

HIGHER GROUND

PILOT

**CREATED BY
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**WRITTEN BY
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&
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TEASER

EXTREME CLOSE UP: A woman's eyes. They gleam - with joy. Creases at the corners tell us she's older. CAMERA PULLS BACK as she raises a shot glass of amber liquid and downs it. SOUNDS FADE IN:

PAT

Joan!

CROWD WALLA - WE'RE IN A...

INT. DIVE BAR -- PHILLY, PA. -- NIGHT -- WINTER

PAT

They've got your song!

HIGHER GROUND by STEVIE WONDER IN LOUD: Joan turns from the bar. She's 60's, Caucasian, might be unnoticeable, but on closer look -- she is beautiful.

PAT, 80, wiry, a lively wise-ass. KATHLEEN, 70 plain, soft-spoken but with a nice Irish sense of humor and BARBARA 50's, African-American, quiet, mindful.

The four friends snap fingers, start dancing to the music, feeling this song from their youth. OTHER FOLKS IN THE BAR, AN INCLUSIVE CROWD FOR AGE AND RACE enjoy the energy of the older women.

The bar door opens and a tall, powerful, 38 year old, AFRICAN-AMERICAN MAN walks in accompanied by TWO BODYGUARDS, intense looking fellas you wouldn't want to annoy. They don't need to flaunt guns, everyone knows they're packing. The bar gets quiet, fast.

JOAN

Juney!

BARTENDER

(concerned)

You know this guy?

JOAN

(beaming)

Yes, I do! For 28 years.

INT. FUNKY ROOM, BOARDING HOUSE -- NIGHT -- WINTER

Rickety space heater, WHIRS. Unmade bed. Filthy sheets. Fast food wrappers, clothes tossed around the room. A broken chair. ONE DINGY LAMP by the bed.

AMBER WILLETTE, 18, white, could be just a pretty-girl-next-door but for piercings, tatoos and PREGNANT. She and her boyfriend, TAVION HILLS, 19, African-American, beautiful and adoring, are lying in bed, holding each other in a loving post-coital embrace. Tavion is rubbing her belly. He leans over and talks to it.

TAVION

Hey, Baby. This is your daddy out here. Waiting to see you.

Amber laughs.

AMBER

Some daddy! He's willing to let you sleep in a box in this dump when you come out.

TAVION

Hey, I'm working doubles and taking every shift that comes up. I'm gonna come through for my family.

AMBER

Working at MacDonal'd's is never gonna cut it! Wake up, Tavion.

TAVION

I know Mama'll come around.

AMBER

She hates my guts. She thinks I ruined your life.

TAVION

You made my life, Amber. You're my heart, baby. We'll make it.

She turns away, tears in her eyes.

AMBER

I got fired today. How'm I gonna get another job - now?

TAVION

Shit...

This gives Tavion pause.

AMBER

Please, please, Tavion. We have to do this. It's the first time I ever asked you for something. We need this - for our baby! Please...

Amber tenderly puts her arms around his neck, kisses him deeply. This is true love --

EXT./INT. JUNEY'S CAR -- OUTSIDE DIVE BAR -- PHILLY -- NIGHT

Joan and Juney are in the back seat, the shield up between them and his men in the front seat. He hands her an envelope with a thick stack of hundreds.

JUNEY

Pays to be in a growth industry.

Joan smiles wanly, counts the bills.

JOAN

Come see your mother?

JUNEY

No. No. For 27 years, no.

She shrugs - had to ask.

She pockets the envelope, moves to get out of the car where the old women bundle up against the cold.

JOAN

Be careful out there, Juney.

JUNEY

Bless me, Sister Joan?

Yes, she is Sister Joan. A NUN. She takes a rosary out of her pocket. Juney bows his head as Joan, leans over him, and makes a sign of the cross --

JOAN

"Grant that we, encouraged by the good examples of thy Saints, and especially of thy servant Leonard --

JUNEY

Leonard?

JOAN

(a look silences him)
-- may persevere in running the
race that is set before us, until
at length, through thy mercy, we,
with them attain to thine eternal
joy."

JUNEY

Who the fuck is Leonard?

JOAN

Patron saint of laboring mothers --

Juney laughs --

JOAN (CONT'D)

Prisoners --

She gets out of the car.

JOAN (CONT'D)

(pointed)
And criminals.

JUNEY

What I do is legal in 28 states and
the District of Columbia.

JOAN

Stay safe.

Joan joins her friends, bundled up against the cold. Juney's
passenger window powers down.

JUNEY

How ya' doin', Sistas?

PAT

Good to see you, Juney.

The Escalade peels out.

Joan hands the envelope of cash to Sister Kathleen.

JOAN

Take five hundred off the top for
the Mother's Day party. The rest is
for the old timers.

The four nuns walk away on the cold deserted street.

EXT. GAS STATION -- PHILLY OUTSKIRTS -- SAME NIGHT -- WINTER

Joan pumps her own gas into a beat up economy car. Sister Pat is dozing in the front seat. Sisters Kathleen and Barbara are asleep in the back.

Filling up his brand new, shiny AUDI, a ASIAN MAN calls:

ASIAN MAN
Need any help, Sister?

He can spot a nun when he sees one. Joan smiles, waves him off, friendly.

JOAN
I'm good, thank you.

