

SHOUT RINGS

Written by

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FADE IN:

OVER OPENING CREDITS

MONTAGE VIDEO: Graphics interweaving images:

the US Revolutionary war,
founding fathers and documents,
flags waiving,
military might,
police,
Jesus tormented and crucified,
airforce flyover,
middle-class white American dream,
overflowing hospital wards,
warfare,
gangs,
drag shows.

VIDEO SOUND: Soulful rendition of America the Beautiful.

The video ends with the logo for APOSTLE CHURCH.

INT. APOSTLE CHURCH SANCTUARY - MORNING

Take in the grandeur of the former big box department store turned megachurch filled with people seated and watching the large stage.

Centered on the back wall of the stage is a GIANT BEJEWELLED CROSS.

JEFFERSON RYAN, late forties southern black pastor, stands behind a podium center stage. Expensive suit. He holds a RED BIBLE in one hand - a finger tucked inside.

Behind him on his right sit three ASSOCIATE PASTORS.

To his left sits the CHOIR.

The massive congregation is majority black ranging from upper-middle-class to poor.

A huge multi-screen display and sound system ensure everyone can see and hear the service.

JEFFERSON

Our nation is in crisis.

He pauses and listens to the minimal AMENS from the crowd.

JEFFERSON (CONT'D)

Our nation...

(beat)

...is in crisis.

CROWD

Amen!

He moves around the stage speaking to the crowd, the choir, and his underlings.

JEFFERSON

Everywhere we turn, we face resistance, oppression, and discrimination. Every morning, we wake to new and old threats. Every time our children leave our homes, we risk losing them to violence, trafficking, and indoctrination. Do you feel me, family?

The crowd loudly affirms.

JEFFERSON (CONT'D)

But, I submit to you that it is not the color of our skin that endangers us. I say to you that a people who sees their skin color as a cause of oppression is a self-hating people.

He pauses allowing his words to hang.

JEFFERSON (CONT'D)

You are not victims of a world that hates you, brothers and sisters. You are imprisoned in a world that hates God! We have been separated from the most high by a fallen world. Lost souls hope to rob our children of the Ten Commandments and the Bible. Their *schools* tell them God is dead.

(MORE)

JEFFERSON (CONT'D)
 Political leaders, under the guise
 of *upholding liberty*, encourage
 radical permissiveness.

MURMURS of agreement rumble.

JEFFERSON (CONT'D)
 Our closeness to God has been
 stolen from us.

Jefferson lifts his BIBLE opening it to a pre-selected page.

JEFFERSON (CONT'D)
 (quoting)
 I have heard your prayer and have
 chosen this place for myself as a
 temple for sacrifices. When I shut
 up the heavens so that there is no
 rain, or command locusts to devour
 the land or send a plague among my
 people, if my people who are called
 by my name, will humble themselves
 and pray and seek my face and turn
 from their wicked ways, then I will
 hear from heaven, and I will
 forgive their sin and will heal
 their land.

He looks up from the Bible and stares into the crowd.

JEFFERSON (CONT'D)
 I will forgive their sin and will
 heal their land.
 (beat)
 Solomon was God's companion, and
 God, in his absolute wisdom, told
 Solomon that *His* people gathered in
His name will be forgiven. That we
 will be healed!

CROWD
 Amen!

JEFFERSON
 But it takes action.

More pausing. More reflection by a focused congregation.

Jefferson changes his tone to more somber.

JEFFERSON (CONT'D)
 Our world is not only plagued by
 lost and frightened sheep.

The three associate Pastors stand and walk off stage.

JEFFERSON (CONT'D)
Our world is infested with evil.
True evil. The evil that thrives
when we are separated from God.
They plot and scheme and mankind
obeys.

A WOMAN snarls from off stage.

WOMAN
(off screen)
Let me go!

A WOODEN CHAIR lowers from the rafters behind Jefferson.

The Pastors lead the angry Woman on stage by a waste-belt attached to three metal poles as if she were a rabid dog.

They force her into the chair. She tries to resist.

They clamp her wrists and ankles and back away.

The crowd is nervously curious.

Jefferson sits his Bible on the podium and reaches beneath for something else.

JEFFERSON
Sister Franklin...

He pauses and finds SISTER FRANKLIN sobbing in the front row.

Beside her sits LILIAN RYAN, Jefferson's wife, and SARAH RYAN, his 17-year-old daughter. Lilian and Sarah are dressed a financial step or two above Sister Franklin.

Lilian wraps one arm around Sister Franklin's shoulders. The other is in the woman's lap holding her hand.

JEFFERSON (CONT'D)
Don't you worry, sister. You did
the right thing.
(to the church)
Sister Franklin came to me last
month with concern in her heart
over her late sister's daughter.
She was no longer herself. Changed.

Jefferson pulls a COILED WHIP from the podium.

JEFFERSON (CONT'D)

I visited with Sister Franklin and her niece several times over the last few weeks.

He slowly uncoils his whip.

JEFFERSON (CONT'D)

There are dark things that will feed on those ignorant enough to seek them out. Those who would bow to this world allowing it to break them. This young lady is broken. She has been inhabited.

(quoting)

I have given you authority to trample on snakes and scorpions and to overcome all the power of the enemy; nothing will harm you.

Jefferson cracks the whip against the stage. The Pastors lift their hands and the choir stands and sings as if on cue.

JEFFERSON (CONT'D)

Defiler! I command you, in the name of Jesus Christ with the authority of God himself, to leave this woman.

She SCREAMS.

WOMAN

Fuck you! Fuck this church! Fuck your God! Fuck your Bible!

Jefferson speaks over her as she rages.

JEFFERSON

Listen to the depravity, family! The thing is afraid. Like squeezing toothpaste, we press the evil out of her.

(to the Woman)

Shut your filthy mouth!

He swings the whip over his head and cracks it on the stage by her feet.

JEFFERSON (CONT'D)

You are in the house of the Lord now, demon. You will submit!

WOMAN

Lick my cunt, pretender!

The woman arches her back trying to stand from the heavy, wooden chair. She jerks and the choir seats slide. Most are knocked off their feet.

Jefferson cracks the whip across her chest.

JEFFERSON
Filth! Submit.

She screams madly.

JEFFERSON (CONT'D)
Your God commands you!

She madly tries to pull away from the chair again. One shoulder dislocates. An ankle snaps. Then a forearm.

Pain.

Rage.

JEFFERSON (CONT'D)
Leave this woman!

He cracks the whip again across her. Blood stripes stain her shirt.

JEFFERSON (CONT'D)
I said be gone!

The woman screams and inhumanly contorts before collapsing.

The crowd is silent. The pastors pray. The Choir regains its feet and softly begins singing. Jefferson inspects the bloodied and broken woman from a distance.

JEFFERSON (CONT'D)
Family,
(beat)
The foul beast is gone.

The crowd cheers and sings and "Amen!"

The Pastors pull the chair off the stage. Behind curtains, PARAMEDICS unstrap her and wheel the woman away.

The crowd doesn't notice. The congregation CHEERS.

EXT. APOSTLE CHURCH - MIDDAY

The Pastors and their wives flank the two sets of double doors as the congregation files out and into the large parking lot beyond. They shake hands, hug, and cheek-kiss their way through every exiting worshipper.

Lilian stands next to Jefferson and fulfils the social duties of the pastor's wife.

JEFFERSON

Miss Sheila!

Jefferson leans into an older congregant giving her a loving hug.

MISS SHEILA

Bless you, Pastor Ryan.

JEFFERSON

(warm)

Bless you, miss Sheila. So happy to have you in God's house on this gloriously humid Southern Sunday.

Jefferson releases the hug with a smile and plants a firm handshake into the palm of BROTHER THOMAS, the spry older gentleman standing beside Sheila.

JEFFERSON (CONT'D)

(charming)

And, Brother Thomas. I only hope I'm hopping around like you in thirty years!

BROTHER THOMAS

It was your praying hands, Pastor.

Thomas bumps his fist against his hip.

Sheila leans in to Lilian and kisses her cheek.

MISS SHEILA

And thank the good lord for you two!

LILIAN

Thank you, miss Sheila. And thank the lord for you, too.

MISS SHEILA

I mean it, young lady. That man of yours has the touch of the Almighty.

(MORE)

MISS SHEILA (CONT'D)

You make sure you're holding him up
in prayer every night. We all thank
the lord for choosing Pastor Ryan.

LILIAN

Oh, I do.

Lilian forces a grin into a smile.

LILIAN (CONT'D)

And let's not forget Sister
Franklin's niece. The Lord removed
the evil that was on her, but she
has a long, healing road ahead of
her.

Jefferson's practiced charm breaks and he flashes a glare
toward his wife.

JEFFERSON

(reassuring)

That young lady is in God's hands,
and there is no better place to be.

Jefferson's attention focuses somewhere far past the old
woman.

MISS SHEILA

That is so true, pastor.

Sarah exits the other door. After saying her daughterly
goodbyes to the other pastors there, she descends the steps
to the sidewalk. She passes five cars before darting through
traffic to a car where several TEENAGERS congregate.

Jefferson watches Sarah approach her friends before turning a
refreshed smile to the next person in line.

Sarah approaches CORINE (17 female), SHERARD (17 male), and a
few other friends.

FRIEND ONE mock gallops and cracks an invisible whip. FRIEND
TWO takes the imaginary lash across their back.

FRIEND ONE

Get out, boy!

FRIEND TWO

Yassah, massah!

FRIEND THREE

Anything for a show.

Friend Three looks at Sarah and looks away. Shame has the three move away from the others.

CORINE
Bunch of assholes.

SARAH
That they are.

Sarah hugs Corine. After the hug, Corine changes topics.

CORINE
Can we go tonight?

SARAH
You know I can't.

CORINE
I mean, this is different. It's for school. Maybe...

Sarah's a pushover.

SARAH
Fine.

CORINE
Yeah?

SARAH
Fine. I'll try.
(beat)
No promises.

Sarah turns to Sherard sitting in the driver's seat with the engine on and the AC fighting the wet, South Carolina spring.

SARAH (CONT'D)
And how are you going to let them talk shit about my dad like that. They're your friends.

SHERARD
They're my cousins. Not friends. But you gotta admit, there were no lies there.

Sarah moans unhappy about his pending rant.

SHERARD (CONT'D)
Your dad is peddling that same ole "obey your masters" garbage they've been weaponizing against us for centuries now.

(MORE)

SHERARD (CONT'D)

How are you going to let him wave around an actual whip and beat that woman with it.

SARAH

Sherard, you're crazy. *Let him?* Since when does Jefferson Ryan need anyone to let him do anything? Besides, I didn't see anyone else in that building trying to stop him either.

Sherard looks away.

SARAH (CONT'D)

He helps people. A lot of people. He definitely helps more people than those naysaying him ever do.

Sherard's hands go up in defeat.

JEFFERSON

(off screen)

How's your mama doing, Sherard?

The three freeze when they hear his voice from the full-sized, luxury SUV parked in the space closest to the church's front door.

JEFFERSON (CONT'D)

I heard her back was bothering her again.

SHERARD

Yes, sir. She threw it out again.

JEFFERSON

Let her know she'll be in my prayers.

Sherard nods an affirmation.

Jefferson climbs into the driver's seat. Lilian smiles before climbing into the passenger's seat.

LILIAN

How're you, Corine?

CORINE

I'm good, Mrs. Ryan.

Lilian gets in.

Sarah mocks Sherard.

SARAH
Yes, sir, Pastor Ryan, sir.

She laughs.

SHERARD
Whatever. You tell him about next
year yet?

The horn blares. Jefferson has backed out and is waiting on Sarah with limited patience.

Sarah lifts her hand in front of her - carefully hidden from her father - and flips Sherard off.

CORINE
Let me know about tonight!

