regina.

RACHEL

What the hell is your problem?

REGINA (O.S.)

Little girl, turn around.

DEE

Just continue to pray for me that I stay strong and keep encouraging other women to love their husbands no matter what.

CONGREGATION

Amen. Amen.

Dee hands the microphone back to the Stately Black Gentleman.

Rev. Josiah walks next to Dee, throwing his arm around her shoulders; his arm slides down to her waist.

REV. JOSIAH TURNER

Amen. There is still time, if you want to come down.

MACK O.S.

Amen. There is still time.

Dee smiles at Rev. Josiah and sits down next to Janet and Darrel.

REV. JOSIAH TURNER

Food ain't goin' nowhere. We've got all day. I'm going to extend this invitation a little longer. My spirit is telling me someone else needs to get up.

Rev. Josiah signals Mack to start singing.

Mack begins humming "Amazing Grace".

Philena springs up, walking fast toward the front, sitting down on the far end of the pew.

Janet turns her head, grunting.

Various voices chime in with Mack's humming.

Rachel buries her head in her hands, laughing.

RACHEL

Oh, god.

Brenda heads to the front, sitting next to Silas.

Regina rubs Darrel Jr.'s head and sits back.

Several more members strut to the front, squeezing onto the full pews while other people get up, making room on the pews.

REV. JOSIAH TURNER

Keep humming quietly, brother. This is God's time to work, in the quietness. We have to be still, let him work. We all sin, we all need prayer.

Several more people come forward.

REV. JOSIAH TURNER

C'mon brothers and sisters, give up your seat for a minute for these honest souls coming down here.

Regina gets up, walking Darrel Jr. to the back, entering the foyer.

Mack hesitates in humming when Regina approaches the front. He clears his throat and continues humming.

REV. JOSIAH TURNER
Don't let Satan make you believe
that you've got more time. You
don't. The only time you have is
right now.

CUT TO:

INT. CHURCH FOYER- SIMULTANEOUSLY

Regina lets Darrel Jr. jump up and down.

Rachel follow after Regina.

REGINA
You need to stop your girl,
Rachel. Stop her before she makes
a huge mistake.

Rachel bends down says hi to Darrel Jr., patting his head.

RACHEL
Regina, look, I tried to tell her
that Darrel is still married to
Janet. You know better than anyone
how he lies about everything.

Regina puts her hands over Darrel Jr.'s ears.

REGINA
Please. That's still his father
and I don't talk bad about Darrel
in front of him. Could you do me a
favor though Rachel?

Rachel looks surprised, smiling.

RACHEL
Sure, what.

REGINA
Take Darrel into the nursery and
stay there until after the
vote. What I've gotta do, I really
don't want him seeing.

Rachel smiles and puts her hand out for Regina to shake it,
which she does, placing a hundred dollar bill in her hand.

Rachel looks at the bill and grabs Darrel Jr.'s hand.

RACHEL
Do what you gotta do girl.

CUT TO:

INT. AUDITORIUM IN CHURCH-

BRENDA
Ummm, I ask for you all to continue
praying for me and Silas that we
grow stronger. Thank you.

Brenda sits down next to Silas, handing the microphone to
Rev. Turner.

REV. JOSIAH TURNER
Anyone else want to make a
statement before we go to God in
prayer.

Philena slowly raises her hand.

PHILENA
(voice cracking)
I want to make a confession.

Dead Silence.

Rev. Josiah motions for Philena to come forward.

Philena walks forward taking the microphone.

Rev. Josiah bends down and whispers to Darrel and Janet.

Rev. Josiah turns to Philena, putting his hand on her
shoulder. He leans in and whispers to her.

Philena bites her lip.

PHILENA
Brothers and sisters of the Church,
I have sinned and I repent of those
sins. And I ask for your prayers
that I be a better Christian.

CONGREGATION
Amen.

Philena holds the microphone, her lip quivers and tears
stream down her face.

Rev. Josiah attempts to take the microphone; however Philena
continues to hold the microphone.

PHILENA

I also want to ask for prayers for
a situation that I'm going
through. That the people...

Rev. Josiah shakes his head and snatches the microphone
away.

REV. JOSIAH TURNER

Sister Shiloh, we will be praying
for you and your situation. You
may have a seat. Amen. Let us say
amen.

CONGREGATION

Amen.

Philena stands very still for a moment.

Rev. Josiah taps her shoulder and gently shoves her back to
the pew.

Philena stumbles slightly, regaining her composure quickly.

REV. JOSIAH TURNER

Let's everyone stand and join
hands.

Everyone stands up, but no one grabs Philena's hand.

CUT TO:

INT. CHURCH NURSERY-

Rachel and Darrel Jr play with toys.

RACHEL

Now Darrel, auntie Rachel wants you
to be very good okay.

DARREL JR.

Where's mommy?

Darrel throws a ball to Rachel.

RACHEL

She's in the auditorium. She'll be
back. Just be a good boy for your
mommy and me.

DARREL JR.
Okay, auntie Rachel. I will.

RACHEL
Shhhhh!!

Rachel turns the intercom on.

CUT TO:

INT. AUDITORIUM IN CHURCH- MINUTES LATER

Philena has returned a pew in the middle of the auditorium, struggling to quietly blow her nose.

Darrel sits next to Philena while Janet walks out of the auditorium.

Silas stays seated at the front of the auditorium.

CUT TO:

EXT. BACK PARKING LOT

Brenda walks behind Regina who is smoking a cigarette.

She sits down on the wooden bench.

Regina turns around, taking a drag on her cigarette and scowls.

REGINA
What do you want?

BRENDA
When you said earlier that Silas
was my gay boyfriend, what did you
mean by that?

Regina puffs on her drag, then drops the cigarette on the ground, crushing it with her foot.

She fumbles in her purse, popping a mint in her mouth.

REGINA
Look, Brenda. We've never liked
each other. I don't care what you
and Silas do, so long as you don't
mess with me, my man, and my son.

BRENDA

What the hell does that have to do with me and Silas? And Darrel is not your man. He's still married to...

REGINA

Married to Janet. Yes, I know. Small technicality when you think about our history.

CUT TO:

FLASHBACK

INT. AUDITORIUM IN CHURCH- NIGHT 2 YEARS EARLIER

Silas and Darrel, dressed in tuxedos, stand at the altar.

Hundreds of people file in the auditorium, filling the pews, chattering, an organ softly playing "At Last".

Rev. Josiah walks up to the altar, shakeing Silas' hand and hugging Darrel.

REV. JOSIAH TURNER

You ready Darrel? Big moment.

DARREL

I'm nervous, but happy. Been waiting for this day for a minute.

Silas chuckles, slapping Darrel on the back.

SILAS

Man, you ought to be more nervous about your baby mama. She's here you know.

Darrel's smile turns to a frown.

DARREL

Yeah, I know.

Rev. Josiah tilts his head and Silas whispers to Darrel.

They step off the podium.

CUT TO:

INT. CHURCH LADIES ROOM- NIGHT

Regina stands at the counter crying.

Brenda walks in with a few other women.

BRENDA

Regina, is that you?

Everyone laughs.

BRENDA

Well, we know it's you. The only
bright spot in this place tonight.

There is more laughter. The other women file out of the
bathroom.

Regina wipes her eyes, washing her face.

REGINA

This isn't funny Brenda. How can
he marry her? I love him. Dammit,
I am the mother of his
son. Doesn't that mean anything to
him?

Brenda wraps her arms around Regina.

BRENDA

You know me and Silas tried to warn
you he's a playa. You know he just
marryin' her for show, girl. Stop
cryin' and get it together girl.

Regina hugs Brenda tightly.

REGINA

Yeah, you and Silas did try to tell
me about Darrel. But we were just
together two nights ago. You
remember?

BRENDA

Look girl, I'm probably the only
friend you got in this church for
real. You've got to let him
go. Let him do his thing with
Janet.

Regina pulls away from Brenda.

REGINA
I have to stop this wedding. He
cannot marry her.

Regina bursts through the door.

CUT TO:

INT. CHURCH FOYER- NIGHT

Regina runs through the hallway toward the foyer.

Voices quietly murmur in the background.

Regina passes by an empty classroom with the door slightly ajar.