ASIAN MAN
Drive careful. The roads are icy as hell.

He pulls away. OFF JOAN SMILING --

INT. GAS STATION, AT THE CASHIER -- LATER

Joan pays with a \$100 bill. Grabs a bag of potato chips.

JOAN
(to Clerk)
Take out for these. And gimme one
"Wonder Bucks", five *"Stacks of Cash"* and five *"Cash4Life"*.

Clerk hands over the SCRATCH OFF INSTANT GAME LOTTERY TICKETS to Joan, who notices TWO TEENS, Amber and Tavion, with hoodies up, enter. Joan sees them out of the corner of her eye, instinctively pockets the tickets, hiding them.

TAVION
Let's get a Yoohoo for my boo.

The teens kiss on their way back to the fridges.

CLERK
Can't take hundreds.

JOAN
Please, it's'all I've got. Have to drive all the way to Greenville, tonight.

Reluctantly, CLERK hands her change.

JOAN (CONT'D)
Thanks, good night.

Joan exits. Amber and Tavion linger in the back by the refrigerators. Under the fluorescents Amber's tatoos and piercings are a lot less sexy. Tavion, covered with a hoodie also, looks like a boy sent to the corner store by his grandma.

Amber PULLS a GUN from her bag: surprise! Tavion looks terrified.

TAVION
What the fuck! Where'd that come from?

AMBER
My grampa.

TAVION
No fuckin' way!

AMBER
Honey, we're not here for hot pockets.

EXT./INT JOAN'S CAR -- GAS STATION -- CONTINUOUS

Joan gets in, tosses the bag of chips to Pat.

JOAN
Here. Something to keep us awake for the ride home.

PAT
No barbeque?

JOAN
She who pumps the gas, chooses the chips.

They drive off, as inside --

INT. GAS STATION -- CONTINUOUS

Wielding the gun, Amber comes lurching from the back toward the Clerk. Tavion follows, totally freaked.

AMBER

Let's go motherfucker. Gimme the cash.

BOOM! Amber fires at the cash register to make her point. The terrified Clerk SCREAMS and backs into a display of cigarette lighters and condoms, knocking it over...

AMBER (CONT'D)

C'mon, you fuck! Open the fuckin' register.

TAVION

Whoa! Amber, shit!

Tavion doesn't know whose side he's on. The Clerk is too terrified to move.

AMBER

You mother fucking asshole!

CLERK

Don't shoot!

TAVION

Cool it, baby.

AMBER

Well, fucking do something!

The Clerk JOLTS into motion, desperately tries to get the computerized cash register open.

TAVION

C'mon man, just open the register. We don't want to kill your ass.

CLERK

I can't. It's fucking computerized. It jammed.

He slams the register open, terrified he's about to die.

EXT./INT. JOAN'S CAR -- HIGHWAY ON RAMP - NIGHT - CONTINUOUS

POLICE SIRENS. Three cruisers speed by Joan's car, blue and whites flash. In the rearview mirror, she watches them screech into the gas station. She eats a potato chip as the site disappears from view.

JOAN

Jesus, Mary and Joseph.

Joan munches a chip. Pat is asleep, potato chip crumbs on her chin. Kathleen and Barbara sleep in the back.

JOAN (CONT'D)
They'd sleep through Armageddon.

INT./EXT. GAS STATION -- CONTINUOUS

SIRENS, POLICE CRUISERS' blue and whites flash closer.

AMBER
Fucking asshole, shit!
You called the cops.

Amber COCKS the gun. The Clerk is trembling, puts arms up.

CLERK
I didn't, I didn't! I swear! It's
automatic! When it jams.

TAVION
Forget it! Let's get the fuck out
of here.

Tavion, panicked, makes a break for it, running out the back door. Amber follows, but can't keep up.

EXT. GAS STATION -- CONTINUOUS

Tavion pauses, even jumpier, waiting for Amber. She's sluggish and lumbering.

COPS are out of the car, guns drawn. Tavion BOLTS, hopping the fence, racing away at top speed.

AMBER
You're leaving me! You're fucking
leaving me?!

Tavion is gone, disappeared down the alley.

A cop FIRES. Amber SLAMS into the building. HIT IN THE SHOULDER, she screams, hurls her gun to the cops, throws hands up.

INT./EXT. JOAN'S CAR, HIGHWAY -- DAWN -- WINTER

Joan still drives, the Sisters snore softly. Far from Philly, it's a two lane highway in the Allegheny's. Snow banks and icicles hang from the trees.

THROUGH THE WINDSHIELD up ahead, a beautiful, old CONVENT on a hillside. Joan looks wistfully, crosses herself. Pat wakes.

PAT
You're still hung up on that?

JOAN
Now, you're awake.

Pat laughs. Checks the chip bag, empty.

JOAN (CONT'D)
That's where I thought I'd end up.
Cloistered, praying for this
screwed up world.

PAT
You'd have gone crazy.

JOAN
(shrugs, wistful)
It's still a beautiful dream.

PAT
We pray through action.

JOAN
It never feels like enough.

Pat scoffs. The car speeds past the convent, STILL VISIBLE IN THE REAR VIEW MIRROR.

INT. A CONVENT CELL -- DAWN -- SAME TIME

CLOSE SHOT: A woman's hand caresses beautiful, soft skin.