Sarah smiles and joins her family.

INT. SUV - CONTINUOUS

Jefferson pilots the car from the crowded lot onto the streets. They move from an overly gentrified retail area to a neighborhood of high-end homes as they speak.

LILIAN
I think the book club should read
Nourishing the Righteous Woman next
month. You know, by Rebecca Owens?
You liked her last book. This one's
supposed to be good.

JEFFERSON
Sounds like it could fit next
month's sermon series.

Jefferson looks into the rearview at Sarah staring out the window.

JEFFERSON (CONT'D)
I'll give it a read next week.

LILIAN
I think it does. You're doing the
righteous family next month, right?
You don't have to go through the
trouble. I know you have a lot
going...

Jefferson dismisses the meek protest.

JEFFERSON
It's no trouble.

He speaks at his daughter in the mirror.

JEFFERSON (CONT'D)
We got you something.

When she doesn't respond, he continues.

JEFFERSON (CONT'D)
Sarah. You hear me?

She turns her attention to him.

SARAH
I'm sorry?

JEFFERSON
We got you something.

He nods to Lilian.

JEFFERSON (CONT'D)
Go ahead and give it to her.

Lilian looks curiously at him.

He urges.

She digs in her oversized pocketbook and pulls out a palm-sized box.

She passes it to Sarah.

SARAH
What's this?

LILIAN
It was supposed to be for the
baptism.

JEFFERSON
You know I love giving presents.

LILIAN
(chuckling)
Yeah, yeah.

Sarah opens the box and pulls out a silver necklace with a silver cross pendant. The cross is specked with diamonds. The cross looks exactly like the large one in the church.

Sarah's smile is uncomfortable, but Jefferson drives and doesn't notice.

SARAH

But, I've already been baptized,
daddy.

JEFFERSON

As a child, yes. But you are
becoming a woman. You graduate next
month. A quick summer and you'll be
back at it.

(beat)

It's the perfect time to re-state
your commitment to God's church. To
your family.

(beat)

Your promise to be incorruptible.

SARAH

Dad.

JEFFERSON

Think about it anyway. I'd really
like you to be at the front of that
line. In any case, the necklace is
for you.

She smiles and puts it on.

SARAH

It's really beautiful. Thank you.

JEFFERSON

Oh, Jeanie's daughter can't come
tonight, so I'm going to need you
leading children's church.

SARAH

What? I was gonna...

JEFFERSON

Gonna what?

SARAH

I had plans with Corine tonight.

JEFFERSON

It's Sunday night. What plans are
you making?

SARAH

Sociology is doing a comparative religion segment and the final is a research paper about different traditions. Most everyone picked a different denomination. The Catholics do a lot of weird stuff. But Corine's dad's side came from John's Island. They go way back. None of his people are around anymore, so she was hoping Granny could...

Jefferson holds up his hand.

JEFFERSON

I'm gonna stop you there. Not on a Sunday. You know this.

SARAH

It's just once.

JEFFERSON

No, Sarah. It's bad enough my mom consorts with those heathens. My daughter won't. Especially on a Sunday night.

Sarah huffs angrily.

JEFFERSON (CONT'D)

Huff all you want, girl. I need you with me tonight.

(beat)

If Josephine is letting her girl learn about those people, that's her choice.

(beat)

I trust she knows. Or do I need to check with her?

Sarah glares into the rearview locking with her father's eyes.

SARAH

She knows. This is a quarter of our final grade.

JEFFERSON

Fine. You can take her to your Granny's.

Sarah smiles.

JEFFERSON (CONT'D)
But not tonight.

Defeat as they pull into the garage of the Ryan Home.

EXT. RYAN HOME - NIGHT

The abundance of street and security lights in the neighborhood keep the Ryan's McMansion well lit. The neighborhood is silent. The moon is high.

INT. RYAN HOME - CONTINUOUS

The foyer is clean. Polished. The only light comes through the stained glass front door.

The living room is finely furnished. The light comes from an air freshener and an animated screensaver on the 80" flat screen monitor mounted prominently above the mantle.

Off the living room is a book-filled library complete with two reading chairs and a single desk. The desk is clean. A book sits on a table next to each chair. The light from the living room makes everything visible enough.

The kitchen is still. Everything is neatly where it belongs. The monitor on the high-end fridge illuminates.

The California King in Jefferson's and Lilian's lavish bedroom is interrupted only by their blanketed bodies sleeping soundly as far from each other as they can get.

Sarah's room is a teenager's room, but clean. Most of the dolls and stuffed animals are on honored display on shelves around the room. Her bookbag rests on a neat desk. A TV streams music videos on low volume from her dresser.

Sarah sleeps soundly.

The street lights cast tree shadows against the closed blinds.

Clothes are displayed neatly in the small room annex outfitted with luxury closet cabinetry.

The song on the television changes and the world doesn't notice.

The shadows on the blinds dance.

The video freezes. Buffers.

The screen turns off.

Pure silence.

Sarah opens her eyes.

She SNIFFS. Something stinks.

She notices the dark and looks to her television.

Without a care, she lies back down and slips back to sleep.

INT. RYAN HOME - MORNING

Sarah brushes her teeth while moving between her bedroom and bathroom watching videos, texting, and getting ready for school. Rinse. Spit.

Bookbag over shoulder, she leaves her room and walks into the kitchen where Lilian pours coffee into a mug.

LILIAN

Early start this morning?

SARAH

Meeting Corine.

LILIAN

Did not going last night mess you up?

SARAH

No. I told her I couldn't go. I already talked to Granny. We're going over after school.

Lilian smiles.

LILIAN

What about your paper? Same topic?

Sarah digs in the pantry for a breakfast bar.

SARAH

No. Catholic weddings. Plenty of information. Easy research.

She grabs an energy drink from the fridge and opens it taking a swig.

SARAH (CONT'D)

I think Corine was just curious about her dad's family.

LILIAN

Makes sense. How late are you going to be?

Lilian sits in a stool at the bar separating the kitchen from the living room and drinks her coffee.

LILIAN (CONT'D)

You still have to fill out the scholarship application. Freedom's not cheap.

Sarah looks at the clock.

SARAH

I'm going to be late! Love you!

She kisses Lilian's cheek and darts for the door. Before exiting, she pauses.

SARAH (CONT'D)

Oh yeah. I think something got in the attic again.

LILIAN

Why do you say that?

SARAH

Got a wiff of the dead funk last night.

LILIAN

Ah. Say no more. Phillipe is scheduled today. I'll have him find it and get rid of it.

SARAH

Cool.

Sarah leaves.

EXT. CREED HIGH SCHOOL - MORNING

Sarah drives her late-model sedan into the high school parking lot and pulls into her assigned spot.

Her radio blares as she shifts the car into park.

A LOW-PITCHED HUM invades the music.

Sarah notices and leans closer to the dash.

The Hum grows as the music fades into the background.

Sarah listens.

The hum hides WHISPERING VOICES.

Closer.

Focus.

BAM!

Sherard BANGS on the roof of the car startling Sarah.

The hum and the voices are gone. The music blares.

Sarah turns the car off and gets out.

SARAH
Why are you such an asshole?

SHERARD
Who? Me?

He laughs.

SHERARD (CONT'D)
Hey. Did your dad hear me
yesterday?

SARAH
What? About how he's Uncle Rukus?

SHERARD
I didn't say...

SARAH
No. He knew you were talking trash,
though.

Corine catches up to them.

CORINE
What're you two talking about?

SARAH
About how Sherard can't stop
running his mouth about my dad.

SHERARD
I'm just saying the man has been
bamboozled and that shit's
contagious.

SARAH

He goes over the top, but that doesn't mean he isn't doing it for the right reasons.

SHERARD

Yeah, yeah. God moves even the devil's hands.

SARAH

(faux threats)

You better watch your mouth.

They pass from the lot to the covered walkway to the school building.

INT. CREED HIGH SCHOOL - CONTINUOUS

Sherard turns right. Sarah and Corine turn left.

SHERARD

Lunch?

SARAH

Wouldn't miss it.

As they walk...

CORINE

So?

SARAH

I told you, yes. I still don't see why you need my granny to...

CORINE

Miss Rosaleigh knows Anyika Knox.

(pleading)

Come on! If I can talk to her... well... I need the "A." And it ain't like I can just waltz up in there and go, "take me to your leader," and actually meet her.

They laugh.

Corine darts for a nearby classroom.

CORINE (CONT'D)

After seventh?

SARAH

Yep.

She continues to class.

EXT. ROAD - LATER

A 90s SEDAN moves along a poorly painted, nearly empty two-lane highway.

The well-kept car passes onto a long, worn bridge over a South Carolina coastal waterway.

ROSALEIGH

(V.O.)

You know, Sister knew your Grandma Jane.

INT. SEDAN - SAME

ROSALEIGH (late sixties and aging beautifully) drives. Sarah rides shotgun. Corine sits in the back seat.

CORINE

Sister?

SARAH

That's what Granny calls Anyika.

CORINE

Ah.

(to Rosaleigh)

My mom mentioned that. It's pretty cool to connect with that side of the family.

ROSALEIGH

But you're doing this for school?

CORINE

I don't think my mom liked going around there after the accident. This kinda gave me an excuse. Especially before we're off to...

Sarah cuts eyes at Corine through the rear view.

CORINE (CONT'D)

...school. I'm moving to Massachusetts in July.

Rosaleigh smiles.

ROSALEIGH

Off on a new adventure. I envy you.
I wish Jefferson did that instead
of where he went.

Sarah scolds.

SARAH

Granny!

ROSALEIGH

Your daddy did fine for himself. I
just wish he had some time away
from his daddy's friends' kids.
Some exposure to the world beyond
here.

Rosaleigh turns the car onto a two-lane gravel road.

SARAH

You don't care much for Granddaddy,
do you?

ROSALEIGH

He let his ancestors' minds get him
in the end. Do you know, when that
man courted me, it was like he was
spitting in the face of history. He
dared any of his family to
disrespect me. But, his heritage
won out in the long run. Walking
around with the father of my child
openly despising my people got to
be more than I could bear.

Rosaleigh steers the car past rows of older marsh houses
clustered together and stops the car in front of one.

ROSALEIGH (CONT'D)

Your mom said you're going to that
school, too?

EXT. SEDAN - SAME

ANYIKA (black woman about a decade older than Rosaleigh)
steps onto the porch and waves.

Rosaleigh smiles and returns the wave.

ROSALEIGH

I know that's what your daddy wants
you to do. It makes sense.

(MORE)

ROSALEIGH (CONT'D)

Everybody who goes there seems to
come out with a newly polished
silver spoon. Just...

(beat)

Be sure you're not just trying to
do right by him. You gotta do right
by you.

Anyika descends the three steps to the gravel walkway at the
bottom and walked toward the car.

Sarah gets out.

Corine and Rosaleigh follow her lead.

The two older women embrace and laugh.

ANYIKA

Sister Rosaleigh!

ROSALEIGH

Sister.

Anyika looks behind her.

ANYIKA

And you're Jazz's girl.

CORINE

Oh my god! My mom said you all
called daddy Jazz. That's so weird.

ANYIKA

You got your daddy's smile.

She pulls Corine into a warm hug.

Anyika looks across the car to Sarah.

ANYIKA (CONT'D)

This your grandbaby, Rosaleigh?

ROSALEIGH

That's her.

Rosaleigh is proud.

ANYIKA

Girl, those legs!

The two women cackle.

ANYIKA (CONT'D)
I remember your legs looking that
good. Years ago.

They get a good laugh.

Anyika approaches Sarah.

Her eyes pause on Sarah's necklace. Her laugh falters
briefly.

She slides her arm around Sarah and leads the group.

ANYIKA (CONT'D)
You ladies came all the way out
here. Let me show you around.