Silas and Rev. Josiah are embracing each other.

Regina stands in the doorway corner, leaning forward slightly to peek in.

SILAS (O.S.)
Weddings make me so horny, god, I
just want to fuck you so bad.

Silas kisses Rev. Josiah and bends down to his crotch.

Regina throws her hands to her mouth, muffling a giggle.

Rev. Josiah backs away from Silas, Silas stands up.

REV. JOSIAH TURNER (O.S)
It's not safe man. Not right now.

Rev. Josiah kisses Silas on the forehead.

Regina peeks in a little further, making a tiny noise with the door. Snap. Click. Regina shoves something in her clutch.

Rev. Josiah and Silas look at each other.

Rev. Josiah heads for the door, but sees no one in sight. He shuts the door.

CUT TO:

INT. AUDITORIUM IN CHURCH- NIGHT

Regina slips onto a back pew.

Silas heads back onto the pulpit, next to Darrel.

The "Wedding March" begins.

Rev. Josiah walks down the aisle to the pulpit. He raises his hands for everyone to stand.

Janet walks alone down the aisle to the pulpit, joining a smiling Darrel as he reaches out for her hands.

WHITE OUT:

EXT. BACK PARKING LOT- MINUTES LATER

Regina takes a drag on another cigarette. She crushes the cigarette butt under her black heels.

Brenda cries with her hands covering her mouth.

Regina hands her a tissue.

BRENDA

He's gay? Oh my god.

Regina shrugs her shoulders.

REGINA

I'm just telling you what I saw. I never told you because, well honestly, I hated you didn't stop this shit with Darrel and Janet.

BRENDA

(blowing her nose)

How the hell was I supposed to stop Darrel from being with Janet?

REGINA

I...I don't know.

Regina shrugs her shoulders, slipping another a cigarette into her mouth. She takes a long puff on the cigarette.

BRENDA

You saw them kiss? You saw Rev. Turner and my Silas kiss each other?

Regina takes two more drags on the cigarette before stomping out her cigarette, popping another mint in her mouth.

Brenda stands up, pacing back and forth.

REGINA (O.S.)

Look, they were kissing, your boy was talking about what he wanted to do Rev. Turner. There's no mistaking it, he's gay, bi, on the down low, whatever.

Brenda stops, staring directly at Regina.

BRENDA

What about Rev. Turner?

REGINA

What about him?

Regina stands up grabbing her purse in one hand and Brenda's arm in the other.

REGINA

A reverend, a minister, preacher, whatever can be gay too. He's still just a man. Look, just hold your peace until the vote later, okay!

They walk arm and arm back into the building.

CUT TO:

INT. AUDITORIUM IN CHURCH- MINUTES LATER

Brenda and Regina walk into the nursery.

Darrel Jr. runs to Regina.

RACHEL

Hey, girl, have you been crying?

Rachel turns to Regina.

RACHEL

Lookahere, you can't be messing with my cousin. Ey, Brenda, do I need to take this outside for you?

Regina bends to Darrel Jr., patting his back gently shoving him over to the other side of the nursery to play.

Brenda sits down, composed, but breaks into an uncontrollable sobbing fit, rocking back and forth.

Rachel rushes by her, grabbing the tissue box from the changing table.

BRENDA
(muffled)
Oh god, oh my god. I could have
AIDS. I'm going to kill him!

Regina sits down on the other side of Brenda.

The door opens and A LADY, overweight, early 20's walks in with a crying baby.

A LADY
Is everything okay?

RACHEL
No.

REGINA
Yes.

The Lady bounces her baby in her arms, walking over to the trio. She stands in front of Brenda.

A LADY
Sister Washington. Hey, are you
okay?

Brenda shakes her head from side to side.

The Lady squats down, laying her baby on her knees, peering at Brenda's mascara stained face.

The baby shrieks loudly.

REGINA (O.S.)
Ain't no show over here. Why don't
you take your baby and do whatever
you came in here to do. Okay.

The Lady struggles to get up. A loud rip tears through her dress. Standing up, the Lady walks off to the bathroom.

A LADY (O.S.)
(muttering)
Damn, now I got to take this
stockings off. My legs are real
ashy too.

REGINA

That's why you don't get in someone else's business.

Rachel laughs loudly.

Brenda cracks a smile.

RACHEL (O.S.)

Didn't know you had that type of soul Regina.

(snaps her fingers and rolls her head)

But on the real, what is up?

BRENDA

Silas is gay.

RACHEL

What the hell? You are fucking kidding me? No he's not.

(looks upward, crosses her fingers over her heart, whispers) Forgive me Lord Jesus, you know I know I'm in your house. Cain't be talking like that up in here.

Regina runs her hands through her hair, shushing Rachel, pointing at Darrel Jr.

Brenda breaks down in sobs again.

Rachel pats her back and looks at Regina.

Regina motions Rachel to head to the door.

REGINA

Brenda, just stay here with Darrel Jr. Anyone comes in here, don't open your mouth until Rachel and I get back.

BRENDA

Alright.

CUT TO:

EXT. BACK PARKING LOT- MID AFTERNOON

Regina and Rachel walk outside, whispering and nodding their heads.

Rachel takes out her cell phone and taps furiously.

INSERT: TEXT MESSAGE..LENA, COME OUT HERE TO THE BACK PARKING LOT, NOW!

CUT TO:

INT. AUDITORIUM IN CHURCH- DAY

Buzz. Buzz.

Darrel reaches for his phone, turns it off. He nudges Philena.

Philena reaches into her purse, silencing the phone.

Silence covers the congregation as eight men stand at the pulpit with silver trays in their hands.

Mack prays a lengthy prayer.

CONGREGATION

Amen.

The men divide themselves among the pews while people are feverishly writing checks, digging in their purses, pulling out wads of bills.

Philena digs in her purse, opening her cell phone and reading the text message.

Slowly she arises, Darrel grimacing under his breath.

Yanking her purse, Philena rushes toward the back door.

A man stops, grunting, pointing to Philena's purse. Quickly, she throws a twenty dollar bill into the silver tray.

Darrel strains looking backward, catching Silas staring at the sunlight peeking through the cracked door.

CUT TO:

EXT. BACK PARKING LOT- SECONDS LATER

Creak. The door opens, revealing Rachel and Regina talking on the bench. They look up at Philena shoving money back into her wallet.

RACHEL

Lena, we've got to talk real quick.

Regina pulls Philena to the bench.

PHILENA

I didn't tell him I'm pregnant, if that's what y'all worried about. Just made a confession, feel a lot better.

REGINA

Lena, it goes beyond that. Just sit down and listen for a second.

CUT TO:

INT. CHURCH NURSERY-

Brenda beckons to Darrel Jr. and she grabs him, hugging him tightly. Regina, Rachel, and Philena slip back into the nursery. Darrel Jr. stretches his arms toward Regina.

REGINA

Show time, ladies. Show time.

Brenda lowers her head and follows the other women out into the auditorium.

RACHEL

At the Apollo, man. This is going to be good.

CUT TO:

INT. AUDITORIUM IN CHURCH- MID AFTERNOON

Mack nestles himself on the pew behind the pulpit.

Regina, with Darrel Jr. in tow, Rachel, Philena, and Brenda file into the auditorium, taking the seats left empty at the front.

Rev. Josiah straightens out his suit, while Dee places his robe on.

There is the faint sound of babies crying in background.

A few of the men that passed the trays are now hunched over, pulling tables and majestic chairs to the front. Mack hobbles down from the pulpit in a sweat to assist.

MACK

Can we get some assistance over here? Some of you young men can stand up and let us old men take a rest.

Silas rubs his legs and stands up.

Darrel scratches his head and saunters toward the front, meeting up with Silas. He catches a glimpse of Regina and Darrel Jr.

DARREL JR.

Daddy! Daddy!

Nervous laughter shatters through the crowd.

Regina quiets Darrel Jr. down.

Philena whispers to Rachel, who stifles her laughter.

Brenda leans over, excusing herself past Philena and Rachel. Regina stops her.

REGINA

Where are you going?

Regina yanks Brenda's arm, pulling her to the pew.

BRENDA

I can't be here with him right now. I just..I just can't.