REVEAL CAMILLA NAVARRO 32, Filipina-American, and MARIA THERESA, 19, Latina - novitiates. Lying side by side in a narrow wooden cot. Camilla gently runs her hand along Maria Theresa's stomach, then her breasts.

Maria Theresa moans with pleasure. She pulls Camilla closer, kisses her. It's deeply sensual...but also innocent and girlish. Camilla's hand moves beneath the sheet. Maria Theresa, moans, giggles with unexpected pleasure.

Suddenly, the DOOR BURSTS OPEN. TWO FIGURES slip inside, SISTER LUKE, the prioress, and SISTER BRIDGET.

Maria Theresa cries out.

SISTER BRIDGET
(harsh whisper)
Silence! Get to your room.

Mortified, Maria Theresa weeps. Sister Bridget roughly pulls her out of the bed. She leaves. Camilla tries to get up but Sister Luke pushes her back, tosses clothes at her -

SISTER LUKE
Get dressed! Three strikes you're out.

INT. CONVENT -- CORRIDOR -- DAWN -- MINUTES LATER

The convent is old, silent. Statue of the Virgin is watching as the nuns shove Camilla, now dressed in ill-fitting street clothes, silently down the hall. She sobs.

Camilla abruptly FALLS to the ground, KISSING their feet.

CAMILLA
Please, please don't make me go! I beg your forgiveness.

SISTER BRIDGET
Get up! We called your father.

Camilla is PULLED back into motion.

ANGLE - the huge entryway doors...then past them. She's not permitted to leave by these...

CAMERA FOLLOWS THE THREE THROUGH A PASSAGEWAY TO A SMALLER, BACK DOOR. Sister Luke opens it.

One last shove from Sister Bridget.

Weeping, Camilla walks toward the door. Sister Luke touches her head, blessing her.

SISTER LUKE
I'll pray for you.

Through the doorway, the dawn breaks, bleached, raw and bright. Camilla walks into the light as -

- a CAR HORN HONKS. She's in the real world. There's a PICK UP TRUCK parked at the curb. A man waving. The ASIAN MAN from the gas station -- RODRIGO NAVARRO.

RODRIGO
Camilla! It's Daddy.

TITLES OVER:

The STEVIE WONDER song "*HIGHER GROUND*" covered by a powerful, woman's voice, soulful R&B:

MUSIC UP: HIGHER GROUND

*People keep on learning.
Soldiers keep on burning.
World keep on turning.....*

OVER: MONTAGE OF devout girls in HOLY COMMUNION dresses - then grown, TAKING VOWS as NUNS in HABITS, as PLAIN CLOTHES nuns ON THE FRONT LINES of protest and fights for social justice; at anti-nuclear protests, in soup kitchens, WORKING WITH THE POOR in America, Africa...

SHOT DEAD in Nicaragua, **THEIR BODIES LYING IN THE MUD.**

MUSIC: HIGHER GROUND

*I'm gonna keep on trying, till I
reach the higher ground. No one's
gonna bring me down. Till I reach
the higher ground.*

END OF TEASER

ACT ONE

EXT. ESTAB. STATE CORRECTIONAL INSTITUTION: GREENVILLE -- DAY

SCI Greenville is a maze of brick buildings - like a rural community college campus - but not. The prison is surrounded by razor wire atop 15 foot fences.

CAMERA TRACKS the line of PEOPLE snaking out of the VISITOR'S ENTRANCE into the parking lot. Tired BLACK and HISPANIC WOMEN, holding weary CHILDREN, restless HUSBANDS and BOYFRIENDS, OLDER KIDS. A FEW WHITE FOLKS.

CAMERA FINDS Joan, squeezing past the people in line, excusing herself. Pushing by a YOUNG TOUGH -

YOUNG TOUGH
What the fuck, lady? I been
standing here two hours.

Joan, smiles calmly --

JOAN
I know -

HISPANIC MAN
Chill, man. That's Sister Joan. She
works here.

INT. SECURITY -- SCI GREENVILLE -- DAY -- CONTINUOUS

As Joan steps inside....

OFFICER WILSON
(yelling)
...No cell phones or electronic
devices. No food, no gifts, no
bling, no weapons and no drugs!

ANGLE: Sister Joan flashes her ID.

JOAN
'Morning, Officer Crue.

CRUE
How are you, Sister?

Joan's hand is stamped, verified under an infrared lamp.

GRINDING SOUND OF METAL DOORS UNLOCKING...

INT. HALLWAYS -- SCI GREENVILLE -- DAY

Peeling green walls, faded, old, linoleum. Joan walks down the hall, knocks on an office door.

WOMAN VOICE OVER
(annoyed)
What?

Undaunted, Sister Joan opens the door and goes in.

INT. ADELE DAVENPORT'S OFFICE -- SCI GREENVILLE -- CONTINUOUS

DEPUTY SUPERINTENDANT, ADELE DAVENPORT, an African-American, middle-aged, ambitious and overworked bureaucrat. She's got a haughty attitude, cheap pant suits and a crappy office with battered filing cabinets, old desk, piles of paper.

Joan and Davenport get along just well enough to work together - a tense respect.

JOAN
Good morning, Dep.

DAVENPORT
What do you want, Sister Joan?