Anyika walks them across the street to a small, neighborhood
CHURCH. The people know it as the Prays House.

INT. PRAYS HOUSE - LATER

Anyika walks them to a large open space in the sanctuary
between wooden pews and a meek, wooden podium. Changeable
numbers signs display the Sunday, Week, and Month tithings.
They almost have NINETEEN HUNDRED for the month.

ANYIKA
...and one Sunday a month is a
potluck. We have service, lunch,
and more service. Not everyone
stays around, but there's enough
food to feed dinner to the
community, too.

Anyika stops talking and looks to Corine.

ANYIKA (CONT'D)
Is that the sort of mess you want
to know about?

Corine hesitates. She was enjoying the stories until then.

CORINE
Not really, Miss Anyika.

Anyika waves a dismissive hand at her.

ANYIKA
Just call me Sister. Everybody else
does.

Corine smiles.

CORINE

Sister. We're supposed to focus on one specific rite or tradition. I was hoping to know what you thought about the afterlife. Like, what do you believe happens to you after you die?

Anyika smiles.

ANYIKA

(Matter of factly)
We go to God.

SARAH

Just like that? No judgment?

ANYIKA

Judgement? What's there to judge?

Anyika teaches.

ANYIKA (CONT'D)

God is love. The unconditional kind. He's all around us. Always with us. He doesn't abandon us. Those smart enough to understand that feel his presence in life. Those who don't miss out. They have to wait until they pass. Only after the veil of life is lifted, do they understand their wasted life. They pursued false idols. Turned life into a sales pitch. Wore their hate with pride.

(beat)

Can you imagine having to die before you let yourself feel real love?

Anyika turns back to Corine.

ANYIKA (CONT'D)

After death, we go to God. At least our souls do.

(beat)

Our essence. Whatever you want to call it. That part of us rejoins our creator. But our spirit remains.

(beat)

We're all two in one. If who we are spends eternity with God, what we know remains behind.

(MORE)

ANYIKA (CONT'D)

Our experiences. Our knowledge. Our memories. This part of us remains to guide our descendants as our ancestors did for us. Guiding us. Within us.

SARAH

So you don't believe in Hell?

ANYIKA

(playing on words)

Heavens no!

She chuckles and sits in a nearby pew.

Rosaleigh follows.

ANYIKA (CONT'D)

Old legs, ladies. Stay active.

(beat)

Hell is real, but being separated from God. And how many people truly earn such a terrible fate? Of course, the Morningstar and his followers were damned for their envy.

SARAH

(challenging)

So no one has ever earned Hell?

Anyika pauses and looks to Sarah.

ANYIKA

Most of us are guilty of something. When we're in the presence of God, we have a perfect heart. We feel the guilt for the wrong we did in life. That reality is punishment enough. Once we've atoned, we'll experience true forgiveness.

(beat)

But there are some who's shame will drive them from God. The facilitators of misery. The hoarders of wealth. Bastions of hatred. Their shame drives into the hands of Lucifer and his horde of torturers.

CORINE

If Lucifer loves evil so much, why punish evil people? You'd think he'd reward them.

SARAH

Corine!

Anyika addresses Corine.

ANYIKA

Lucifer doesn't love evil. He loves God. He fell because he believed angels belonged closer to God than humanity. He despised that mankind was God's favorite. We were chosen as the caretakers of creation. We are capable of free will. Special. Jealousy made the angels fall.

(beat)

Lucifer would think a human that abandons God is the lowest sort of thing.

She focuses on Sarah.

ANYIKA (CONT'D)

His demons find their way to our world. They torment and tempt. They want to see every human soul driven God's presence.

SARAH

That sounds unorthodox.

ANYIKA

What is orthodoxy if not men claiming to speak for God?

The silence is heavy.

Corine breaks it.

CORINE

Wow! Thank you, Sister! This was amazing.

Rosaleigh stands.

ROSALEIGH

Did you get what you need?

CORINE

I did. Thank you!

ROSALEIGH

Good. I better get you two home. It's a school night.

Sarah and Corine hug Anyika, say their goodbyes, and leave.

Rosaleigh helps Anyika to her feet.

ROSALEIGH (CONT'D)
Thank you for that, Sister.

Anyika grabs Rosaleigh's arm.

ANYIKA
Take care with that girl. There's
some sort of shadow settling around
her. Keep her in your prayers,
Sister.

Rosaleigh shows concern.

ROSALEIGH
Of course.

Rosaleigh kisses Anyika's cheek and leaves.

EXT. APOSTLE CHURCH - MORNING

The parking lot is full.

SARAH
(V.O.)
Is there anything that God does not
see?

Multiple CHILDREN respond in unison.

CHILDREN
(V.O.)
No!

INT. APOSTLE CHURCH - SAME

Children's Church looks like a large, high school science lab with a field of tables in front of an audio-visual teaching station. Three CHILDREN - all aged five to twelve - sit at each table.

The children color pre-printed sheets. A couple of the older ones pass notes. The smaller ones play.

Sarah works the daycare like a pro.

SARAH

Exactly. God knows all things and has known all things since before He created the universe. And all things are by His Will alone.

TWO of the older children whisper to one another.

SARAH (CONT'D)

Something to share?

The INSTIGATOR speaks.

INSTIGATOR

So He wills all the bad stuff?

Sarah pauses, but this is a question she is prepared for.

SARAH

Of course. This is the best of all possible worlds because God has willed it. If not for the trials and tribulations, we would neither understand nor deserve His grace.

INSTIGATOR

But what about all of the suffering? I mean, people starve every day.

Sarah is less comfortable with the continuation of the rehearsed response.

SARAH

There can not be life without death. No joy without sadness. And no Grace without suffering. But...
(beat)
But an eternity in the congregation of God outweighs all worldly pain.

INSTIGATOR

But what about...

SARAH

Maybe we can save this for a conversation with Pastor Ryan. He'll know better...

INSTIGATOR

No!

Sarah takes in the room.

A shock of fear flashes across most of their faces.

INSTIGATOR (CONT'D)
What about that lady last week? Why
did God let that happen to her?

Sarah sees the question on everyone's face.

SARAH
He didn't... That wasn't Him. The
thing that was inside her was...

She searches for words.

SARAH (CONT'D)
There was a demon tearing her apart
from inside.

INSTIGATOR
But why would God let that happen?

Sarah can't find an answer.

ANOTHER CHILD speaks up.

ANOTHER CHILD
My dad said it could only get in if
she invited it in.

The room explodes with conversation, laughing, playing. The
heavy has been dismissed for all but Sarah who forces a smile
and sits in a heavy desk chair.

The chair SQUEAKS.

INT. APOSTLE CHURCH - LATER

Same room.

Children's Church has been dismissed.

Sarah moves around the room picking up coats and toys.

Jefferson stands in the door.

JEFFERSON
How was it?

SARAH
I think they get worse every month.

Jefferson laughs.

JEFFERSON

Children aren't always a blessing.
Present company excluded.

Sarah deposits the collected toys and articles of clothing between a toy box and a Lost and Found box in the cabinet.

SARAH

(sarcastically)

Ha ha.

(beat)

I'm just glad I only have to do
this once a month.

JEFFERSON

(scolding)

Have to? Girl, leadership is a
calling. One you were born to. This
is just the start of great things
for you.

Sarah rolls her eyes - but she knows damned good and well to do it while her back is turned to her father.

Jefferson looks at the clock on his phone.

JEFFERSON (CONT'D)

Oop. Ten minutes til showtime.
Don't be late.

SARAH

I won't.

Jefferson knocks lightly on the door frame.

JEFFERSON

Front row.

SARAH

Of course, daddy.

He leaves.

Sarah walks to the far corner and gathers the last of the loose papers littering the floor.

She walks to the trashcan by the door and tosses the trash in.

She reaches to flip the light switch when...

The chair SQUEAKS as if someone sat in it.

Sarah spins to look at the chair.

Nothing.

She looks around the room.

Still nothing.

She turns off the light and leaves the room.

INT. RYAN HOME - NIGHT

Sarah sleeps. It's late.

On inhale, Sarah wrinkles her nose. A smell wakes her.

She sits up and smells the air searching for a source.

She smells her blanket.

She smells her shirt. Her pits.

She stands on the bed,

Tip toes,

And stretches her nose toward the ceiling.

Inhale.

Sarah gags. She leaps off the bed and runs for her bathroom where she rips the toilet seat up and vomits.

She wipes her mouth with the back of her hand.

A spark of pain strikes. She winces pressing her palm against her temple.

SARAH

Ow.

The shock of pain grows intense. She strains against the migraine.

She CRIES OUT.

Lilian is the first through the door flipping the light on. She runs to Sarah curled on the bathroom floor.

She calls out for Jefferson to call 9-1-1.

EXT. MUSC CHARLESTON, SC - HOURS LATER

It's early morning outside the hospital. The streets haven't fully woken for the day. Traffic is light. Sirens are plentiful.

The EMERGENCY ROOM is busy.

INT. MUSC CHARLESTON, SC - CONTINUOUS

Sarah has a small, private room. Lilian sits at the foot of the bed.

Jefferson exits the room and walks away.

Inside the room, Lilian chuckles to herself.

LILIAN
Milk duds will see that man in a
diabetic coma.

Sarah laughs.

LILIAN (CONT'D)
And how about you?

SARAH
I'm just tired. A little hungry.

The DOCTOR enters focussed on his tablet.

DOCTOR
Good morning. How are you feeling?

SARAH
I'm okay. Ready to get out of here.

DOCTOR
I bet. So, we saw nothing
concerning on your tests. Urine and
blood are normal. All systems
normal.

SARAH
Normal?

DOCTOR
Just a few more questions while
you're here. Do you remember seeing
auras around things? Glow
outlines?

SARAH
Not that I remember.

DOCTOR
Did light hurt your eyes?

SARAH
Maybe? A little?

DOCTOR
I'm going to get you scheduled for an MRI and a few other scans over the next couple of weeks, but I think you had a migraine. The vomiting. The intense pain. Even the smell. Have you had migraines before?

SARAH
No.

Lilian stands.

LILIAN
I need you to assure me that my daughter only had a headache.

DOCTOR
A migraine is a bit more than a...

LILIAN
Migraine. Whatever. I need you to tell me that there's nothing seriously wrong with my daughter.

DOCTOR
Sarah, have you been under any extra stress recently?

SARAH
Just school.

LILIAN
School? School's easy for you. All you have to do is send in your scholarship acceptance letter. You...

Sarah looks away.

LILIAN (CONT'D)
You're not going.

The Doctor takes the cue.

DOCTOR

That's all I need. I'll put in the discharge orders. They should have you out of here in the next fifteen minutes or so.

The Doctor exits.

SARAH

I'm going to school.

(beat)

Just not Freedom University.

Lilian slides back to a seat on the bed beside Sarah.

LILIAN

Then where are you going?

SARAH

Corine and I...

Lilian stops her.

LILIAN

Corine. That's a long way. Your father is going to lose it.

SARAH

I got a scholarship for there, too. It'll actually cost less.

LILIAN

I remember the letter.

SARAH

I just need...

LILIAN

I know.

JEFFERSON

(V.O.)

We are called to form and maintain a righteous family.

INT. APOSTLE CHURCH SANCTUARY - DAY

Light fills the large sanctuary. The stage's light fixtures are re-positioned remotely to properly light Jefferson as he moves around the stage preaching to an imaginary congregation. He is casually dressed in that he's not wearing a tie with his shirt, sportscoat, and slacks.

Workers clean and prep the church.

JEFFERSON

(stressing)

To form and maintain.

(beat)

Then the Lord God made a woman from the rib he had taken out of the man, and he brought her to the man.

Jefferson lifts a bottle of water from the podium and rehearses his dry throat.