Regina shakes her head, whispers to Brenda, wrapping her arms around Brenda.

Silas checks out Brenda leaning on Regina's arm. He catches Darrel by the arm.

They slide another table over.

MACK

Thank you brethern.

Silas snatches a gavel from off the pulpit and places it on the table.

Darrel interlaces his arm with Dee Turner while Silas pulls Rev. Josiah's seat out for him.

Rev. Josiah smiles at Silas and Dee. Darrel kisses Dee's hand and she sits down.

Silas stands behind the chair, hands behind his back. Darrel matches him, staring into Philena's eyes first, then Janet's.

Regina looks behind her to see Janet crossing her arms, smirking. She whispers to Regina.

JANET

Whatcha got now, Regina?

Regina snaps her head back, her blond hair whipping around her shoulders.

Rev. Josiah bangs the gavel on the table. Immediate silence slides across the auditorium.

Mack squats beside Rev. Josiah, grabbing a bottle of water, placing it on the table.

REV. JOSIAH TURNER

Amen. We've got some business to attend to. Right now, if you are not an active member here, please do not make any statements at this time.

JANET

Amen.

CONGREGATION

Amen.

Rev. Josiah bangs the gavel once more.

Looking to Josiah, Dee places a headset around her head.

DEE

We have two young men desiring the office of a deacon this morning. Silas Pointer and Darrel James.

Darrel and Silas step forward, standing in front of the audience.

DEE

We must also consider that the office of a deacon is not solitary. With that in mind, Janet, Brenda, please come on up here.

Janet struts down the aisle to Darrel, grabbing his shaky hand. He rubs his head.

JANET

(whispering)

You okay, baby?

DARREL

(mumbling)

Yeah, Janet, yeah, I'm fine. Wasn't expecting you to get up today, that's all.

Brenda's eyes glazed from tears, shutters as Regina calmly stands up with her and walks down the aisle.

Philena twitches in her seat while Rachel stares blankly at Brenda and Regina walking before the crowd.

The congregation mutters in disbelief.

Mack waddles down from behind the pulpit and stands face to face with Regina.

Silas pulls Brenda to his side, reluctantly, she forces a smile as he kisses her gently on the cheek.

Mack attempts to usher Regina back to her seat but Regina steadfastly remains still in front of Mack.

MACK

Umm, you're not a member here, are you, Ms. Snow?

Allowing her blond layers to sweep across her shoulder blades, Regina shrugs silently.

MACK

Then please take a seat. We got food in the back, and this don't need to take long.

CONGREGATION

Amen. Tell it brother.

Silas chuckles, digging his fingernails into the Brenda's palm. Brenda squirms, easing her hand away from his, grimacing.

SILAS (O.S.)
 (almost inaudible)
 She's trying to mess up this vote.
 Can you believe this woman?

Silas slides his arm around Brenda's waist, pulling her close to him.

Brenda shakes her head, nodding.

REGINA
 If I may, Rev. Tuner, I would like
 the opportunity to say something on
 behalf of Bro. Darrel James, since
 he is my son's father.

A huge gasp overcomes the congregation. Rustling of pages turning whisper through the crowd. Dee wiggles around in her seat, straining her ear toward Rev. Josiah.

REV. JOSIAH TURNER
 Brother, go ahead and sit
 down. Let Ms. Snow speak.

Murmurs rumble amid the first pews around Regina. Regina gathers her composure and smiles at Brenda who is biting her lip.

Darrel clasps Janet's hand tightly. Janet grits her teeth, breathing heavily. Janet whispers to Darrel who then grabs a chair.

Series of Shots:

Darrel bends over to Rev. Josiah, speaking to him behind a piece of paper.

Rev. Josiah grabs Silas and Darrel, heading into a side hallway; returning with four more chairs.

Brenda grabs the chair next to Janet and sits down. Darrel and Silas sit on the other side of Dee.

Mack waddles his way back to the pulpit, sitting down and leaning forward with a Bible in his hand.

REV. JOSIAH TURNER
 Ms. Snow, you have the floor.

Rev. Josiah snatches his gavel, waving it around slyly.

Laughter like the spread of an infectious disease lingers in the auditorium.

Regina clears her throat and turns toward the congregation.

REGINA

Actually, it is Sister
Snow. Darrel convinced me some
years ago to get baptized.

Regina cocks her head to the side, slanting her eyes at Rev. Josiah.

REGINA

Long before you became the
minister, Rev. Turner.

RANDOM FEMALE VOICE

Amen. Amen.

Darrel sits straight up in his seat next to Silas. Silas maintains a slight scowl on his face. Janet frowns and grunts quietly.

Regina shakes her long blond hair and paces back and forth. She stops, standing in front of Janet.

Janet's frown slowly changes to a nervous smile.

REGINA

I want to make clear why I am
before you all. I believe that
when you all are looking for a man
to serve, you need someone who can
also lead.

MACK O.S.

Amen, sister. You sho' right about
that.

The murmuring continues throughout the audience. Dee yanks the gavel and bangs it on the table.

DEE

Look, Ms.. uh I mean Sister
Snow. We...
(pointing to Rev. Josiah)
are the the spiritual elders
of this flock. Now, we need to
continue with the vote if you don't
mind?

Brenda rubs her forehead, tears streaming down her face. Dee passes a tissue box to Brenda. Janet stretches her arm around Brenda, smirking at Regina.

Rev. Josiah tilts his head to the pulpit and snaps his fingers. Mack hurries down the steps, reaching for a microphone.

Dee and Regina stare at each other viciously. Darrel Jr.'s hushed voice peaks the attention of Darrel, who motions for him to come over. Darrel Jr. happily plunks himself down on Darrel's lap.

Mack stands firmly in front of Regina.

REGINA

So that's it, I don't really have a say in this, do I?

Nervous laughter seeps out across the audience.

Regina flips her hair and reaches for Darrel Jr.'s hand. Darrel Jr. reluctantly hops down from Darrel's lap, clutching Regina's hand.

CUT TO:

EXT. FRONT PARKING LOT- MINUTES LATER

Regina struggles with her keys to her cherry red Honda Accord. Darrel Jr. runs back to the front door. Philena catches him and carries him over to Regina.

PHILENA

I thought you were going to stop the vote.

Regina grabs Darrel Jr.'s hand and shakes her head. The car alarm sounds and Regina presses her keys to shut it off. She opens the car door and Darrel Jr. climbs inside to the back seat.

REGINA

What am I supposed to do, huh? They're not going to take me seriously. And Brenda isn't going to leave Silas or stand up for herself.

Regina bends over into the car, shuffling papers.

PHILENA

So, that's it? You're not going to stop it?

Regina straps Darrel Jr in the backseat, shutting the passenger door. She stomps over to the driver's door, her hair blowing in the wind. Philena slams her hand on the hood of the car.

PHILENA

You can't do this, Regina. I can't stop it. No one will listen to me.

Philena balls her fist, her face turns beat red. She trembles and cries.

Regina walks over to Philena, handing her a manila envelope. Philena peaks inside the envelope, her eyes widening and her mouth slowly falling open. She puts her hand over her mouth, shaking her head. The envelope falls to the ground.

The wind picks up, blowing the envelope away from Philena. Regina quickly recovers the envelope, placing it firmly in Philena's hands.

Regina hugs Philena, whispering something in her ear. Philena holds the envelope close to her chest and watches as Regina slips into her car, pulling the door closed.

Regina speeds off, onto the main street. Philena's gaze trails off toward the church building.

CUT TO:

INT. AUDITORIUM IN CHURCH- MINUTES LATER

Rachel, standing at the open foyer door, beckons for Philena as she hurries inside.

Philena stands at the walks to the auditorium door with Rachel, stifling a cough as they peer at the chaos inside the auditorium.

RACHEL

Where's Regina?

Philena puts the envelope over her mouth.

RACHEL

Oh..my..god! Lemme, see, girl.

Philena shoves Rachel, while Rachel snatches the envelope. Philena grabs it back and slithers into the auditorium. Rachel quietly follows her.

Rev. Josiah bangs his gavel furiously. Dee shrugs her shoulders. Mack puts his lips together, whistling loudly.

MACK

We need to cut this out now. Ms.
Snow is gone, we can continue with
the vote.