Joan waves an envelope, labeled MOTHER'S DAY PARTY.

JOAN
I did a collection, got the four hundred dollars for the Mother's Day party.

Joan offers the envelope.

DAVENPORT
Alright -- I'll okay the event. But how are you going to get the kids here?

JOAN
The Diocese will lend us a bus.

Davenport opens the envelope, glances at Juney's \$100s.

DAVENPORT
Since when do folks put hundred dollar bills in the collection basket?

JOAN

(lying)

I went to the bank. Who needs all
those nickels and dimes?

Davenport shoots her a look, skeptical --

DAVENPORT

(calls)

Lucy!

LUCY, her secretary, enters.

LUCY

Yes, Dep.?

DAVENPORT

Count the money and give Sister
Joan a receipt.

Lucy takes the bills out --

LUCY

(sniffs the bills)

Whew! That's some strong after
shave on these bills.

INT. NAVARRO HOME -- DAY

TV BLARING. CLOSE SHOTS: Food cooks on the stove for a
welcome-home feast, soups bubble, pots steam.

NENITA

Crispy pata and lechen, all your
favorites --

NENITA NAVARRO hugs her daughter Camilla. Nenita CRIES,
doesn't want to let Camilla go.

Packed in the entryway of the house is Camilla's family. All
professionals, they are MARISOL (28, sexy), her husband
EFREN (29, wary), nephew NICK (4), younger brother,
ROBERTO/BOBBY (16, smart as hell).

NENITA (CONT'D)

You must be hungry?

CAMILLA

A little tired.

IN THE LIVING ROOM, the huge TV BLARES, a baseball game. A lovely home. Floral papered walls are lined with studio family photos.

LOLA (Grandma) MARIA, (80), severe, profoundly devout, opens the door of her room --

CAMILLA (CONT'D)
Hello Lola.

LOLA
Shame on you.

The family is shocked. Camilla bows her head.

RODRIGO
Be quiet, Mama. I don't care what happened. I'm happy Camilla's home.

INT. JOAN'S OFFICE -- SCI GREENVILLE -- DAY

SUPER: TWO MONTHS LATER

Joan talks loudly into the speaker of an old push button desk phone. Sitting opposite is inmate TONYA.

JOAN
...Keasha's mother is right here,
Mr. Weinberg.

MR. WEINBERG
(filtered, speaker phone)
Every time Keasha talks to her
mother she starts picking fights...

JOAN
Of course. She's angry. She misses
her mother.

TONYA
Please, Mr. Weinberg. I want to do
right by Keasha. I want her to do
good in school.

JOAN
The more contact the kids have with
their mothers, the better they do
in the long term.

MR. WEINBERG
(on speaker, groans)
Okay.

Joan gives Tonya a thumbs up. Suddenly, Dep. Davenport barges in.

KEASHA
(filtered, on speaker too)
Mom? You there?

TONYA
Hey, baby. I miss you. I hear you
having trouble in school.

Joan steps to the doorway to join Davenport. Conversation on the phone continues in BG.

JOAN
What brings you to the bowels of
Greenville, Dep. Davenport?

DAVENPORT
We have a new inmate. Pregnant. Her
social worker says she refuses to
make a plan for the baby.

JOAN
Why?

Davenport hands her a FILE FOLDER labeled WILLETTE #16G3926.

DAVENPORT
When you figure out why these
foolish women do what they do --
you let me know, Sister.

INT. HALLWAY -- SCI GREENVILLE -- DAY

Joan carries the FILE. INMATES move purposefully, ADLIB
GREETINGS: "HEY SISTER JOAN. She's happy to see these women.
MAXINE CLIFTON, 50s, African-American, one time crack addict,
now an old-timer, serving life without parole, is mopping the
hall.

MAXINE
Hey, Sister J! How is Sister Pat?

JOAN
Much better, Maxine. Her retirement
is official.

MAXINE
We're gonna miss her.

JOAN
(quietly)
Did the old timers get their
commissary money from the pen pals.

MAXINE
'Bout a month ago. When you gonna
see Juney again?

JOAN
I'll let you know when I do.

MAXINE
You know I gotta ask --

Joan squeezes Maxine's hand, smiles continues down the hall.

INT. OFFICE -- SCI GREENVILLE -- DAY -- CONTINUOUS

Amber sits, picking at her bloody cuticles. Joan enters.

JOAN
Hello. Are you Amber Willette?

AMBER
16G3926.

JOAN
I'm Sister Joan Gavighan.

AMBER
Where's your black witch outfit?

JOAN
Oh, those went out of style with
poodle skirts and saddle shoes.
1966 to be exact.

She smiles, hoping to connect. Amber stares blankly, hostile.

JOAN (CONT'D)
Most nuns don't wear them anymore.
I'm a social worker with Catholic
Aid to Families. I do advocacy for
the women inside --and their kids.

AMBER
So, you like, help the babies get
what they need in here.

JOAN

Have you noticed any babies inside?

Amber gives her a dirty look.

JOAN (CONT'D)

No babies allowed. I'm here to help you make a guardianship plan for until you get out.

AMBER

Oh - they're just gonna kick my baby out in the street?

JOAN

If you don't name a guardian, the state will TERMINATE YOUR PARENTAL RIGHTS. Put your baby up for adoption.