JEFFERSON (CONT'D)

He brought her to the man. The man said, "This is now bone of my bones and flesh of my flesh' she shall be called woman, for she was taken out of a man.

(beat)

That is why a man leaves his father and mother and is united to his wife, and they become one flesh.

Rosaleigh enters the sanctuary and walks the long aisle toward the stage.

JEFFERSON (CONT'D)

He leaves his father and his mother, two people he is to honor above all others-

(he qualifies)

- assuming they provide a Godly family -

(he continues)

He leaves childhood behind, and he is *united* to his wife. A boy becomes a man and a girl becomes wife.

Jefferson notices Rosaleigh as she rounds the front row and sits near center stage.

He pauses briefly. He loves his mother, but he's not thrilled to see her.

He continues his sermon with renewed fervor.

JEFFERSON (CONT'D)

When we accept and prioritize God's calling for us, we find meaning in a fallen, meaningless world. But what is a righteous family?

(MORE)

JEFFERSON (CONT'D)

Would God tell us to do this but not show us how to structure a righteous family?

(beat)

Colossians three. Verses eighteen to twenty-one. "Wives, submit to your husbands, as fitting the Lord." Meaning submit as if your husband speaks for God. "Husbands, love your wives and do not be embittered against them." Men, your submission to God makes you worthy of your wife's submission, but you, too, must keep your wives and hold no hard feelings against them. You are to guide, not control. "And, Children, obey your parents, for it is pleasing in the Lord. Fathers, do not..."

Jefferson looks to the control box in the back of the sanctuary.

JEFFERSON (CONT'D)

Marcus! Marcus, keep the damned light on me! I'm going to move around up here. You need to keep up!

The voice crackles through the sound system.

MARCUS

Sorry, Pastor Ryan. They were vacuuming in here.

JEFFERSON

I don't care! Your job is lights. Let them do theirs.

He storms to the podium.

JEFFERSON (CONT'D)

(to himself)

How many times am I gonna have to practice this fucking sermon?

ROSALEIGH

As many times as it takes to believe that mess?

JEFFERSON

Mom!

He looks at her annoyed.

JEFFERSON (CONT'D)
I'm busy here. What do you need?

ROSALEIGH
You got your dad's nasty attitude still. I'm fine, by the way. If Lilian and Sarah didn't come visit, you wouldn't know I was still alive.

JEFFERSON
I've been busy.

ROSALEIGH
I see, Jefferson. You stay busy. Carrying on just like your father. Still trying to fill his shoes.

JEFFERSON
Dad was a politician. I bring people the Word. I ain't filling no body's shoes.

Rosaleigh stands.

ROSALEIGH
You build this monstrosity...

She motions around at the church while climbing the stairs to the stage.

ROSALEIGH (CONT'D)
You rake in hundreds of thousands of dollars a week. You twist and turn the people while making yourself rich.

She looks to the podium and sees Jefferson's RED BIBLE sitting there.

ROSALEIGH (CONT'D)
(chuckles)
Even got his old Bible still.

She locks eyes on the book staring mournfully until he picks it up and tucks it by his side.

ROSALEIGH (CONT'D)
Your father turned into a bigot and you want to be just like him.

JEFFERSON

He was a white man with a black wife and a half-black son in South Carolina. He was *not* a bigot.

Rosaleigh wants to say hurtful words, but holds them in. She lifts her hands in surrender.

ROSALEIGH

I didn't come here to fight, son.

Jefferson relents.

ROSALEIGH (CONT'D)

I'm worried about Sarah.

His defenses go back up.

JEFFERSON

Sarah? Why? There's nothing wrong with her. She had a headache. She'll be fine.

ROSALEIGH

No. She seemed... She just didn't seem right.

JEFFERSON

Didn't seem right. Seriously?

Jefferson looks hard at his mother.

JEFFERSON (CONT'D)

She maybe didn't seem right because you keep taking her around those heathens you call friends even after I *explicitly* told you not to.

ROSALEIGH

Now you listen he-

JEFFERSON

No, mother. You listen. I am raising my family right. I guess I am following in my father's footprints after all. He gave me opportunity. Connections. He ensured my future while you abandoned your husband and your child.

Rosaleigh is stung. She can't respond.

JEFFERSON (CONT'D)
I got a lot to do here.

He solidifies himself.

She ultimately backs away.

As she walks to the exit, Jefferson Ryan goes back to work.

JEFFERSON (CONT'D)
Marcus! Have they finished cleaning
back there?

Marcus gives a thumbs-up.

JEFFERSON (CONT'D)
Fine. Let's do it again.

INT. CREED HIGH SCHOOL - DAY

Sociology Class.

Corine stands in front of the relatively bored class.

Sarah sits next to her empty seat.

Corine's presentation is peppered with visual aids - photos,
illustrations, writings.

CORINE
...visited with Sister Anyika. She
leads the Prays House on John's
Island.

Corine looks at Sarah. They exchange a smile.

CORINE (CONT'D)
Sister Anyika's people, my people,
are Gullah-Geechee descendants.
Their rites and traditions are
unique. They intermix Christian,
Islamic, and African folk
traditions to create a spirituality
unlike anything else anywhere else
in the world. The Prays House
family have unique ideas about the
duality of the human spirit and the
afterlife. But their ideas about...
(pause)
...exorcism...

Sarah looks at Corine. She's confused.

CORINE (CONT'D)

While Sister says that exorcisms are so rare that she's never seen one, and doesn't know anyone else who has,...

A PRICK in the class bellows.

PRICK

Exorcisms are everywhere. Just watch YouTube sometime.

TEACHER

Quiet!

CORINE

She says what most people know about demons, they know only from movies and books. Fiction. She says demons don't just show up and torture people. They have eternity for that. Demons only bother with our world when they have a real chance to influence humanity on a global scale. They want souls so ashamed of the horrors they did in life that they can't bear God's grace in death. Their want important people.

PRICK

(laughing)
The white devil!

The class laughs.

TEACHER

Out.

The Prick stands, collect his cheers and high-fives, and exits.

CORINE

They look for all kinds of people, but they want to drive souls in droves into Hell. Like the Germans who stood back and did nothing, or, worse, reported people and cheered as undesirables were trafficked and murdered. Or those who explicitly or implicitly support chattel slavery. The demon's goal isn't to announce its presence. It doesn't want to be seen.

Sarah seems uncomfortable.

CORINE (CONT'D)

She said you can recognize the possessed by certain markers. One. They're super important. Like king-maker important.

Sarah looks around to see if anyone else is feeling the discomfort.

No one.

CORINE (CONT'D)

Two. They're false prophets using false idols. Hitler stole the swastika from Hindus and turned it into a symbol the faithful would rally behind something as horrible as genocide. Three. Their influence is illogically unchallenged. Almost supernatural. And they focus on growing that influence. Transferring it.

Sarah breathes.

CORINE (CONT'D)

They're followed by strange smells. The cologne of hell, Sister called it. And they get hysterical. Like they've lost all sense of reality.

Sarah fans her face. Her forehead glistens as the heat gets to her.

CORINE (CONT'D)

She said they're so powerful and so protected by the people they deluded, you typically can't get close enough to do an exorcism, but she did say there isn't much of a ritual to them. She says that just by being human, we're closer to God than the angels. They have no authority over us, so we don't have to do much more than command them and they have to leave. We're the fingerprints of God.

Corine smiles. This excites her.

CORINE (CONT'D)

All of Sister Anyika's traditions incorporate the celebration of love. Worship services. Baptisms. Even exorcisms. These celebrations involve shout rings. Reminiscent of Islamic whirling dervishes, the celebrants in a shout ring dance and sing.

Corine reads from a note card.

CORINE (CONT'D)

If God is love, then true worship is to celebrate love.

She looks up and smiles.

CORINE (CONT'D)

She wanted me to quote her on that.

Sarah's breathing is rapid. Still, no one notices.

CORINE (CONT'D)

For exorcism ceremonies, they perform a shout ring around the possessed. The demon...

(correction)

...angel... she wanted to make sure I said angel. When the angel is kicked out, they do a lot of damage. The shout ring is meant to wrap the afflicted with God's love hoping to protect and heal the soul.

Sarah stands quickly.

She speaks to the teacher.

SARAH

May I go tot the restroom?

EXT. CHARLESTON - AFTERNOON

The roads surge with after school traffic as the newly freed high schoolers congregate around stores and cafés in an upper-middle class business development.

Small bookstores and trendy groceries and local restaurants are a gentrified dream come true.

The MIDDLETON CAFÉ is neatly tucked among stylishly overgrown landscaping.

Sarah, Sherard, and Corine take a table near the window.

INT. MIDDLETON CAFÉ - CONTINUOUS

The place is busy.

There's no food, only drinks, in front of the three friends.

SHERARD

I just can't believe they have you
back in school after only two days.

SARAH

You know Jefferson Ryan.

CORINE

What happened to you in class?

SARAH

It was like I was having a hot
flash. I think I'm about to start
my period. I was cramping, too.

SHERARD

Uh... T.M.I.

They ignore his prudish protest.

SARAH

Speaking of class, what was that? I
don't remember Sister Anyika
talking about any of that.

CORINE

I guess she got my number from your
granny, because she called.

SARAH

She called?

CORINE

Yeah. Kinda random. But good. We
talked about my grandma a little.
She asked me about my report. Said
she was thinking about me and
wanted to tell me more.

SARAH

So she tells you about exorcisms?

CORINE
I mean, why not, right?

They laugh.

CORINE (CONT'D)
Anyway, good thing she did because
I needed an A.
(beat)
So... what did your mom say
about...

SARAH
She's keeping quiet for now. But
I'm going to have to tell him soon.
She won't keep it secret long.

Corine says something, but Sarah doesn't hear. The sound of
the world drops away.

Sarah whips around to an UNHEARD SOUND behind her.

SARAH (CONT'D)
What?

CORINE
What?

SARAH
Did...

She looks around.

SARAH (CONT'D)
Did someone call my name?

Corine looks around.

SHERARD
I didn't hear anyone. You okay?

Sarah shakes it off.

SARAH
Fine. Probably somebody back there.

She motions behind her at no one in particular.

The BARISTA calls out.

BARISTA
Forty-one.

Sherard checks his receipt.

SHERARD

That's us. I'll get it.

He leaves the table.

CORINE

You sure you're okay?

SARAH

Yeah. I'm fine. Things have just been weird, you know?

CORINE

You need to get some sleep. Did you get any rest while you were home?

SARAH

A little. But, you know, finals.

Sherard returns with fancy warm sandwiches sliding the plates into place while sitting.

SARAH (CONT'D)

Enough current events. Let's talk the future.

She cuts accusatory eyes at Corine.

SARAH (CONT'D)

Did you send the deposit?

CORINE

Of course. We got the apartment.

They squeal.

Sherard bites into his sandwich.

SHERARD

I still can't believe ya'll are leaving me behind. What am I supposed to do?

CORINE

Get a job. That's on you. Why didn't you apply anywhere?

SHERARD

Too much money. And to be what? A teacher? Continue the propaganda cycle.

CORINE
(mocking)
Blah, blah, blah. You're just going
to work in your uncle's garage.

SHERARD
And what's wrong with that?

Sarah laughs.

CORINE
Boston needs mechanics, too.

Sherard smiles. He leans closer to Corine.

SHERARD
Yeah? You want me in Boston?

Corine pushes him back.

CORINE
Sit down, clown!

She laughs. He laughs. Sarah laughs.

Sarah reaches to pick up her sandwich.

The top bread slice moves.

Curious, she slowly reaches for the bread.

Just before she grabs it, the slice flies to the side.

The sandwich explodes with bugs. Frogs join the throng
emerging from nowhere. Roaches fly for her face.

She SCREAMS and jumps to her feet.

Rats swarm across her shoes. She stomps at them and SCREAMS
again.