Mack plops down on the front pew. Darrel stands up, Janet in hand. He reaches for the microphone. Silas nudges Brenda.

SILAS

Wonder what he's going to say now?

Brenda scoots her chair away from Silas, crossing her legs, her eyes scanning the congregation. Philena and Rachel, still sitting at the back of the audience, make their way toward the front pews, retrieving their purses.

INSERT: THE ENVELOPE, IMPORTANT WRITTEN ON THE FRONT.

Darrel squeezes Janet's hand for a moment, rolling his eyes as he meets Philena at her seat.

Rachel slides next to Brenda. Silas taps Rachel on the knee, clicking his teeth, mouthing words with no audible sound coming forth.

A hush drapes the congregation as Rev. Josiah manages to control the chaos.

Darrel tilts his head toward a side door and back at Philena. Philena follows Darrel into the side hallway, closing the door behind them. Janet's shoulders droop as she slumps back into a chair, shaking her head. Dee turns around, stretching her hand to Janet's lap.

REV. JOSIAH TURNER

The brother is right, now.
(clearing his throat)
Behind each pew is a set of orange
index card.

Several members reach forward and flip through the index cards.

REV. JOSIAH TUNER (O.S.)
 As you can see the cards have
 Brother Pointer and Brother James
 and yes box or no box. It's real
 simple.

The orange cards are being passed down the pews. Mack passes a handful of cards to Dee. She places two on the table in front of her, and hands the remaining cards to Janet.

Janet takes the cards, gets up and passes them to Silas. Silas takes a card, pulling a pen from his pocket, picking a Bible off the floor. Brenda pulls the last two cards from underneath Silas' Bible.

INSERT: SILAS' INDEX CARD, MARKED YES FOR SILAS, YES FOR DARREL

RANDOM FEMALE VOICE
 Rev. Turner, when we're done,
 we...?

The random female's hand goes up, a pink sleeve falls down her brown arm, while her aged-spotted hand waves the orange card high in the air.

Rev. Josiah walks to her, grabbing it. He looks at it, smiling and walks back to his table, placing it face down. Rev. Josiah leans over to Mack.

REV. JOSIAH TURNER
 The ushers are on stand-by. Just
 hold your hand up like the good
 sister just did, and they will pass
 the collection plates around.

A flurry of hands raise in the air. Several men, in black and blue suits, silver collection plates in hand, walk up and down the isles.

CUT TO:

INT. SIDE HALLWAY- SIMULTANEOUSLY

Darrel presses his full body weight against Philena, kissing her neck.

Philena pushes him back, firmly gripping the envelope. Darrel leans against Philena again, sliding one leg between Philena's legs, rubbing his hand from her thigh to her waist.

DARREL

What's in the envelope, baby?

Philena surrenders to a kiss Darrel plants squarely on her lips, still holding the envelope.

Darrel attempts to snatch the envelope, Philena pushes back.

Tap, Tap, Tap. Footsteps grow closer to the hallway.

CUT TO:

INT. FAR END OF HALLWAY- SIMULTANEOUSLY

Janet quietly stomps toward the opposite hallway entrance. As she nears entrance, voices become clearer. She stops, taking off her black stilettos, creeping closer to the entrance. Janet peaks around the corner, thumping her shoes in her hands.

Philena lets the envelope slip out of her hands. Darrel immediately stops kissing Philena and bends down, picking up the envelope. Philena attempts snatching the envelope from Darrel but Darrel pulls it to his chest.

PHILENA

Shit. Gimme that.

Darrel laughs and thumps the envelope against his palm.

DARREL

You're gonna play right into
Regina's hands. Damn, girl. I
thought we were better than that.

Philena plays tug of war with Darrel for the envelope. Philena tries unsuccessfully to rip the envelope away from Darrel, tripping over his foot, and falling down.

Janet laughs softly, and ducks behind the wall. Philena manages to get up with Darrel's help.

PHILENA

Just give it back to me. Please
Darrel.

Darrel turns away from Philena and walks down the hallway. He stop and leans against the wall, peaking inside the envelope.

Janet's shadow sneaks past the wall, exiting the hallway.

DARREL
(muttering to himself)
Oh shit!

Darrel takes off running down the hallway. Philena, tripping over her shoes, falls down again, this time ripping her skirt slightly.

PHILENA
Darrel, wait. I'm pregnant.

CUT TO:

INT.CHURCH FOYER- MOMENTS LATER

Darrel catches Janet by the arm.

JANET
Let me go, you son of a ...ugh. It
doesn't even matter.

Janet pulls away from Darrel. Standing in front of him, Janet wipes a tear from her eye. Darrel puts the envelope down onto the table and gets down on one knee, pulling Janet close to him.

DARREL
I'm sorry, baby. I'm sorry. She
doesn't mean anything to
me. Nothing.

Janet kicks Darrel in the groin. He groans, kneeling over before getting to his feet. Janet takes the envelope off the table, looking inside. She gasps, her eye bulging widely.

JANET
Oh my god.

Janet flings the foyer door open, stomping inside.

CUT TO:

INT. AUDITORIUM - MOMENTS LATER

Rev. Josiah and Mack stand in front of the congregation. There are two men still collecting orange index cards, while three men are sitting next to Dee Turner counting the cards, separating them in piles of yes and no.

JANET (O.S.)
 (screaming)
 Stop the vote. Stop this damn vote
 now.

The entire congregation falls dead silent. The men look up from counting. Silas stands up and Rev. Josiah motions for Mack to shut all the doors.

Darrel stumbles inside the foyer. Mack hurries over and shuts the door behind him.

Janet marches to the front of the auditorium. Philena glides back into the auditorium, sprinting over to Rachel and Brenda. She squats down and moves her hands erratically. One of the ushers grabs a chair and motions for Philena to sit down. Philena shakes her head, standing as Janet walks directly toward Philena.

REV. JOSIAH TURNER
 Janet, what is the meaning of this?

Janet scowls at Rev. Josiah but says nothing. She continues to stand in front of Philena staring at her wickedly. Philena crosses her arms, then uncrosses them, stretching her hand toward the envelope. Janet smirks and laughs wickedly.

Rachel reaches in her purse, unwrapping a ball of tissue.

INSERT: EPT STICK PREGNANCY SIGN STILL VISIBLE

Brenda reaches for the stick and shakes her head, tossing it back in Rachel's lap.

Rev. Josiah grabs Janet's arm.

REV. JOSIAH TURNER
 I need to know what this is all to
 about Janet.

Rev. Josiah walks over to Janet, turning slightly to Dee. Dee gets up and walks to the other side of Janet. Rachel stands up, EPT stick in hand. Janet wiggles herself away from Rev. Josiah's arm.

BRENDA (O.S.)
 (almost in a whisper)
 Janet.

Darrel comes up behind Janet, she turns around and slaps his face.

SILAS (O.S.)

Damn.

Pandemonium erupts throughout the audience. Silas puts a fist over his mouth, laughing.

SILAS

(to Brenda)

I knew this was gonna go down. And where is Regina? All she came to do was bust this up.

He shrugs his shoulder, smirking slyly.

SILAS

It's too late anyhow, the votes are in.

Mack comes over and restrains Janet. Rev. Josiah pulls Darrel off to the side. Darrel shakes his head and lowers his head as Rev. Josiah quietly fusses at him.

Dee returns to the table, banging the gavel. The congregation falls silent once more.

Rachel walks up to Philena, nudging her. Philena, frozen, stares into the sea of faces. She looks at Rachel's hand, sighing heavily.

RACHEL

(in Philena's ear)

Tell 'em. You've gotta tell 'em.

Philena takes the test from Rachel's hand. Janet holds to the envelope. Mack tries to wiggle it from her grasp, but Janet turns around and pulls one of the pictures out. Mack backs up from Janet.

PHILENA

I'm pregnant, Janet. With Darrel's baby.

Janet drops the envelope from her hands. Mack attempts to grab the envelope but Rachel places her shoe on top of it, reaching for it instead.

Pandemonium breaks out again. Dee bangs the gavel continuously. Rev. Josiah pushes Darrel toward the front of the audience.