A flicker of real fear in Amber's eyes --

AMBER

They can't do that!

JOAN

You belong to the state, now. They don't need your permission.

AMBER

Fuck! I don't have to listen to this bull shit.

Amber bangs on the door. The Guard enters, shoves her back down.

JOAN

We're okay Officer, thank you.

Joan nods, as the Guard exits, closing the door.

JOAN (CONT'D)

It's the LAW, Amber. THE ADOPTION AND SAFE FAMILIES ACT. ASFA.

Amber starts to mouth off again. Joan interrupts --

JOAN (CONT'D)

The law states that if a parent cannot provide care for her baby for 12-18 MONTHS -- which you cannot, since you're serving a minimum of 3 years -- that the
(MORE)

JOAN (CONT'D)

state -- that is the United States
Federal government -- has the right
to terminate parental rights -
FOREVER.

Amber just looks blankly at her.

JOAN (CONT'D)

It's the law of the land. Do you
understand me?

AMBER

I have no idea what the fuck you're
talking about.

Amber struggles to her feet. Joan stands, too.

JOAN

A judge will strip you of your
LEGAL RIGHT to be your child's
mother - FOREVER -- You won't ever
be able to get your baby back. You
won't be able to see it or even
know where it is.

Amber is paying attention now.

JOAN (CONT'D)

If you don't want that to happen to
you -- then find a place for your
baby to go. Tell me how to contact
a LEGAL GUARDIAN of your choice -
your family, or the father --

PAUSE -- then Amber scoffs, glares at Joan.

AMBER

Sister, I know what you're trying
to do. Get me to rat out the guy I
did the robbery with.

JOAN

(bewildered)

No --

AMBER

But he ain't my baby daddy. I don't
even know who is.

Amber struts to the door and knocks for the Guard --

INT. DAVENPORT'S OFFICE -- SCI GREENVILLE -- DAY

Joan, holding the file, stands across from Davenport who sits at her desk.

DAVENPORT

Why are you trying to make extra work for me, Sister?

JOAN

Amber's baby never has to enter the foster care system. I would reach out to her family but she didn't indicate any next of kin.

DAVENPORT

If Amber Willette wanted her family to have the baby, she'd have said.

JOAN

You and I know she's just an immature kid. She's not getting situation.

DAVENPORT

That's not my problem.

JOAN

I would do it, but I don't have that level of clearance.

DAVENPORT

No, you don't.

OFF Davenport, reluctantly conceding.

INT. CLOTHING STORE -- MALL -- DAY

Camilla stands passively nearby as her younger sister Marisol, with an armful of clothes, looks through a rack. A MALE CLERK checks them out.

MARISOL

Will you wear jeggings?

CLERK

Hey baby, you'll rock 'em.

The Clerk sidles up to them. Camilla looks away, uncomfortably, grabs some slacks off the rack.

CAMILLA

Let's just get these.

MARISOL

Cami, you're driving me crazy!
Don't you care if they fit?

CAMILLA

No -- not really.

MARISOL

Ugh, why'd I drag you out.

CAMILLA

I love being with you.

MARISOL

You've been wearing that horrible
skirt and blouse since you got
home.

CAMILLA

You pick out some things. That
would mean a lot to me.

MARISOL

I can't believe you're the same
girl who used to wear Chanel from
head to toe.

EXT. PRISON YARD -- SCI GREENVILLE -- DAY

INMATES in the yard. Jogging, working out, hanging out. Amber is alone in a corner of the yard, humming her favorite pop tune and dancing. Focused on her belly, she laughs when the baby starts to move.

AMBER

Yeah, baby, that's our favorite
tune. How are you doin'? You're
stuck in there and I'm stuck in
here -- I guess we're both doing
time. Tight quarters, huh?

She continues swaying and humming, rubbing her belly contentedly.

EXT. ESTABLISHING JOAN'S HOUSE -- NIGHT -- EARLY SPRING

The slums in the shadow of Greenville. A small brick house, on the same property as a rundown CATHOLIC CHURCH, is Joan's

"convent." There's a garden in the front. Newly planted vegetables, a few pansies.

INT. JOAN'S HOUSE -- KITCHEN/DINING ROOM -- NIGHT

The out of date kitchen opens onto the dining room that connects to the living room. A few religious objects in the house, plain furniture, worn. Sisters Barbara, Pat and Joan prepare a meal together.

PAT

...You and I know - the first pope with real balls is going to put an end to celibacy -

JOAN

- not the pope's balls, again!

BARBARA

I know. Pat, please, I've had a long day and too many arguments with my students.

PAT

Okay, okay. In the interest of harmony - no balls! This retirement thing has me on edge.

INT. DINING ROOM -- JOAN'S HOUSE -- LATER

Pasta, salad, bread and water on the table. Joan, Pat, Barbara, Kathleen all join hands for the blessing --

PAT

O loving and gracious God, bless the food we are about to eat and those gathered here. May we be ever mindful of those who are in need, especially people everywhere who struggle with the basics of life.

JOAN

Compassionate God, let us pray for Amber and her unborn child. Guide her out of the darkness of anger and fear.

ALL SISTERS

Amen.

They pass the food. Joan reaches for the water.

PAT
Still no wine?

JOAN
Not until your next scan.