Something grabs her arms.

It's Corine.

Sarah is back in the café.

Sherard and Corine keep the trembling Sarah stable. She has
the cafe's undivided attention.

SHERARD
What the hell was that?

The drinks were knocked over when Sarah jumped up. The table is a mess. Sarah's bug and frog-free sandwich sits on her plate.

Sarah is scared silent.

CORINE

Okay. Let's go.

She guides Sarah to the door. Sherard follows.

INT. RYAN HOME - LATER

Jefferson sits at the desk in the library researching. The books are angel and demon lore, academic research, and his Red Bible.

Lilian is in the kitchen putting the final touches on dinner.

Jefferson calls from the library.

JEFFERSON

Oh! Remember we have the Ward
Plantation social on Thursday.

Lilian closes her eyes, sighs silently, and smiles.

LILIAN

I almost forgot.

JEFFERSON

Senator Bryce will be there. I want
to introduce Sarah.

Lilian walks to the library.

LILIAN

You know she doesn't like going to
those things.

JEFFERSON

Well, she needs to get used to it.
She has a big future ahead of her.
She has to start the networking
early.

Sarah darts through the front door and moves quickly to her room closing the door too hard.

Jefferson, fuming, rests his elbow on the desk and points at his wife.

Lilian understands.

LILIAN
I've got it.

Before she leaves.

LILIAN (CONT'D)
Just remember. She's going through
a lot of changes right now. Finding
herself. Being on her own for the
first time.

Lilian catches herself.

Jefferson doesn't notice.

JEFFERSON
She won't be own her own. She'll be
home every weekend with clothes to
wash and a debit card to reload.

He returns his gaze to his studies.

JEFFERSON (CONT'D)
That girl surrounds herself with
the wrong influences. She needs to
cut away that trash she calls
friends and get back to church.

LILIAN
Don't say that about those kids.

He dismisses her.

LILIAN (CONT'D)
I think we need to get her to talk
to somebody. If it's stress...

JEFFERSON
Here I am saying she needs to get
rid of bad influences and you
suggest a therapist?

LILIAN
Confession is supposed to help,
right? And, no matter how good we
may be, there are some things a
teenage girl won't tell her
parents.

Jefferson relents.

JEFFERSON

Do what you want. Explore your
worldly solution. When they fail,
I'll remind her of who will.

Lilian begrudgingly smiles and leaves Jefferson to his reading.

EXT. WARD PLANTATION - NIGHT

Ward Plantation is a busy country club where the wealthiest and most prominent members of the community socialize and make backroom deals.

Jefferson pulls his silver SUV to the VALET STAND and steps out leaving the truck running. He's wearing a high-dollar suit and tie.

He rounds the back of the vehicle as Lilian and Sarah step out. They're both in gorgeous dresses. Sarah's falls just below her knees.

Jefferson reaches through the passenger door to the VALET in the driver's seat and takes the ticket for his keys. He tucks it into his inner coat pocket and walks ahead of the other two.

He opens the door for them and enters behind them.

INT. WARD PLANTATION - CONTINUOUS

Through the door, Jefferson takes the lead making sure Lilian is walking just behind him and Sarah behind her.

JEFFERSON

Best behavior tonight, ladies.

He looks in a mirror in the hallway leading into the main ballroom and puts on his professional smile.

Lilian humors him with a smile.

Sarah rolls her eyes when he isn't looking.

Into the ballroom, Jefferson is in his element.

JEFFERSON (CONT'D)

Joe Wainwright!

He presses his palm into the thick hands of a wealthy man dressed in beige slacks and a polo shirt.

JOSEPH

Pastor.

JEFFERSON

I heard you got a new cabin
cruiser.

JOSEPH

(boasting)

That I did.

JEFFERSON

I'll have to come around next time
you're taking her out.

Jefferson moves past his acquaintance moving to the next
greeting.

JEFFERSON (CONT'D)

Judge Kline. Thank you again.

KLINE

Don't mention it. We can't have the
wrong kinds of people setting up
shop in our community.

JEFFERSON

You've met my beautiful wife.

He smiles and nods.

JEFFERSON (CONT'D)

And my stunning daughter. She may
be arguing cases in front of you in
a few years.

Kline and Jefferson share a laugh.

Jefferson's confident turns to opportunistic excitement. He
grabs Lilian's arm.

JEFFERSON (CONT'D)

The Senator!
(to Kline)
Excuse us.

The family's attention turns toward an older man surrounded
by an entourage entering. SENATOR BRYCE instantly becomes the
focal point of the room.

JEFFERSON (CONT'D)

C'mon!

He pulls Lilian forward. Sarah follows.

LILIAN
Jefferson. Calm down. He has a
line.

JEFFERSON
We're not standing in line!

He diverts their path toward an old man, BRENT, not far from
the senator.

Sarah is visibly uncomfortable.

Brent sees him and motions him forward.

JEFFERSON (CONT'D)
(to Brent)
Now good?

BRENT
For my god son? Always.

Brent guides the Ryans through the crowd to the Senator.

BRENT (CONT'D)
George.

Senator Bryce finds the familiar voice.

BRENT (CONT'D)
George. This is Pastor Jefferson
Ryan.

SENATOR BRYCE
Ryan? That name carries a lot of
weight around here, Pastor.

The Senator smiles and shakes Jefferson's hand.

SENATOR BRYCE (CONT'D)
The Apostle Church, right?

JEFFERSON
Yes, sir, Senator. Eight years
strong.

SENATOR BRYCE
I've heard incredible things.

JEFFERSON
I'm honored, Senator.

Jefferson remembers his family.

JEFFERSON (CONT'D)
Where are my manners? Senator
Bryce, my wife, Lilian.

She delivers a preacher's wife over-sized, practiced smile
and shakes the Senator's hand.

SENATOR BRYCE
Nice to meet you, young lady.

He leans in and kisses her cheek.

She stomachs it.

LILIAN
You as well.

JEFFERSON
And this is my daughter, Sarah.

Senator Bryce turns lecherously toward Sarah.

SENATOR BRYCE
Oh my.

He puts his hand on her back and tries to pull her in for a
cheek kiss, but Sarah deflects into a hand shake.

SARAH
Nice to meet you, Senator.
(to Jefferson)
I'm sorry, I need to excuse myself.

She puts a hand over her stomach. Lilian flashes concern.
Jefferson flashes annoyance.

JEFFERSON
Of course.
(almost annoyed)
Hurry back please?

Sarah smiles and walks away as Jefferson continues his
conversation.

Sarah slips into the nearly empty ladies room and locks
herself in a stall.

She sits down and breathes. Relaxes. Recenters.

Back in the BALLROOM, Jefferson has positioned himself
between the Senator and the waiting line.

JEFFERSON (CONT'D)

You really should come to a service
some time. We boast one of the
largest congregations in the
county.

SENATOR BRYCE

Is that so? I may have to stop by
next time I'm down this way. I'll
be hitting the campaign trail this
summer.

JEFFERSON

Our church would be the perfect
place to announce...

Sarah's blood curdling RAGE SCREAM silences the room.

Jefferson looks to the center of the room.

Sarah stands panting and staring blankly at the ceiling. A
TEAR leaks from her unblinking eye and crawls down her cheek.

Sarah holds her underwear up wadded in her tight fist.

LILIAN

Sarah?

Lilian leaves a stunned Jefferson and Senator behind and
walks slowly toward her daughter.

LILIAN (CONT'D)

Sarah, baby?

Sarah's legs flush with blood gushing from beneath her dress.
It splashes and pools on the expensive carpet as horrified
onlookers gasp.

LILIAN (CONT'D)

Sarah!

Jefferson stares.

Lilian runs to Sarah and holds her.

INT. PRAYS HOUSE - THE DREAMING

1st Person POV. Everything is out of focus as if an AI
creation.

We walk the aisle to the door.

The door opens.

EXT. PRAYS HOUSE - CONTINUOUS

The sky outside is... off.

Corine and Sherard stand just beyond the church's steps. Their backs are to us. They move as if joking. Animated. But their conversation has no sound.

We approach.

They turn to look at us. Their edges are poorly rendered. Their faces don't exist.

We walk past them into a field of tall grass. The black mud beneath our feet slows our trek.

Lilian stands in the grass sobbing soundlessly with her face buried in her hands. As we near, she looks up. Her face: a blurred AI abomination.

We back away and then push deeper into the overgrown swamp.

Jefferson stands with his back to us. He holds his hand to the sky with his fingers spread as if in worship. He delivers a garbled, INAUDIBLE SERMON as he praises the sky.

We step around him. His face is blurred, but rendered enough to make out. But we still cannot understand him. He doesn't see us as he gazes ahead.

We turn to look where he does.

In the distance, THREE CROSSES stand against the horizon. The center one SPARKLES as if reflecting the sunrise. The other two are silhouettes.

The silhouetted crosses BURST INTO FLAMES.

In the light of the flames, a CRUCIFIED FIGURE writhes on the center cross.

The figure is SARAH. She writhes as if in pain, but her face is featureless.

Turning away from the dying child, we see that we have been Anyika this whole time. She is terrified.

INT. ROSALEIGH'S LIVING ROOM - NIGHT

Rosaleigh jerks awake.

She had been dreaming in her recliner with the evening news playing.

Her house is humble but warm.

She sits the recliner up and reaches for her cellphone charging on the side table.

She goes to her recent calls and finds Sarah's contact information.

She calls.

No answer.

She sees that she has a voicemail. She plays it.

LILIAN
(through phone)
Rosaleigh, it's Lillian.

EXT. ROSALEIGH'S HOME - NIGHT

Rosaleigh's house is old but well maintained.

Her living room curtains are still open. Her lamp is on.

She stands.

INT. MUSC CHARLESTON, SC - NIGHT

Sarah lies in an MRI CHAMBER. The machine CACKLES.

A TECH sits in an adjacent room watching screens.

Lillian and Jefferson stand nearby watching the test through a window.

They argue.

JEFFERSON
I can't believe you brought her
back here!

LILIAN
Jefferson Ryan. This is your
daughter!

JEFFERSON
She *is* my daughter! And she just
had a MRI. This wordly nonsense
ain't going to tell you a goddamned
thing!

The Tech tries not to look at the couple.

Lilian moves closer trying to turn Jefferson's volume down.

LILIAN

Our daughter hemorrhaged and violently seized in the middle of cocktail hour, and you seem more concerned with how it's going to reflect on you. This isn't some moral failure. It's not the devil. We need to find out what is *actually* wrong with Sarah.

JEFFERSON

Careful how sharp your tongue gets with me. Where is your faith?

Lilian has no immediate response. She's a dam holding back a vitriol flood.

An ALARM sounds.

The Tech leaps to their feet and bolts into the room.

Lilian and Jefferson crowd the window and watch as Sarah's legs straighten and jerk.

She has a seizure while inside the MRI.

The Tech gets to Sarah's flailing legs and pulls her halfway out of the tube. She flinches and kicks the Tech in the chest sending them hard against the far wall.

Sarah SCREAMS.

Jefferson rushes into the room and grabs her ankles jerking her out of the machine. He pulls her to the floor and hugs her tight while she continues to spasm.

Lilian stands beside them terrified.

More NURSES and DOCTORS race into the room following the alarm.

Someone produces a syringe filled with sedative.

They stick Sarah. She seizes for a second longer and then her body loosens.

Jefferson looks to Lilian.

JEFFERSON (CONT'D)

I hope they have the answers she needs.

EXT. MUSC CHARLESTON, SC - NIGHT

The PARKING GARAGE next to the MAIN ENTRANCE is moderately busy for the late night. Very limited foot and auto traffic.

Rosaleigh gets out of her car. She parked on the second floor, but the closest spot is on the other side of the lot from the elevators.