REV. JOSIAH TURNER

Philena, this is not the time for childish pranks. And this is not

(MORE)

REV. JOSIAH TURNER
the time to deal with this issue,
if it's true.

Rachel hands the envelope back to Philena.

INSERT: PHOTO OF SILAS AND REV. JOSIAH IN HEATED EMBRACE

PHILENA
How dare you, Rev. Turner. How dare
you judge me. How dare any of you
judge me.

Philena holds up the picture of Silas and Rev. Josiah.

RANDOM FEMALE VOICE
Oh lord, have mercy.

Rev. Josiah reaches for the photograph but Philena pulls it
back. Silas walks forward, snatching the photograph from
Philena's hand.

Dee bangs the gavel again, sobbing.

REV. JOSIAH TUNER
(stuttering)
I, uh, uh, look y'all, this ain't
what it seems to be. This is a
fake.

Janet shakes her head as Darrel once again tries to come
near her. Janet crosses her arms, spitting at Darrel's
shoes. He looks down, grunting.

JANET
Don't you ever come near me. You go
be with your ho.

Janet turns around to Philena, smirking.

JANET
And don't worry Philena about your
baby being lonely. I'm already
through my first trimester. So
we'll be seeing a lot of each
other.

Janet pats her stomach, turning around to the congregation.

JANET
In court.

Janet stomps out of the auditorium, amid several women getting up following her outside. Darrel stands dumbfounded.

Dee bangs the gavel a final time. She grabs a microphone from off the pulpit.

DEE

I need everyone to quiet down. I need everyone to take a seat. Now!

People scurry around the auditorium. Rev. Josiah takes the microphone from Dee. Dee snatches it back. Rachel moves toward Philena, wrapping her arms around her stiff body.

Darrel slumps down on the front pew, his head buried in his hands. Mack sits next to him, rubbing his face with a handkerchief. Philena tosses the remaining photos across the table behind her. Rachel stares at Brenda, who gets up from her seat next to Silas, joining Philena at her side.

Silas reaches after Brenda. Brenda looks at him quizzically, and then turns around.

DEE

I want to address the issues Sis. Shiloh just presented to us. Brother, shut the doors, Sis. James can hear us in the foyer.

CUT TO:

INT. CHURCH FOYER- SIMULTANEOUSLY

Several ladies in church formal attire with huge, feathered hats, crowd around Janet as she cries. A flurry of handkerchiefs fly around Janet. She grabs one from a LADY in a bright orange suit, with matching bright orange hat.

Mack peers through the window in the door as he point upward to the intercom, then shuts the door. The Lady stands on a black step-stool and presses the button on a 21 inch flat screen monitor.

The screen comes on and the inside of the auditorium is shown clearly. Dee Turner has the microphone, while Darrel is sitting, head buried in his hands.

The Lady steps down off the step-stool and makes her way back to Janet; leading her to the couch in the foyer, directly across from the monitor. Janet sits down, cradling her stomach while the group of ladies disperse, scurrying to find a place to sit.

CUT TO:

INT. AUDITORIUM - MOMENTS LATER

Rev. Josiah grabs his headset microphone and place it in his ear.

REV. JOSIAH TURNER
(blowing into the drop-down
microphone piece)
Testing, 1, 2..testing.

The entire congregation falls silent. Silas stands beside Brenda but she shoves him away. Dee stares blankly at Rev. Josiah as he continues to blow into the microphone.

Darrel frowns as he looks at Silas staring at the photograph.

REV. JOSIAH TURNER
I can explain. That is not what it
looks like.

Rev. Josiah shakes his head, licking his lips and clicking his teeth.

Silas, startled, hands the picture to Rev. Josiah. Turning to Brenda he mouths something nearly inaudible.

SILAS
I'm so sorry, Brenda. I'm so
sorry.

Brenda breaks down crying uncontrollably. Mack stomps over and sits next to her with a box of tissue. Brenda takes a few, loudly blowing her nose, and then regains her composure.

Rachel sits down on the other side of Brenda, while Philena on the other hand sits down next to Darrel. Darrel reaches for her hand, which she allows him to grab.

CUT TO:

INT. CHURCH FOYER- SIMULTANEOUSLY

Janet mutters profanities as she watches the monitor screen showing Darrel and Philena holding hands. The Lady in orange shakes her head, stroking her arm with a mother's touch.

Several other ladies whisper amongst themselves, two non-descript ladies shuffle to the restroom, while more ladies pass around fans and fan themselves.

Janet takes out her cell phone, tapping furiously.

INSERT: CELL PHONE SCREEN MESSAGE: WHY THE HELL DID YOU DO THIS? MESSAGE TO: REGINA SNOW

CUT TO:

INT. AUDITORIUM - MOMENTS LATER

Silas stands next to Rev. Josiah as the audience awaits Dee's next move. Dee scratches her head as she lifts the microphone to her mouth.

DEE

Not what it looks like, huh?

Silas turns to Rev. Josiah and shrugs his shoulders.

SILAS

We were drunk one night, things got way out of control. It was before you guys were married and...

The auditorium rumbles with gasps and whispers.

CUT TO:

INT. CHURCH FOYER- SIMULTANEOUSLY

The Lady in Orange shakes her head.

LADY IN ORANGE

(to Janet)

Be glad that isn't you right there. All you got to worry about is Darrel taking care of your child. Trust me, he won't let you go. You hear me.

Janet, mesmerized by the monitor, never turns to the Lady in orange, only nods her head. The Lady in Orange opens her mouth as if she intends continuing her pep talk; however Janet scoots away from the Lady on the couch.

LADY IN ORANGE

(shaking her head vigorously and scowling)

(MORE)

LADY IN ORANGE
 Well, I'll be. Ain't this
 something? Goin' get an attitude
 with me. Girl, do you know how many
 people are laughing at you right
 now?

Janet's eyes slowly leave the monitor.

JANET
 I'm sorry, I just want to hear
 this.

Janet turns back to the monitor. The Lady in Orange waves a fan nonchalantly.

CUT TO:

INT. AUDITORIUM - MOMENTS LATER

Bang. Bang. Bang. The gavel pounds the table behind
 Dee. Silas, sheepishly anxious, nervously rubs his head
 while Rev. Josiah gets on a bended knee.

REV. JOSIAH TURNER
 You know I would never hurt you,
 you are the love of my life.

Dee tosses the gavel onto the pew in front of her, squarely
 missing Rev. Josiah's head. He ducks to the side, rising up
 with his hands on his knee.

REV. JOSIAH TURNER
 We can handle anything with God's
 help. We need to do this later..at
 home.

Silas scratches his head and he grabs the envelope full of
 pictures off the table. He flips through them and stops
 pensively at the last picture.

INSERT: 8X10 PHOTOGRAPH OF SILAS AND REV. JOSIAH AT LUNCH AT
 A LOCAL BISTRO, THE TWO SMILING TENDERLY AS REV. JOSIAH
 HOLDS SILAS' HAND.

Silas tosses the pictures onto the pew, waving his arms in
 the air.

SILAS
 This ain't right, man. This ain't
 right. Who took these?

Rev. Josiah rolls his eyes at Silas, steadily gazing at Dee.

DEE

No, Silas, it ain't right. Obviously the vote is invalid. A cheating dog can't conduct the deacon search, can he?

(Dee pauses, facing the audience as she points to Silas and Darrel.)

DEE

Neither one of you can be deacons, not in the least. This whole thing... it's been a sham.

The Older Gentleman wipes his face with a handkerchief, shaking his head. He grabs a microphone from a stand and blows on it.

OLDER GENTLEMAN

Just an abomination, that's what this is. I knew getting one of these prime time preachers was wrong. Just wrong.

Dee rolls her eyes, frowning.

DEE

A man of God, cheating on his wife. Sin and a shame is what it is.

(to Rev. Josiah)

How could you do this to me?

CONGREGATION

Amen!Amen!

Rev. Josiah faces the congregation, and weeps silently. Darrel bows his head, also shedding a tear. Silas, facing the congregation, solemnly stops fidgeting.

SILAS

I'm sorry, church. I am. I've struggled for so many years with this. I'm so sorry Brenda. So sorry.

Brenda walks over to Dee and takes the microphone. She then drops the microphone. A loud squealing sound shrieks through the audience until Silas picks the microphone off the floor.