PAT
Shit. I wasn't planning on a dry
retirement.

Joan's cell phone beeps. She reads a text from DAVENPORT -
FOUND MOTHER.

INT. PRISON CELL -- SCI GREENVILLE -- NIGHT

Amber's cell mates sleep. Amber cries quietly, face pressed
to the wall. Maxine, in a bunk across from her, wakes, hears
her.

MAXINE
(whispers)
You will always be that baby's
mother. You understand me. It
doesn't matter who raises him. He
is tied to you. Even when he don't
want to be.

AMBER
He won't be a baby by the time I
get out.

MAXINE
Three to five is nothing compared
to life without parole.

AMBER
What did you do?

MAXINE
Let's just say, I got the sentence
I deserved. But you, you've still
got a chance to be a real mother --
even from inside. Sister Joan will
help keep you connected to your
baby.

AMBER
Bitch wanted me to rat out my baby
daddy.

MAXINE

Nah, she's trying to keep your kid out of the system. She's watched over my son Juney for almost thirty years. You can trust her.

AMBER

I told her to fuck off.

MAXINE

Lucky for you, she's in the business of forgiving.

Suddenly, Amber's WATER BREAKS.

AMBER

Oh my god. Ow! Something just popped inside.

Water DRIPS onto the bed below. The CELL MATES wake up -

CELL MATE I

Shit! Are you seriously pissing right on my head!?!?

AMBER

What's going on? I can't stop it.

CELL MATE II

You are one stupid white girl.

MAXINE

Your baby is coming.

CELL MATE I

Guard! Guard! Get this bitch out of here so I can sleep.

INT. PRISON HALLWAY -- SCI GREENVILLE -- NIGHT

CLOSE ON: Amber's frightened face. We PULL BACK to REVEAL: she is shackled to a wheelchair, pushed by a GUARD.

AMBER

Shit! It hurts! Please, please I need Sister Joan!

END ACT ONE

ACT TWO

INT./EXT. BELL TOWER -- CHURCH -- DAWN

At the church next door to Joan's house, FATHER JUAN MIGUEL, a Columbian priest (35), pushes a button on the wall. THE BELLS RING. And CONTINUE OVER:

INT. CHURCH - CONTINUOUS

FATHER BERNARD, 70s, Irish-American, old-school holier than thou, at the altar as a couple of ANCIENT PARISHIONERS arrive for mass.

It's a lonely, meager morning mass --

BARBARA
(VOICE OVER)
"Finally, recall the sublime words
spoken on the day of the
Annunciation --

INT. JOAN'S HOUSE -- ATTIC CHAPEL -- SAME TIME

Joan and Sisters hold their own service, here. All is serene. The morning light bathes an altar where a Miraculous Virgin statue is flanked by bouquets of roses, lit candles. Along another wall is a BLACK MADONNA.

BARBARA
(CONTINUES)
'Nothing is impossible with God,'
and repeat them in hours of trial --
to all I love --

Joan's phone rings. She quickly reaches in her pocket, turns off the ringer.

BARBARA (CONT'D)
...That their confidence in Our
Lord may be reanimated, when all
human help fails --"

The cell phone begins VIBRATING INSISTENTLY--

INT. HOSPITAL ROOM -- DAY

Joan pushes past a GUARD at the door. Amber, drenched in sweat, SHACKLED to the bed, wails in agony with contractions.

JOAN
Unshackle her, now!

The NURSE enters...

NURSE
No can do. She's a flight risk. Are you allowed to be here?

JOAN
Yes, I'm Amber's advocate. I'm a nun! Sister Joan Carney.

NURSE
Oh...Okay.

AMBER
Help me, Sister. Please, I'm dying.

JOAN
Give her something for the pain.

NURSE
Doctor said no. Probable addict.

AMBER
I'm not a fucking addict!

JOAN
Is she okay?

NURSE
Fine. Healthy as a horse.

Nurse exits. Joan wipes Amber's face with a cool cloth. Amber screams again - pulls at the shackles.

AMBER
Fuck! Please, take these off! I can't move -- I gotta move!

The DOCTOR enters and examines Amber, nods to ORDERLY.

DOCTOR
She's ready.
(to Joan)
The family waiting room is down the hall.

AMBER
Don't leave me Sister! Please don't go - I'm scared. Please.

The Orderly wheels Amber out.

DOCTOR
Fine by me. Get her a gown and
mask.

OFF JOAN, she's scared --

INT. BIRTHING ROOM -- DAY

Amber SCREAMS, still shackled as the Doctor and Nurse work.
Joan holds Amber's hands, wipes hair from her face.

AMBER
Get me out of this! Let me up!

She pulls the metal cuffs so savagely, you'd think they would
break, but they don't.

DOCTOR
It's better if you just try and
stay calm, Willette. Okay, okay.
Here it comes.

Amber screams, blood curdling. Joan lifts her up so she can
push hard. Joan squeals.

JOAN
I can see the head. I can see the
tip of the baby's head.

Joan ecstatic - amazed, as the Doctor holds the BABY up.

DOCTOR
It's a boy!

JOAN
(awed)
Sweet Jesus....

AMBER
Give him to me! Give me my baby! I
want him!

The Doctor lays the Baby across Amber's chest. Amber sobs,
filled with awe -- instantly in love.