She walks quickly and pulls out her cell calling Lilian.

It rings.

INT. MUSC CHARLESTON, SC - SAME

Lilian's phone vibrates on a table in Sarah's hospital room.

Sarah sleeps in the bed. Jefferson sleeps on a small sofa. Lilian sleeps in the recliner.

EXT. MUSC CHARLESTON, SC - CONTINUOUS

Rosaleigh gives up on the call as Lilian's voicemail plays.

LILIAN
(over phone)
...and I will return your...

She slides the phone into her pocket book as the elevator door OPENS. She is blanketed in fear as she steps into the elevator.

Traffic on the road beyond the hospital campus parts as an AMBULANCE, siren blaring, speeds through.

The Ambulance turns onto campus.

FIRST FLOOR - PARKING GARAGE

The door opens and Rosaleigh steps out.

She speed walks from the elevators to the sidewalk outside the garage. She tries calling again. Her attention is on her phone.

Beyond her, the flashing AMBULANCE LIGHTS approach.

The ambulance ripples out of existence. The siren sound warbles then silences.

Rosaleigh disappointedly hangs up again. She looks before stepping into the crosswalk and sees nothing.

She steps into the crosswalk... and is mowed down by the ambulance.

INT. MUSC CHARLESTON, SC - DAY

OFFICE

Jefferson sits across from a MAN IN A SUIT and signs paperwork. An OFFICER stands to the side.

Lilian hangs her head.

SARAH'S HOSPITAL ROOM - SAME

Sarah sits up in the bed staring at the ceiling. Tears leak from her eyes.

SARAH'S POV: A barely visible shadow moves across the ceiling.

She grabs a pillow and covers her face.

She SOBS.

Corine KNOCKS on the door.

CORINE

Hey.

Sara looks up as Corine and Sherard enter.

SARAH

Hey.

The two approach the bed and sit.

SHERARD

How are you?

CORINE

(scolding)

Sherard.

Corine climbs into the bed beside her friend and holds her.

CORINE (CONT'D)

Your granny's house always smelled like food. Beans. Ham.

SHERARD

Oh man. She always had that bowl in the middle of her table.

(MORE)

SHERARD (CONT'D)
Remember that? Biscuits or
cornbread were always in there.

CORINE
Yeah. Your dumb ass always emptied
it.

SHERARD
She kept it filled for a reason.

Sarah smiles.

She jerks her head to the side as if seeing something.

SHERARD (CONT'D)
What's up?

Sarah seems confused. Distracted.

SARAH
Nothing. Seems like there's
something always moving just out of
eyesight.

CORINE
Maybe Miss Rosaleigh is keeping an
eye on you.

She hugs Sarah tighter.

Sarah scans the room.

Sherard looks around but sees nothing.

SARAH
Not her. Something dark.

CORINE
Dark?

Corine sits up.

SARAH
I just... felt something last
night. The walls were closing in on
me.

SHERARD
Like a panic attack?

SARAH
That's what I thought at first. But
then...

She loses her way in memory.

CORINE

Then?

Sarah looks at her friend.

SARAH

Then I don't know. I woke up here
and Granny was gone.

She sobs.

Corine and Sherard embrace her.

ASSOCIATE PASTOR 1

(V.O.)

Rosaleigh Harriett Ryan was a
mother, a grandmother, and a pillar
in her community. She was a godly
woman.

EXT. CEMETERY - DAY

A large crowd gathers under and around the family tent in the
historic graveyard.

Anyika and her PEOPLE stand outside the tent closer to the
back of the crowd. They are the larger group, but they are
dressed more poorly. They are clearly in mourning.

Those closer to and under the tent are well-dressed
congregants of the Apostle Church and acquaintances of
Jefferson. They are there for support and politics.

ASSOCIATE PASTOR 1 presides over the funeral.

ASSOCIATE PASTOR 1

We know this because of the fruit
she bore. This beautiful family
sitting with us. May God be with
you and your family, Pastor.

Jefferson nods acknowledging the Pastor.

ASSOCIATE PASTOR 1 (CONT'D)

Proverbs call upon mothers to point
their children toward Christ. To
pray for them. To model faith and
character.

The Pastor opens his Bible to a pre-marked selection.

ASSOCIATE PASTOR 1 (CONT'D)
 "Train up children," Proverbs says.
 Train them "in the way they should
 go, even when they are old they
 will not turn from it."

He closes his book and looks at the crowd.

ASSOCIATE PASTOR 1 (CONT'D)
 Miss Rosaleigh did not regularly
 attend the Apostle Church, but was
 and will always be a member of our
 church family. She will be missed
 by us all.
 (beat)
 God works through us all, does he
 not?

The Apostle crowd AFFIRMS.

ASSOCIATE PASTOR 1 (CONT'D)
 Before I close, Miss Sarah Ryan
 wanted to say a few words about her
 beloved grandmother.

Sarah stands and walks to the lectern.

She slides her hand on the casket as she passes.

Her eyes are red from crying.

SARAH
 Granny...

She pauses and searches the crowd.

Jefferson nods for her to continue.

She searches more and finds Corine and Sherard a row back
 smiling.

SARAH (CONT'D)
 Granny never met a stranger. I
 remember being a little girl going
 with her to Hodge's General Store.
 It's not there any more, but Granny
 always got her groceries there. She
 said they had the best meat. I
 always thought she was a little
 sweet on Mr. Hodge.

Sarah chuckles.

The crowd echoes.

SARAH (CONT'D)

There was one time this boy was in the store. I remember he was wearing these dirty, old sandals with jeans with holes all in them. Mr. Hodge had this Slush Puppie machine in the front of the store by the counter. It had cherry, grape, and sour apple. This boy was standing, staring at the rotating plastic slushie on the top when we walked in. Granny did her shopping and, when we were checking out, the boy was still there. She went and talked to him. I don't remember what all she said, but he looked like he wore the weight of the world on his shoulders when I first saw him, and, after Granny talked to him, he looked like any other boy. She bought him the biggest slush they had and we stayed there until the boy's mom was off work. She worked in the salon next door.

Sarah pauses and chokes back. She fondles her CROSS NECKLACE.

SARAH (CONT'D)

Sorry. It was a small thing, but that was Granny. She believed in community.

Sarah locks eyes with Anyika. Anyika smiles.

Sarah smiles.

SARAH (CONT'D)

She truly loved her neighbor like herself. And, when you were around her, you couldn't help but doing the same.

(to the casket)

I love you, Granny.

Sarah returns to her seat and Jefferson steps up. He collects himself before speaking.

JEFFERSON

God is good.

The crowd responds with an AMEN.

JEFFERSON (CONT'D)

I'm going to miss my mama, but I am grateful that God gave me her. I want to thank you all for joining us as my family says goodbye. And I'm excited that mama knew so very many people. I want to invite you all out to Apostle Church's reaffirmation ceremony this weekend. Our entire church family will be rebaptized. We'll will cleanse ourselves and remind ourselves to whom we belong. Please join us.

EXT. CEMETERY - LATER

As the funeral attendees disperse, Sarah stands with Corine and Sherard.

SHERARD

...and then she held out that bar of Dial and told me she'd wash that filth right out of my mouth if she ever heard me say that again.

They all laugh.

SARAH

Granny didn't play.

ANYIKA

No she didn't.

Anyika approaches with a smile.

She hugs Sarah.

ANYIKA (CONT'D)

I'm going to miss her.

SARAH

Me, too.

Anyika's face hardens.

ANYIKA

Sister Rosaleigh called me the night she died.

SARAH

What?

ANYIKA

She had a... a very bad dream. She was worried about you. And, I think, rightly so.

Corine presses Sarah's arm.

CORINE

We're going to go. See you later?

SARAH

Yeah.

CORINE

Love you.

SARAH

You, too.

Corine and Sherard say their goodbyes to Anyika and walk away.

ANYIKA

When I first met you, I saw something creeping up on you.

Sarah is shocked.

Anyika looks around Sarah at nothing.

ANYIKA (CONT'D)

But it's on you now.

SARAH

What? What's on me?

ANYIKA

Don't you let it separate you from your loved ones and your light, you hear me?

SARAH

What is it?

Jefferson is speaking with a couple of funeral attendees when he notices Anyika and Sarah speaking. He excuses himself.

ANYIKA

A dark thing. A fallen thing. Something that wants to separate you from God. The darkness is where it thrives.

Jefferson steps between Anyika and Sarah.

Anyika smiles.

JEFFERSON

It's good of you and your people to come say goodbye to my mom.

ANYIKA

I am truly sorry for your loss. We actually plan to continue the celebration of Sister Rosaleigh's life out at Prays House if you and your family would like to join us.

Jefferson steps closer to Anyika. He leans in and speaks quietly.

JEFFERSON

My mama's gone. What you and your heathen horde do in her name is between you and God. But you stay away from my family.

He turns and wraps his arm around Sarah's shoulders.

JEFFERSON (CONT'D)

We need to catch up to your mom.

Sarah looks back with apology on her face.

Anyika watches them walk away.

EXT. PRAYS HOUSE - EVENING

The evening is blue and clear. The sun has set, but the lack of street lights expose how bright a southern summer night can be.

The small church is busy with activity. People come and go from the front and the back. A pot luck is staged on folding tables in the back yard. CELEBRATORY MUSIC comes from inside.

Sarah's car pulls into the grass out front.

She, Corine, and Sherard get out and walk toward the church.

Sarah hesitates.

SARAH

I really shouldn't.

Corine sighs.

SHERARD
Come on. You need this.

SARAH
But my dad...

SHERARD
He'll get over it.

CORINE
Shut up.
(to Sarah)
These are your granny's people.
This is...

SARAH
...how she should be celebrated.
(beat)
But, I'm just so tired.

CORINE
We won't stay long.

Corine nods with a, *you need this* look.

Sarah follows them in.

INT. PRAYS HOUSE - CONTINUOUS

The pews are sparsely populated with people eating and talking and laughing.

The open space beyond the pews swarms with dancing and music. Two rings of people dance and rotate and SHOUT with glee and SING.

The back wall is lined with pictures of Rosaleigh. A life well lived.

Sarah walks the aisle and crosses the dance floor entering the Granny Museum.

Sarah smiles as she looks through the proudly displayed photos.

The centerpiece is a large, aged photo of a YOUNG BLACK WOMAN dancing. Behind her, a MIDDLE-AGED WHITE MAN leans against a wall with arms crossed. He wears a vest and tie and watches with a smile.

ANYIKA
She always loved to dance.

She stands beside Sarah.

SARAH
You knew her back then?

ANYIKA
Oh yeah. Her daddy's house wasn't
but a block from mine.

SARAH
Is that Granddaddy?

ANYIKA
It is. He loved that woman back
then.

SARAH
I don't know that I've ever seen
him that young. I mean, there was
one baby picture, but most of their
photo books were from after they
were married.

ANYIKA
That was the day they met.

Sarah's jaw drops. She stares in awe at the photo.

SARAH
I've never seen this before.

The photo mesmerizes. Sarah's POV slowly closes in until the
photo is all-encompassing.

ANYIKA
The neighborhood behind Sister
Rosaleigh's house used to be a huge
field. We'd go out there on Friday
and Saturday nights. People would
bring guitars and make drums out of
whatever they found and we'd sing
and dance into the night.

(beat)

I don't know how Gary Ryan heard
about our gathering, but there he
was. Just showed up and joined the
fun and no one said boo about it.

(beat)

A hurricane was making landfall
sometime early the next morning, so
our night was going to be shorter
than usual. But we still had fun.

The photo begins to slowly shift... then move... as Anyika tells the story.

ANYIKA (CONT'D)

The thunder rolled like God himself was joining in. Flashes of lightening made her eyes and skin sparkle. I think that was all it really took to knock that man head over heels for Rosaleigh. But then the trees started swaying and she just danced with them. He never took his eyes off her.