Dee turns her attention back to Rev. Josiah who is wiping his eyes and sniffing.

DEE

I thought I married a man of
God. But apparently, you ain't
even a man.

Nervous laughter erupts from among the audience
members. Dee quickly fires back.

DEE

This ain't no laughin' matter. Our
minister
(pointing directly at Rev.
Josiah)
our minister is gay and living a
lie. A lie! A lie!

Dee hysterically repeats herself and shrieks
uncontrollably. The Stately Gentleman saunters from the
back to help Dee to a seat in the back of the auditorium.

Rev. Josiah whips off the headset microphone and picks up
the other microphone. As he opens his mouth, various
members get up and walk out.

REV. JOSIAH TURNER

Wait a minute, y'all. I'm not
gay, I'm not a homosexual. This was
before my conversion. I don't even
know where these pictures came
from!

More people walk out while Rev. Josiah is talking. Janet
pushes her way through a small crowd of people walking out
to walk back inside to the front pew. She takes out her
cell phone.

JANET

According to Darrel's baby mama,
all but two of those pictures were
from my wedding rehearsal dinner,
my wedding, and the bachelor party
you threw for Darrel.

The people rushing out of the auditorium stop at the
door. A silence falls over the crowd. Janet snatches the
microphone from Rev. Josiah.

JANET

Evidently, you got sloppy hidin'
your bisexuality..I don't know.

Darrel lets go of Philena's hand and rips the microphone from Janet's hands. She slaps him, without hesitation. Darrel slaps her back. Janet, stunned by the force of slap, stumbles backward.

Philena jumps up from her seat, screaming.

PHILENA

STOP IT! Just stop it. I didn't want any of this to happen. I'm sorry Janet, I really am.

Janet struggles to her feet, standing in front of Philena. She raises her hand in a fist, but then drops her arm to her side.

JANET

Regina's right. This is sick. But you know what, you the last person that needs to stay anything, you stupid little ho. I know what you did last night.

Janet waves her cell phone in Philena's face.

INSERT: TEXT MESSAGE PICTURE: DARREL AND PHILENA IN A HEATED EMBRACE

PHILENA

Oh god, Darrel, how could you? You said it was between us. You told me no one else would know. How could you tell Regina of all people?

Darrel straightens his tie and pops his neck. Silas cracks a smile as he watches Darrel take Janet's phone, intently staring at the screen. Janet takes the phone back from Darrel and smirks.

JANET

Yeah, your girl sent me a text. Seems like you think you can be a playa, playa.

Philena grabs her purse from off the floor. She stands directly in front of Darrel and Janet, taking off a necklace with a charm heart and dropping it. She rubs her hands over her ring finger, slipping off the diamond ring, throwing it down.

PHILENA

You know what, Janet, I don't want him. I can do better all by

(MORE)

PHILENA
 myself, for real. You need him more
 than I do. I'll be alright without
 him.

Philena stomps the necklace and walks off toward the
 foyer. Brenda and Rachel run after her as Silas goes over
 to Rev. Josiah.

Janet looks at her wedding ring, massaging it with her right
 hand. She yanks it off her finger, takes Darrel's hand and
 places it firmly in his palm. He looks down, eyes bugged
 out.

DARREL
 No, baby, don't. You're having my
 baby. We can make this work.

Janet closes his hand around the ring. She looks deeply
 into his eyes and lets go of his hand.

JANET
 I told you no more Darrel. I meant
 it.

Janet walks out, passing by the last pew where Dee is being
 comforted by Mack. Mack reaches out to Janet, gently
 caressing her hand. Dee gazes longingly at Rev. Josiah,
 who's arms are crossed as he carefully listens to Silas at
 the front of the auditorium. Janet disappears behind the
 auditorium doors.

CUT TO:

EXT. FRONT PARKING LOT- MINUTES LATER

Philena fumbles with her keys in her purse, while walking to
 her Mustang. Rachel runs after Philena, Brenda following
 after Rachel.

Brenda taps Philena on the shoulder.

PHILENA
 What?

BRENDA
 I'm sorry.

Brenda shrugs her shoulders, holding her head down.

BRENDA

I'm really sorry. I had no idea...

PHILENA

That your man was gay. That the man I love is having a baby with his wife and me. That your man and Darrel used me for fun. That's what you had no idea about, right?

Rachel comes up behind Brenda, handing the pregnancy test stick to Philena. Philena holds it in her hands, caressing it slowly, sighing slightly. She throws the stick in her purse.

RACHEL

Look, all of us got played a little bit, okay. It's the game. Philena, ain't no sense in you bein' mad at Brenda now.

Philena smiles widely. Cracking the door to her Mustang slightly, Philena turns to Brenda, extending her hand. Brenda takes hold and they hug, laughing and crying at the same time.

PHILENA

You know what, there is going to be more drama to deal with. But, I'm not going to be angry. Want to get in, go to lunch? I'm starving.
(patting her stomach)
Eating for two now.

Brenda and Rachel exchange glances and climb into the backseat of the Mustang. Philena slips inside the driver's side and looking back, cracks a toothy grin.

PHILENA

No one riding in the front seat with me?

The three burst into laughter as Philena starts the ignition and presses her foot on the accelerator, revving the engine. Rachel moves to the passenger seat.

RACHEL

What are you going to do? Like for real?

CUT TO:

INT. AUDITORIUM IN CHURCH- SIMULTANEOUSLY

The auditorium has been emptied of all the people except Silas, Rev. Josiah, Darrel and Mack. Mack whistles "Amazing Grace" softly as he carries chairs into the side hallway. Silas picks up his Bible and walks toward the door, Rev. Josiah following a few steps behind him.

Darrel clutches both rings, while picking up the broken necklace. He looks longingly at the foyer door as an image appears in his mind of Janet. Janet is packing luggage, throwing clothes all over a bedroom floor, crying.

DISSOLVE TO:

INT. BLACK MUSTANG- MOMENTS LATER

Credits Roll, with an instrumental version of "Redemption's Song" playing in the background. With the top down, Philena's hair blows playfully in the wind as she drives. Rachel digs through Philena's purse, tossing out the pregnancy stick.

INSERT: SEVERAL CARS RUN OVER THE STICK. THE STICK IS BROKEN INTO PIECES

Brenda takes off diamond stud earrings, handing them to Rachel, who tosses them out of the window as Philena revs the engine and speeds off, down the street, smiling.

FADE OUT:

Soundtrack, a mixture of Gospel, Jazz, and R&B music plays in the background.

Ending Credits Roll

Redemption Railway **The Beginning** Everyone knows art imitates life. That cliché best describes Redemption's Sweet Song, a fictionalized version of the last decade of my life. The Redemption Railway quickly travels through the creation, evolution and influences of my screenplay. I apply historical and literary value to my screenplay as a work of literature, thereby illuminating aspects of my work versus historical and contemporary works in the African American community presently. I must first admit that writing this paper took me on a tumultuous personal journey as I recalled the pain with which I originally wrote my screenplay. I spent all winter break and the first two months of this semester strumming together theories of why I wrote my screenplay, what literary works influenced me, and what elements of African American culture I wanted to avoid