Sweat mixes with tears streaming down Joan's face.

Amber clutches Joan's hand. Both are sobbing with joy,
sharing a profound moment of connection.

INT. HOSPITAL ROOM -- LATER SAME DAY

QUIET. CALM. Lying in bed, Amber is as beautiful as any Renaissance Madonna. The Baby, swaddled in a blue blanket, and cap, is nestled in her arms. He has soft brown skin.

Now, Amber's ankle is shackled to the foot of the bed.

Amber is transformed - soft, tender, loving. Joan watches mother and son, adoringly.

JOAN

You're going to be a wonderful mother.

AMBER

I hope so.

JOAN

Is it okay if I bless him --

AMBER

Sure, Sister.

She takes a small antique bottle from her purse.

JOAN

Holy water! From a trip to Lourdes.

She opens the bottle, prays, uses the water to make a cross on his head. For an instant the Baby opens his eyes, looking right at Joan.

Guard I shrugs, while Guard II crosses himself. Dep. Davenport enters, interrupting --

DAVENPORT

Good day, Sister Joan. Hello, Willette.

JOAN

Dep.!

As Joan pockets the holy water bottle -

In walks CRYSTAL WILLETTE, Amber's mother, not more than 38. A plain, woman with hair pulled back, wearing new Walmart clothes. Unsure and uncomfortable, she's trying to look as proper as possible.

CRYSTAL

Amber, sweetheart!

Amber's expression hardens. She presses the baby closer, turning him toward her protectively.

AMBER
Shit! What's she doing here?

JOAN
I called her.

AMBER
Get that bitch out of here!

CRYSTAL
I told them you wouldn't want to see me, Amber. But I've changed. Honestly, I have. I've been saved, Praise Jesus, truly I have. I'm clean, honey.

AMBER
She's a lying bitch.

JOAN
Whoa! Amber stop! Everyone stop. We need to give this a chance. Mrs. Willette?

DAVENPORT
I've checked her out, Amber. Everything she says seems to be true. Now, I have two sets of papers here.

She holds up the two sets -

DAVENPORT (CONT'D)
One set to assign guardianship of the baby to your mother. Or, PARENTAL TERMINATION papers.

JOAN
Dep., c'mon. The girl gave birth a few hours ago.

DAVENPORT
She's going back to prison by the end of the day. Without the baby. He has to be placed.

CRYSTAL
Please, let me make it up to you. I want to make amends. I'll be a good grandma.

All look to Amber.

DAVENPORT

Let's be clear: If you won't let your mother take him, he comes with me. The foster care agency has a family standing by. Then tomorrow we go to court and terminate your parental rights so this baby is free to be adopted.

SILENCE. Everyone is quiet. Trapped.

AMBER

(to Crystal)

I named him Braydon. Bray. You want to hold him?

CRYSTAL

I do. Very much, honey.

Amber offers the baby. As Crystal takes him, his face is REVEALED, his cap falls off --

CRYSTAL (CONT'D)

Holy Jesus, is he black?!

Stunned silence. Amber emits a harsh LAUGH.

AMBER

Just like his, beautiful, sweet chocolate daddy.

CRYSTAL

With all due respect, Mrs. Davenport -- I can't take a black baby. I'm not racist. I just...Where I live, I live around white folks. What'll they think?

Joan snatches the baby from her, protectively. Davenport's veneer of officiousness is wearing thin -

AMBER

Get that fuckin' bitch out of here. I told you!

DAVENPORT

Please step out, Mrs. Willette.

CRYSTAL

I'm sorry, honey. It just wouldn't work out. Call me. Call me when you get out.

Davenport shows her the door, shoves it closed behind her. Amber cuddles her baby protectively. A moment between Joan and Davenport.

DAVENPORT

I have to take the baby - now.

AMBER

No! Please, please. You can't.

Davenport reaches for the baby. Amber shoves her hands away.

AMBER (CONT'D)

(screaming, wildly)

You can't take him! You can't! You fucking cunt! Bitch!

JOAN

You're scaring Bray.

Amber falls apart, sobbing as quietly as she can, holding Bray close.

AMBER

(sobbing)

He's mine- You're mine, Bray - He needs me...

DAVENPORT

Willette, release the baby now. You are being returned to Greenville immediately. Do you want to go straight to SHU?

Heartsick, Joan can only watch this nightmare helplessly. Amber weeps, helplessly.

AMBER

Don't take him! Please, he's all I got. I got nothing else. I'm his mother. He needs me! I know he needs me.

Davenport grabs the baby roughly away. Now, he's screaming too.

DAVENPORT

It's for the best, Sister.

Amber is breaking, truly breaking apart - crawling to her baby, trying to grab him but -- she's CHAINED to the bed.

AMBER

Please, please. Don't take him!

Suddenly, Joan blocks her path -

JOAN

Give him to me! Now!

A moment with stunned Davenport.

AMBER

(sobs, pleading)

You take him, Sister. You take him.
Take care of him for me. Please --

INT. HOSPITAL WAITING ROOM -- DAY -- MINUTES LATER

Dep. Davenport storms down the hall, followed by Joan.

DAVENPORT

You're a sixty year old nun, with no kids, no money, who lives with a bunch of even older nuns -- How the hell do you think you're going to take care of this baby?