The couple's joy unfolds in holographic motion.

ANYIKA (CONT'D)

When the rain started, everyone ran for cover. Gary was the only one there with a car. He made sure Rosaleigh was safely in the passenger seat before leaving.

The wind in the photo blows heavier.

As it does, Sarah's hair moves.

Anyika sees and grabs Sarah's hands.

ANYIKA (CONT'D)

Where did you go?

SARAH

I... I don't...

Anyika looks around her head.

ANYIKA

When any of the spirit world touches you, all of it touches you.

SARAH

I don't... Let go.

Corine and Sherard notice. They approach.

ANYIKA

Something is on you.

Sherard separates Anyika from Sarah.

SHERARD

Yeah. And for a generous Ryan
tithe, you'll grab a goat and chase
it away, right?

The music stops.

ANYIKA

I didn't...

SARAH

Sherard, stop. Thanks. But stop.

She guides her friends away from Anyika.

She calls after Sarah.

ANYIKA

Don't let it tear you away from
God, Sarah. Our souls are connected
through Him.

They leave.

EXT. APOSTLE CHURCH - MORNING

The morning is already hot.

Four large above-ground pools line the lot outside the
church. Each is filled with crystal clear water.

Each pool is surrounded by metal decking and walkways
established with velvet ropes and stanchions. The decks are
decorated with tall grasses and flowers.

Metal scaffolding supports a camera grid above and large
MONITORS behind.

Congregants queue as of for an amusement park ride. They each
wear white baptismal gowns over bathing suits.

INT. APOSTLE CHURCH - SAME

JEFFERSON'S OFFICE.

Jefferson ties the tie of his ceremonial suit and yells at
Sarah.

JEFFERSON

Of course you're getting baptized.
I don't want to hear any more about
it.

SARAH

It's just, we *just* buried Granny.
This just sorta feels wrong.

Jefferson glares at his daughter.

JEFFERSON

What's *wrong* about rededicating
yourself to God?

(beat)

You've been backsliding. Don't
think I haven't noticed. All of
these... issues that you've been
having. You've invited something
in. A deception. Don't let it to
convince you you're something more
than you are. You are a servant of
the most high.

(beat)

Now, you're not only getting re-
baptized today, you're going to be
at the front of the line.

SARAH

I'm sorry, but I don't feel the
need to do performative worship to
get closer to God.

She tries to catch her words but is too late.

JEFFERSON

That's your damned Granny speaking
through you.

Anger.

SARAH

Good!

JEFFERSON

You're going to Freedom U.

Surprise.

JEFFERSON (CONT'D)

Oh yeah. Your mama let that one
slip. You're going and you're
getting your head right about your
future. There is no Boston. That
nonsense ends now.

Very nearly a protest.

JEFFERSON (CONT'D)
Not one more word.

And there wasn't.

Jefferson slides his arms into his coat and straightens his tie.

JEFFERSON (CONT'D)
Change into your gown.

EXT. APOSTLE CHURCH - MINUTES LATER

Jefferson exits the church and follows his planned route around the crowd to the deck of the first pool.

Sarah follows him wearing her gown.

Each of the other Pastors already stand on the decks of the other pools.

The mic clipped to Jefferson's collar pops to life and he speaks.

Lilian watches from the line at Jefferson's pool.

Corine and Sherard stand to the side - part of the congregation, but not in line for baptism.

JEFFERSON
Glory be to God, brothers and
sisters. Glory be.

The crowd responds AMEN.

JEFFERSON (CONT'D)
We live in a world set against us.
Trying to convince us that we are
owed something, thus subjugating us
to the will of a fallen society.

He looks across the sea of rapt followers.

JEFFERSON (CONT'D)
Baptism washes us clean. Makes us
worthy. It takes away our fallen
nature and sets us upon the path of
righteousness. By birth we are
fallen. By choice do we rise.
(beat)
We soiled by this world. And, as
with any filthy child, we must be
washed clean.

Jefferson points to the cameras.

JEFFERSON (CONT'D)
Millions at home can see our
commitment to God and join in our
rededication.

(beat)
And this is a bit of a proud papa
moment, but my baby girl is the
first in line. She's about to
venture out into this evil world as
an adult.

He locks eyes with Sarah.

She can't be made to fake a smile.

Lilian looks concerned.

JEFFERSON (CONT'D)
She will wash clean the temptations
of youth and give to God what is
God's.

Jefferson steps down into the pool and motions for Sarah to
follow.

Corine and Sherard seem worried.

JEFFERSON (CONT'D)
She will insulate herself from and
guard herself against this world.

Sarah hesitates at the water's edge.

He forces a patient tone.

JEFFERSON (CONT'D)
Sarah?

Lilian takes a step, but stops herself.

SHERARD
(yelling)
She doesn't want to!

The crowd SHUSHES him.

Sarah steps into the pool.

The vinyl of the pool wall SHUDDERS.

Jefferson takes Sarah in his arms. One hand goes to her back.
The other lies flat on her forehead.

Jefferson looks to the nearest camera.

JEFFERSON

I baptize you with water. But one who is more powerful than I will come, the straps of whose sandals I am not worthy to untie. He will baptize you with the Holy Spirit and fire.

He dunks her beneath the water.

The pool wall ruptures sending thousands of gallons of water into the gathered crowd.

Jefferson is washed out of the pool.

Sarah stands in the center of the nearly empty pool gasping for air.

Lilian sprints to the deck as Sarah emerges from the pool. Sarah is blank - emotionless.

Lilian wraps her arms around Sarah and leads her down the steps and toward the church.

Corine and Sherard see them climbing the church stairs and follow.

Jefferson watches.

INT. APOSTLE CHURCH SANCTUARY - CONTINUOUS

Lilian leads Sarah to the front row and sits her in a seat.

LILIAN

I'm going to get some towels.

Sarah is blank. Emotionless.

Corine and Sherard approach.

SHERARD

Someone doesn't know how to set up a pool.

CORINE

Were you hurt?

SHERARD

Can you believe that shit? Gotta have his circus. That loon is going to kill someone one day.

Sarah stands and walks toward the stage stopping at the bottom step. She stares at the oversized, sparkling cross hanging overhead.

Sarah SCREAMS WITH RAGE.

She digs her fingernails into her face and drag them down drawing blood.

She continues to SCREAM and scratches her nails down her arms. More blood.

Corine and Sherard race to stop her.

When they grab her arms, she SLINGS them to the side with inhuman strength.

Sarah bends backwards placing her palms flat on the carpet behind her while her feet remain flat.

She SCURRIES up the stairs to the top of the stage.

Lilian enters with towels but freezes.

SARAH

(inhuman voices)

We are the beginning and the end.
The light and the dark. We are
life, and we are death. We are
eternal.

A whip CRACKS from the sanctuary entrance.

Jefferson stands in the door.

JEFFERSON

Sleep, demon!

He CRACKS the whip again.

Sarah collapses.

Corine and Sherard stare at Sarah.

The Three Pastors enter behind Jefferson.

JEFFERSON (CONT'D)

It's time for you two to go home.

INT. CORINE'S CAR - MIDDAY

Corine drives. Sherard rides shotgun.

SHERARD

Where are we going? Why did you let him...?

CORINE

There was no way Pastor Ryan was going to let us stay there, and you know it.

SHERARD

Whatever.

CORINE

There was nothing we could do there.

He crosses his arms and sits back.

He reacts as Corine turns toward the Prays House.

SHERARD

Are you serious?

CORINE

Anyika knew something was wrong.

SHERARD

How do you know she isn't the one doing voodoo shit?

CORINE

(defensive)

You know damn good and well that's not what they believe. Don't be an ass.

(beat)

You said it yourself, Pastor Ryan is just wants his circus. You've seen what he does. There *has* to be a better way.

Corine parks the car.

They run for the church.

INT. PRAYS HOUSE - CONTINUOUS

CORINE

(calling)

Anyika? Sister?

Anyika emerges from the back.

ANYIKA
Stop yelling.

CORINE
It's Sarah.

ANYIKA
I know, I know. This has been moving on her. I hoped she could escape it. That girl is just so tempting.

SHERARD
Tempting? What the hell are you talking about?

ANYIKA
Our souls are tethered to God. When we die, we return to him. Our spirits stay behind. They become guides. Some spirits are so powerful, so full of promise, they become targets for God's fallen angels.

SHERARD
Fallen angels? You're talking about demons?

ANYIKA
(continuing)
They want to suck the bodies clean like oysters and wear us.

CORINE
What do you mean by promise?

ANYIKA
(answers Corine)
Influence. They find people with the potential to guide humanity. To push us toward self destruction.

Anyika leads the two out of the church.

EXT. PRAYS HOUSE - CONTINUOUS

She leads them to the next door house.

ANYIKA
Sarah has a choice to make.

CORINE
What kind of choice?

ANYIKA
She can either bend to the will of
the thing crouching inside her, or
she can stand.

Anyika knocks on the door.

A MAN comes to the door.

ANYIKA (CONT'D)
Gather the celebrants.

The Man goes inside.

A PHONE RINGS at one house.

Then TWO. Then MORE.

Anyika leads Corine and Sherard back to the front yard of the
Prays House.

ANYIKA (CONT'D)
She can't stand alone. We are one
through the Holy. None can stand
alone.

Front doors for neighboring homes open and families step onto
the porch.

INT. APOSTLE CHURCH SANCTUARY - SAME

The congregation has shrugged off hopes of the mass baptism
and are, instead, seated in the sanctuary preparing for a
show.

From somewhere backstage, Sarah SCREAMS MADLY.

Two Associate Pastors stand on stage.

The third leads the choir. The choir sings.

BACKSTAGE

Lilian faces Jefferson.

Jefferson wears his WHIP Indiana Jones-style on his waist. He
holds his RED BIBLE in his hands.

Sarah's OFF SCREEN CURSES & SCREAMS continue through the
scene.

LILIAN

She is our daughter, Jefferson! You can't do this.

JEFFERSON

I am doing this *because* she is my daughter, woman! Your trust was in science. Man's medicine. I told you this was a spiritual war. Your faith belonged in God.

(beat)

I let you abandon your station long enough.

LILIAN

You let -

JEFFERSON

Know your place!

His voice hammers.

Lilian, shocked, is silent.

JEFFERSON (CONT'D)

Sarah is in my care now. God's work is getting done today.

Jefferson leaves her alone backstage.

He steps on stage with arms spread.

The choir stops mid-verse. The congregation freezes.

Associate Pastor 3 dismisses the choir.

JEFFERSON (CONT'D)

I apologize, family. We are called to organize our families in a rigid, divine structure as a form of worship.

(beat)

While guiding yours, I failed to properly manage my own.

Murmurs.

Jefferson holds up a hand to silence them.

JEFFERSON (CONT'D)

Today was for righteous rededication.

(MORE)

JEFFERSON (CONT'D)

But, instead of washing our failed
community clean, we are forced to
do battle with a darkness within
our walls. A darkness...

(beat)

A darkness invited in by my own
daughter. Worldly fixations.
Secular education. Daily
interaction with sinful peers.
These things opened the door and
brought the enemy into God's home.

He moves his eyes over the crowd. Sarah SCREAMS.

JEFFERSON (CONT'D)

But the devil is a fool. For where
two or three gather in my name,
there am I with them. God is here.
This is where the devil is
destroyed.

CHEERS and AMENS from the crowd.

THE CHAIR lowers from the rafters. Sarah is chained in.

Jefferson unfurls his whip.

The Associate Pastors flank the chair.

Sarah's head is lowered. Her loose hair shrouds her face.

SARAH

Daddy?

She sobs.