versus the elements that needed highlighting. **My**

Background I grew up in the Church of Christ, a sect of Christianity in which strict adherence to New Testament scripture remains its primary dogma. Often thought of as a cult, the Church of Christ, like other forms of Protestant Christianity preaches Christ as Savior, repentance for salvation, and love among the congregants. A typical worship service includes an opportunity for public repentance of sins committed during the preceding week, with many also proclaiming thankfulness to God for life and its blessings. Those coming forward often reveal tidbits of their private lives that otherwise stay hidden from the congregation. My experience as a penitent believer also living a double life contributes greatly to the conception of my screenplay. Redemption's Sweet Song, a reference to a gospel song I heard years ago as a child, binds together commentary about the morality of organized religion with the inherent nature of man. My screenplay chronicles my personal journey discovering what redemption means through Philena's love affair with Darrel, the shocking boundaries crossed by a man of God, and the hypocrisy surrounding people's lives. In my own life, without paralleling my screenplay detail- by- detail, I experienced falling in love with a man who lied to me about his marital status and lied to his wife about his being my son's father. I watched redemption and forgiveness freely wash over Aaron, my son's father, while I struggled to find peace and solace in a most unforgiving yet important sphere of my world. I grew up believing that forgiveness marked the true Christian. As the author of Christianity, Jesus states in the New Testament scripture, "For if ye forgive men their trespasses, your heavenly Father will also forgive you". I felt confident that I deserved forgiveness too(KJV Matthew 6:14). However, to my dismay, not only did I suffer a broken heart when Aaron first denied his involvement and subsequent fathering of my son, I also endured public and private condemnation by several members, including pastors. This dishonest form of Christianity continues presently. While I no longer attend any church, my mother, ever dedicated to her faith, remains a member of a Church of Christ in my hometown. My screenplay snapshots the pain Philena feels from finding out her boyfriend lied to her and the isolation that comes from publicly admitting her flaws. Through this painful account of Philena's desire for peace, the message of my script declares finding redemption begins in one's own heart and not through any form of humanly orchestrated religion. **African Americans & Christianity** My personal history adds one piece to the puzzle. The next piece floating around this puzzle fits neatly under the historic significance of using Christianity, the foundation of African American culture, as the backdrop of my screenplay. From the time an African American child descends onto this planet, God and organized

religion establish themselves as fundamental elements in their perception of the world. As one may guess, this Christian foundation stems from the displacement of slaves from Africa into America, away from their homeland, families and native faiths. Christianity infiltrated African American communities, becoming a mainstay in many homes. The tradition of attending a worship service every Sunday has, over time, become less religious and more ritualistic. To this ritual I dedicated myself at an early age. From that practice I learned to view the world through the eyes of a good Christian, the Bible-toting, scripture-quoting naïve young lady who never sins. My screenplay's heroine, Philena, walks the fine line between sinner and saint, the same line I strolled for many years while I attended church. Although church sermons taught that "all have sinned and come short of the glory of God", churchgoers often live as though they have never sinned (KJV Romans 3: 23). Philena seeks forgiveness and redemption in her plea before the congregation, hoping to emotionally right the wrong she committed the night before; however, she quickly realizes that redemption cannot be found when those around her also need redeeming. The historic influence of Christianity in its various forms never stopped at the church doors. Rather it follows African Americans into their everyday lives, including entertainment. All too often, African American films such as Tyler Perry's first stage play-turned film, *Diary of a Mad Black Woman*, incorporates a church scene, complete with the fragile yet penitent sinner, the theatrical preacher, and the commanding voices of an angelic choir while never examining the reality behind the euphoric symphony of visual imagery turned stereotype. I knew that showing the emotional baggage plaguing Christians meant creating one of those stereotypical moments in cinema as well. However, instead of highlighting the redeeming effect audiences generally walk away with from one of those scenes, I chose the less popular examination. Black films never break down the walls of Christianity, investigating what happens on the pews, or in the bathrooms or nurseries, or in the parking lot with the people who comprise a congregation. These films always show the sinner saved by grace, happily entering the fellowship of righteous people awaiting the lost soul's redemption. African American films generally refuse to critique the problems inside black Christianity, essentially because this faith provided hope for those in the worst human conditions, thereby sustaining an entire nation of people. As monumental as Christianity is to African Americans, flaws and misconceptions exist and persist within it. Is illuminating the holes in the once airtight cornerstone of African American culture the riskiest thing a writer could do? In a word, yes. From the start of crafting this work, I thought about the risks associated with deviating from the normal comedic point of view of African American Christianity. Instead of faith and

Christianity playing supporting roles to the comedic melodrama, they take center stage in Redemption's Sweet Song. I know I risk alienating my audience, perhaps destroying the effectiveness of the social and cultural introspection of my screenplay. To fully convince any audience that self-reflection regarding the seemingly untouchable allegiance African Americans have toward their Christian beliefs, I found it necessary to marry my personal experience with historic facts concerning religion in the black community. Craig S. Keener, author of *Defending Black Faith: Answers to Tough Questions About African American Christianity*, traces the roots of "the white race's false religion called Christianity" in America (Keener 13). Differing greatly from the Latin Christianity spread throughout Northern Africa shortly after the fall of Carthage, African American Christianity served only to keep slaves unable to "resist" the oppression imposed on them by their slave masters (13). In itself, Christianity and its roots emerge as a topic of exhaustive examination; however, the historical preeminence of the church in African American culture must be established, clarifying the reasons why it must also radically change. As Keener continues his examination and defense of black faith in America, he discusses the correlation between Christianity and slavery. The accepted perception of Christianity bringing salvation to the downtrodden slaves in the South outshines the truth as Keener points out that Christianity was "strongest among free Blacks in the North" (33). By the late 1700s, however, Christianity swept through the South; freed slaves from the North joined ministers, both black and white, creating churches where slaves could hold their own services apart from their owners. The "religious meetings" served as places of worship and safe havens for planning slave revolts (33). This contributed to the steady growth of African American Christianity throughout slavery and into the Reconstruction Period, resulting in a plethora of churches springing up across America. At this point, Christianity in the African American community established itself on a social reformation platform. As America at large struggled with incorporating freed slaves into society, blacks held fast to their growing faith in Christianity. By the mid twentieth century, America embarked upon a true Civil Rights Movement led by the Rev. Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr., a Baptist minister from Georgia. The African American community looked to its Christian principles rather than the more radical view held by Nation of Islam activist Malcolm X for stability and strength. Again, African Americans confirmed to the rest of society that faith and religion were the pillars by which the entire community would function, a wonderful philosophy but very impractical. This form of Christianity slithers in the black cinema genre, a philosophical glimpse into faith and its ability to bring the sinner into

salvation. Inasmuch as this viewpoint provides entertainment and possibly a love for one's heritage, it also pigeonholes African Americans, essentially propagating stereotypes that need dethroning. *Comedy's History in Black Communities* These stereotypes, created as a means of justifying ignorance, prevail throughout the African American community, often at our own doing. Case in point, how many box office hit "black" films produced fall into the category of dramas? I can tell you that one of the most popular and influential screenwriters today in the Black community, Tyler Perry, enjoys great success promoting stereotypical characters that keep African Americans locked in the box rather than releasing them from it. Such films as *Crooklyn* and *Boys 'n' The Hood*, both released in the early 1990s, generally maintain an undercurrent resolve of showing the protagonist as a human being rather than as a character, while Perry's mainstream films based on his gospel stage plays highlight predominately exaggerated characters. Perry's machine of gospel plays-turned-films helped reprise the inherent nature of comedy in the African American community, which, despite its popularity, stands firmly grounded, just as black Christianity, in slavery. Originally, I considered defending why I pursued a dramatic route to my script versus the more popular comedic take. A brief overview of the history of comedy explains why my script, as a groundbreaking tragedy about the perils inside Christianity, rests soundly as a drama and could never function as a comedy. I, like many, never knew that comedy in the black community in America grew directly from slavery. According to Mel Watkins' *African America Humor: The Best Black Comedy from Slavery to Today*, the "roots of African American comedy can be traced back to African griots and an oral tradition that esteemed dramatic, colorful speech, imaginative storytelling and libelous verbal satire" (xvii). Slaves traveled unwillingly to this country, deprived of a means of adequately continuing their oral traditions of relaying history one generation to the next. When any new group of people arrives in America, no matter the means of arrival, they adopt the culture, traditions and language of America. African slaves conformed to this assimilation as well, despite the oppression of slavery. Watkins continues elaborating on the historical woes of slavery, pointing out that the humor of Africans served another purpose outside of preserving tradition and heritage: protection from harsh slave masters. Tested and proven by living on the plantation, slave owners less likely harmed a "jolly" slave that made them laugh (xvii). The language barrier between slaves and their American masters created an enclave in which slaves from diverse African tribes bonded together, remaking their oral traditions and cultural tributes through a mixture of English and mangled African tongues. Throughout slavery and beyond, humor in the black community operates as a catalyst

for relief from oppression, for preservation of history, culture and entertainment as well as the voice of social change. Not belaboring the point too much, it stands to reason that African American comedy, once a vehicle for cultural preservation transformed into the method by which blacks "openly reflected sentiments and attitudes that had carefully been masked in the plantation setting" (Watkins 55). From the abolition of slavery to the Roaring Twenties, blacks endured oppression and degradation from the dominant society. Whether caused by Jim Crow laws or the production of vaudeville and minstrel shows, wherein white actors appeared in blackface, imitating black people in the most abhorrent manner possible, agitation with the lack of social reformation promised during Reconstruction grew. Humor, like Christianity, gave blacks the voice in America they so desperately desired and needed. While whites used ethnic-driven humor for entertaining guests, humiliating an entire race of people, blacks counteracted in the only way proven to work, comedy. Comedians like Amos and Andy performed the archetypal comedy routines that whites created, garnering more attention, praise and monetary gain nationwide than thought possible. These routines made light of inherent dysfunctions in the black community, an element that persists in ethnically-driven comedy today. By the late twentieth and early twenty-first centuries, African American humor evolved into "street humor", turning the mirror of humor outward rather than maintaining its original introspective glance (Watkins 214). Comedy routines, no longer performed as one-man acts, infiltrate black films as a means of "speaking out on social issues such as politics, social injustice and race" (Watkins 214). Comedy and humor, in other words, speaks for the black community rather than speaking to the black community. My job as a screenwriter warrants speaking to my audience, not about them. I found by soliciting opinions from the social network Facebook that my film might attract an audience initially, while ostracizing many with the overall theme once they watched the film. I realized then that African Americans cling to a slave mentality, afraid of speaking against social injustice. This clarifies why comedies or even dramas that rely heavily on comedic relief are safe. Humor gives African Americans a voice; however, that voice often produces laughter about dysfunctions versus serious deliberation regarding methods of fixing those dysfunctions. Humor clouds the hidden meanings of terms and phrases, while dramas jolts us back to our dark and dangerous realities. Ideally, the box office leaves room for serious dramas that deal specifically with the harsh realities that affect us as a people and those comedies that provide an escape from reality altogether. **Synopsis** Making mistakes and redeeming oneself marks growth. Philena Shiloh, a naïve African American woman, learns the hard way that growth generates both pain and reward. An unplanned pregnancy

forces Philena's best friend, Rachel, to reveal that Darrel lingers unhappily in his marriage to Janet James. During a normal Sunday morning worship service, more secrets unfold. While Darrel balances Janet, Philena and old flame Regina Snow, who also happens to be the mother of his five year old son Darrel Jr., his friend Silas Pointer struggles with his sexuality while his girlfriend, Brenda Washington, uncovers troubling information about the people she thought she knew best. Add in the Reverend Josiah Turner's dark secret that eventually turns the congregation on its head, and the script becomes a recipe for redemption.

Literary Influences

My first literary influence came about midway through writing *Redemption*. Shakespeare's *Comedy of Errors*, a stage play written between 1592 and 1594, happens in real time, an incredibly difficult task for any writer. William Shakespeare, a genius at multiple plots and intriguing characters, mastered effortlessly the illusion of time. I never found it grueling to pace the screenplay in real time; however, making that seamless took an attentive ear toward Shakespeare. Reading *Comedy of Errors* for my Shakespeare's Comedies class enabled me to see and hear time as an illusion; and with any great illusion, it must repeat itself constantly in order to work properly. In the same semester, I took screenwriting where the major assignment meant delivering the first act of a screenplay during a workshop. Assigned readings of *Chinatown* by Robert Towne and *Chasing Amy* by Kevin Smith drove me deeper into conceptualizing plot and creating interesting characters that drive the story. Although the actual films influenced me more, reviewing bits of the written scripts helped sharpen my ability to write the type of narratives that illustrate the scenes and transition actions smoothly. For the purpose of saying that I looked at a screenplay for help in authenticating dialogue, I skimmed Quentin Tarantino's *Jackie Brown*, a predominately African American film. Even though Tarantino's dialogue gives the impression of authenticity, too much profanity reduces its validity. Rather than look to any particular literary text for realistic dialogue, I listened to the voices in my head, the words that flowed from the characters as they danced around in my visions. In essence, I transcribed much of the dialogue based upon the visions I saw once I closed my eyes and thought about the plot. I cannot describe the process of writing this screenplay at all without simply saying I have a God-given talent, and although refined through workshops and reading literary works, the creative process works as a prophecy, a mixture of fact and fiction married together harmoniously.

Revisions The crafting of format, on the other hand, left me scrambling through Madeline Dimaggio's *How to Write for Television*, a guide on writing treatments or the narratives for a script and the actual screenplay. Linda McDonald, former instructor of the screenwriting courses, encouraged me to pay close attention

to the chapters on writing the two-hour film. Additionally, James Dolph, current instructor of the screenwriting courses, gave us Robert McKee's *Story* as a guide in developing the entire plot of a screenplay. The draft of *Redemption's Sweet Song* that I present now indeed started off much differently. Told that my dialogue kept the story interesting but my plot lacked movement, I ripped the entire draft up and start over from scratch. Instead of working on the script all summer as I intended, I never touched it. By the first week of my Fall 2009 semester, I wrote a treatment, a basic idea of the screenplay's main characters and plot. Propelled primarily by the goal of graduating in May 2010, I worked tirelessly on my script. While waiting for the spring semester's arrival, I took Mr. Dolph's advice and watched as many movies as possible, recognizing what techniques screenwriters and directors use, discovering which techniques for plot development work versus those that keep the plot stagnant. This newfound knowledge gave me insight as I prepared for the revision process. I wanted Mr. Dolph's feedback before I revised any portion my script. Much to my surprise, Mr. Dolph felt my screenplay displayed originality and uniqueness, complete with twists and turns that kept him engaged. He recommended two major revisions outside of correcting typographical errors. The first revision, breaking up the first flashback which started around page 37 and incorporating it into the first twenty pages, made the entire first half of the film transition easier. The second revision suggestion, breaking up the second flashback sequence starting around page 53, proved much more difficult. Mr. Dolph pointed out that part of the flashback's dysfunction stems from key points not showing up earlier in the script. I sat for a few days weaving together a scene that gives the audience key information early in the play. I watched more films, studying the silent action during the opening credits and mimicked that in my screenplay. I left the other flashback alone as it stands much stronger with the opening scene illuminating just how and why Regina had those incriminating pictures in the first place. I took an entire month rereading, editing and revising my screenplay. I combed through the dialogue, rehearsing some lines as if I were auditioning for a part in the film. Hearing the dialogue out loud tested the authenticity of it and caused me to tweak it, making it flow even better than it did before. AudienceConfident that my script fulfills the requirements for passing defense, I was humbled and shocked when Mr. Dolph suggested I look into sending my script out to literary agents. The market audience for this film is the average Christian African American; however, the film boasts themes relative to the broader topic of Christianity, reaching a much larger audience, tapping into African Americans of other religions and white audiences of Christian and non-Christian faiths. Lies, betrayal, deceit

have no color. Though I wrote my script from the eye of an African American female, the overall message transcends race. Ideally, I would love seeing my film in theatres alongside films by James Cameron, Ron Howard, and Tyler Perry; realistically, because the script portrays controversial themes, an independent film studio might buy and release it to select theatres first. I plan on submitting the script to Oprah Winfrey, producer of several films and the Broadway version of *The Color Purple* in addition to several literary agents. Whether it lands in the hands of an independent film director or in the laps of Hollywood's major film studios, *Redemption's Sweet Song* peaks inside a hidden world, giving audiences something to talk about.

ConclusionTrekking through the process of *Redemption's Sweet Song* gave me insight into the type of writer I am. No longer do I feel as though genre writing or finding a particular niche will label or pigeonhole me. Since I have written my first screenplay and received good reviews, thus far. I intend on writing another screenplay vastly different from this one. Rather than stereotype myself as many African American writers do, writing only to and for African Americans, I plan on writing a psychoanalytical thriller about a young woman suffering from a mental disorder. I read a Jonathon Nasaw's novel *When She Was Bad* two years ago with this theme, and have not yet decided if I want to adapt this story from that novel or strike out on my own, writing from my experiences working in mental health. Through all of this painstakingly hard work, I found a place where the serenity of narration and the voice of dialogue soothe my creative beast.

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