SARAH (CONT'D)

Daddy, please! There's... there's
nothing inside me. Maybe there was,
but there isn't anymore. I don't
feel it. Daddy, please let me go.

Jefferson CRACKS his whip.

JEFFERSON

Abomination, be silent!

The disgust on Jefferson's face is something Sarah's seen
before, but never felt. She is terrified.

Jefferson paces as if taming a lion.

JEFFERSON (CONT'D)
You, which are lesser than we who
belong at God's side. You will
yield!

Sarah's head falls.

An UNHOLY GROWL echoes around her.

JEFFERSON (CONT'D)
Name yourself.

Wind begins to blow around the sanctuary. Slow at first.

The walls GROAN.

The wind blows harder.

Seats throughout the sanctuary JUMP. Some congregants are
thrown to the floor.

The large CROSS above the stage moves.

JEFFERSON (CONT'D)
You will not have my daughter.
Return to the filth where you
belong.

The cables holding the large cross above the stage straining
and SNAP.

The cross crushes the choir section.

The Associate Pastors scatter, but stay on the stage.

Most of the Congregation FLEES the church.

Jefferson stands and faces Sarah. He smiles.

JEFFERSON (CONT'D)
We will do battle with this evil.
The rest of you should go.

Associate Pastor 1 takes the cue and urges the remaining
people out. The other two stay with Jefferson and flank
Sarah.

Lilian stands beside the stage. Tears streak her face. Shock.
Horror.

Jefferson CRACKS his whip.

JEFFERSON (CONT'D)
Lock the doors.

Associate Pastor 1 locks to the nearest door.

On the stage, Jefferson lifts his Bible above his head and commands.

JEFFERSON (CONT'D)
 I am crucified with Christ! It is no longer I who live, but it is Christ who lives in me; and the life which I now live in the flesh I live in faith, the faith of the Son of God, who loved me and gave himself up for me.

Sarah FLAILS and SCREAMS as if in pain.

JEFFERSON (CONT'D)
 It is by His will that I command you. By His grace that I challenge you. By His might that I cast you out so that this child can become a vessel for the Spirit.

SARAH
 Stop!

She rabidly screams the word.

Associate Pastor 1 stands guard at one of the church's locked doors when Corine BANGS on the glass.

She stands outside the door. Behind her are Sherard and Anyika. Beyond them, half a dozen or so Prays House FAITHFUL.

Associate Pastor 1 shakes his head and turns his back to them.

Corine BANGS on the door.

CORINE
 Let us in!

He turns and shouts through the door.

ASSOCIATE PASTOR 1
 Go away!

Sherard steps up and kicks at the glass.

ASSOCIATE PASTOR 1 (CONT'D)
 If you know what's good for you, son, you'll take your girlfriend and go home.

Lilian approaches.

SHERARD

And if you knew what was good for
you--

Anyika grips his arm and stops him.

She looks through the door and speaks to Lilian.

ANYIKA

Sarah needs help. Her spirit is
being broken. Her soul cut free.
And something is setting up shop
inside her.

ASSOCIATE PASTOR 1

You blasphemers caused this! That
girl is safe with her father.

ON STAGE

Sarah pulls against the chains.

JEFFERSON

I have been granted authority over
you! In the name of that authority,
I command you out!

Sarah SCREAMS and pulls harder.

The chains around her wrists hold, but the chair breaks. She
frees her arms and stands.

The Associate Pastors step up to grab her.

Sarah twists one of their heads around the wrong way.

She leaps on the other as he turns to run biting and tearing
at his back and neck.

The whip CRACKS across her back.

She SCREAMS.

Lilian hears her daughter scream and she breaks.

She shoves Associate Pastor 1 to the side and unlocks the
door.

ASSOCIATE PASTOR 1

You can't let them in!

He tries to stop her from opening the door.

With one finger in the air, she backs him down.

LILIAN

That is my daughter. Don't you dare
tell me what I can't do.

She lets them inside.

She exchanges a "Thank you" look with Anyika.

They race down the aisle toward the stage.

On the stage, Jefferson is on top of Sarah.

He punches her and screams.

JEFFERSON

Out, you damned spirit. Get out of
this vessel!

The still living Associate Pastor lies on the stage gasping
at air as he bleeds out.

SHERARD

Get off!

Sherard charges tackling Jefferson.

He stands and pulls Jefferson to his feet by his suit jacket.
He spins slinging the older man to the back of the stage.

Jefferson falls over the fallen cross and off the back of the
stage. His arms flail as he falls and the Red Bible is slung
away.

The Bible slides to curtains lining the walls.

Sarah, bloody, WEEPS.

Lilian and Corine run to her and lift her. Lilian uses her
dress to wipe the blood from her daughter's face.

Anyika gazes at Sarah. Studies her.

She searches the space above her.

She looks around the stage.

LILIAN

Sarah! Sarah, baby. Can you speak
to me?

SARAH

Mom?

She cries.

Anyika continues searching the rafters.

ANYIKA
(concerned)
There's no demon in her.

LILIAN
Oh thank, God.

Lilian embraces her daughter.

ANYIKA
No.
(beat)
I mean there never was.

CORINE
But you said...

ANYIKA
I said something was creeping up on her. Wanted her. But a demon leaves a mark. The victim, after they're freed, they're closer than ever to God. They had to be in the presence to be freed. But Sarah...

LILIAN
Sarah what?

ANYIKA
Sarah's been pulled and torn at like she was being dragged away from God. Like she was being hauled to Hell.

Anyika puts the puzzle together.

ANYIKA (CONT'D)
King maker.

FLASH: JEFFERSON INVITES THE SENATOR TO THE CHURCH

ANYIKA (CONT'D)
False prophet.

FLASH: CHRISTIAN NATIONALIST VIDEO FOOTAGE

ANYIKA (CONT'D)
False idol.

She looks at the bejeweled CROSS around Sarah's neck.

ANYIKA (CONT'D)
Unchallenged influence.

A BREEZE grows.

ANYIKA (CONT'D)
Quick. Gather around.

She motions for the Followers to form a circle around Sarah.

They begin to SING a hymn. They move to the music.

JEFFERSON
She is ours.

The voices emanating from Jefferson speak in unison. They are deep. Powerful.

His features are distorted. Inhuman.

Everyone is terrified.

Anyika, wrangling her fear, speaks to the demon.

ANYIKA
What are you?

JEFFERSON
We are the jealous god. The mighty
god. The way. The Truth. The Light.
We... are.

The sanctuary vibrates with his words. Dust from cracking walls and ceiling dust the room.

The shout ring SINGS LOUDER. They dance harder.

Sherard and Corine join the singing.

Lilian cradles her daughter.

Sarah no longer sobs. She is at ease.

Anyika stands between the shout ring and the demonic Jefferson.

Lilian looks up from a resting Sarah to see the thing that was her husband.

ANYIKA
You're no god. You're a deceiver.
Just another disgraced angel.

JEFFERSON

This is my community. I hold it up.
I guide it. I make this community
viable.

She laughs. Realizing.

ANYIKA

You are the impotence of decadence.
An emptiness demanding isolation. A
false idol.

Jefferson SNARLS.

JEFFERSON

Heretic bitch! Pretender!

She holds up a hand.

Jefferson RAGE SCREAMS.

ANYIKA

God commands you out of this man.

JEFFERSON

Who are you to speak for God?
You're nothing more than trash
grown from sludge. Limited. No
concept of the vastness of
creation. I lived for eons before
God shat out your species.

ANYIKA

And you're just a demon begging for
daddy to notice him.

JEFFERSON

Just a demon? I am a holy servant
of God! I uphold the *proper* order.
God with his host of angels by his
side. A creation healed of its
humanity infestation.

He spits.

JEFFERSON (CONT'D)

Humanity. Slaves begging for a
master. Easily led excrement
undeserving of the preferential
treatment it gets.

Anyika stomps her foot.

ANYIKA

Out!

Jefferson ROARS.

The rafters TREMBLE and GROAN.

The RED BIBLE bursts into flames. It catches on the curtains and climbs quickly to sound panels that line the walls of the re-purposed big box store. The room turns into an inferno.

ANYIKA (CONT'D)

Out!

He ROARS again.

A piece of rafter at the far side of the sanctuary falls.

LILIAN

We have to go!

Anyika looks around and takes in the danger.

She waves the shout ring away.

They lift and carry Sarah.

Corine and Sherard follow Lilian.

Jefferson BELLOWS.

Part of the wall behind him collapses on him.

Anyika searches and finds him partially buried.

Flames close in.

His face, cut and bruised, looks normal.

He struggles to breathe.

He looks around wildly, unable to focus his vision.

JEFFERSON

Mama?

Jefferson dies.

Anyika mourns her friend's son momentarily before remembering the burning church.

She follows her flock out.

EXT. APOSTLE CHURCH SANCTUARY - CONTINUOUS

The church burns.

EXT. ROSALEIGH'S HOUSE - DAY

A moving truck is backed into the drive.

MOVERS unload into the house.

INT. ROSALEIGH'S LIVING ROOM - SAME

Most of the furniture is still Rosaleigh's. A few pieces are new

The BOOKSHELVES are Lilian's.

Lilian unpacks her books onto the shelves.

MOVER 1

Aye, Jake. Which one's the master?

LILIAN

Top of the stairs. Second left.

He notices her for the first time.

MOVER 1

Oh! Sorry ma'am.

LILIAN

You're good.

MOVER 1

Yes'm.

He climbs the stairs.

Lilian unloads another few books.

Sherard carries in a box.

Corine follows with a box.

Sarah has clothes on hangers slung over her shoulders.

SHERARD

...and that he *had* to offer me the job. He'd be an idiot if he didn't.

Corine kicks him in the back of the thigh.

CORINE
Shut up, ya clown.

The three laugh.

LILIAN
You're not going to be unpacking
all of that up there, are you?

Sarah feigns irritation.

SARAH
Of course not, mom.

LILIAN
Don't of course not me. Unpack what
you need for the summer. I don't
want to have to go and reclaim that
room after you move to Boston.

SARAH
Love you.

LILIAN
Damn right you do.

SHERARD
I love you, too, Mrs. Ryan.

LILIAN
Shut your mouth, boy.

They laugh.

Anyika KNOCKS at the open door.

Lilian stands to greet her.

LILIAN (CONT'D)
Sister! Hi. I didn't know you were
coming by.

ANYIKA
I just wanted to drop in. See how
you two are getting along.

LILIAN
We're... um... good. I think.
(then)
Yeah. We're good. I just... I don't
know how much she remembers.
(beat)

(MORE)

LILIAN (CONT'D)

It's like she's only missing part of the time because the rest of it is hazy... like a dream.

ANYIKA

That's to be expected. There was a thing trying to shred her soul to make room for itself, and it was damning her in the process. But that only worked like a slingshot. It threw her to the feet of God. She pulled us all into His grace.

LILIAN

I get that. The world has seemed so much more... real since...

Lilian stops. Thinks.

LILIAN (CONT'D)

How long was Jefferson not... Jefferson?

SARAH'S ROOM

SHERARD

Where do you want this?

Sarah looks at the box.

SARAH

That's future apartment stuff. Stack in the corner?

He takes the box to the far corner.

Sarah hangs the clothes in the closet.

Corine sits her box on the bed. She inspects it.

CORINE

Jewelry. Bedside drawer. Where do you want this one?

Sarah hangs the last thing and walks to Corine.

SARAH

We still have a few months, right?

SHERARD

Party time!

CORINE

Clown.

Sarah opens the box smiling.

SARAH
You never know.

Her smile falters.

She pulls the cross necklace from the box.

She stares at it as if it's both familiar and alien.

CORINE
Sarah?

SARAH
Huh?

CORINE
You okay?

Sarah looks at the necklace.

SARAH
Yeah. I'm good.

She reaches over and drops the necklace in the trashcan.

THE END