JOAN

Look, I don't want a baby. But he deserves to be with his parents. This buys us time to find the dad.

DAVENPORT

Us?

JOAN

I'll find him! Amber'll go along with anything so she doesn't lose her son.

DAVENPORT

You are not helping either of those pathetic creatures, Sister.

JOAN

She robbed a convenience store. First offence. Never hurt anyone.

DAVENPORT

She had a gun.

They pause at the Nurse's station. Davenport holds the guardianship papers.

DAVENPORT (CONT'D)
Of course, you have a plan?

JOAN
Amber said she had multiple partners. That she doesn't know who the father is but --

DAVENPORT
(laughs)
You mean, if he's a brother screwing a white ho', he's the kinda guy whose DNA is likely in the system.

JOAN
That's what I was thinking but you put it so eloquently --

The joke breaks the icy anger.

JOAN (CONT'D)
How long do DNA tests take?

DAVENPORT
Couple of weeks.

JOAN
So, I'll take care of the baby for the next two weeks. Till we find the father.

Davenport sets down the GUARDIANSHIP PAPERS - Joan SIGNS both copies. Davenport takes one.

DAVENPORT
You know, she's playing you. These bitches inside - that's the one thing they're all good at.

JOAN
That baby isn't playing anybody.

Davenport scoffs, turns to a NURSE.

DAVENPORT
Nurse, don't let the Sister leave with Baby Willette unless she shows you the brand new, fresh out of the box, infant car seat.

Intimidated, the Nurse nods, fearfully.

INT./EXT. JOAN'S CAR -- HIGHWAY -- DAY

CLOSE ON: Bray cries his heart out.

PULL BACK TO REVEAL: Wrapped in a blanket, he is strapped into an infant car seat in the back of Joan's car, screaming.

Joan clutches the wheel anxiously, glancing constantly in the rear view mirror at the baby. There's a case of formula beside him. Panicked, she pulls off the highway.

INT. HIGHWAY REST STOP -- MINUTES LATER

HAPPY TRAVELERS lined up at McDonalds, Starbucks, Cinnabun...

INT. HIGHWAY REST STOP BATHROOM -- MOMENTS LATER

Bray still screams. Joan clumsily, tries to manage the baby while she pulls down the plastic change table, tries to fill a brand new bottle with baby formula. A FEW PEOPLE give her strange looks - an older white lady with a black newborn?

WOMAN I

You should strap him in.

JOAN

Of course, thank you.

At the sink, she turns on the hot water, runs the new bottle under the water for a few minutes, burning her hand.

JOAN (CONT'D)

Ow! Shit....

A FEW WOMEN hurry out, worried and suspicious.

SECURITY GUARD

(CALLS. O.S from door)

Ladies! Man coming in!

He enters. Even he is taken aback by the site of the older white lady clumsy and frazzled -- with the black newborn.

SECURITY GUARD (CONT'D)

Excuse me - Ma'am. Is that your baby?

JOAN

(curt)

Well, I am a nun. And do believe in miracles but -- no, I'm his legal guardian -

She manages to hand him the Guardianship papers.

SECURITY GUARD I

Oh, okay. Sister, lemme give you a hand. I've got three at home.

He takes the baby, cradling and rocking him expertly.

JOAN

You are a god send!

Holding the baby in one arm, he deftly opens a can of formula and hands it to Sr. Joan, who is still holding the bottle.

SECURITY GUARD

Here you go! But you got to sterilize the bottle and the nipple -- Pardon Sister.

She turns on the hot water.

SECURITY GUARD (CONT'D)

Gotta be boiling. MacDonald's.

EXT. JOAN'S HOUSE -- DAY

Joan holds Bray and lifts a baby bag out of the trunk. Pat comes out of the house.

PAT

Joan, what the hell have you done?

JOAN

Shut up, Pat. Give me a hand.

Pat tenderly takes the baby from Joan.

PAT

Aw...He's gorgeous.

JOAN

I meant, help me empty the trunk. I've got a port-a-crib and a whole layette in there.

PAT
God called you, Joan. Loud and
clear.

OFF JOAN, uplifted by Pat's words, takes the baby in her
arms, rocking him tenderly --

END ACT TWO

(CONT'D)

ACT THREE

INT. JOAN'S HOUSE -- NIGHT

SOUND OF BABY CRYING INCONSOLABLY as we FOCUS on the empty port-a-crib in Joan's small room. Diapers, baby clothes, etc., cluttering up the space, and all over the lovely altar of Joan's favorite Saints and mementos. WE MOVE TO:

IN THE LIVING ROOM: Joan walks and rocks the inconsolable baby. Kathleen emerges, groggy, from her room -

KATHLEEN

Do you want me to take him for a while?

JOAN

It's only for a couple of weeks.

KATHLEEN

Don't worry. We can deal with it.

JOAN

Nothing comforts him.

KATHLEEN

Colicky?

JOAN

I have no idea?

KATHLEEN

My niece was colicky --

Kathleen caresses the baby's head lovingly, then sits on the couch. She starts to sing quietly, the only lullaby she knows, "HUSH, LITTLE BABY." Bray just keeps crying.

Barbara comes out of her room. The guilt is written all over Joan's face but Barbara is cheerful -

BARBARA

Three for tea?

Finally, Pat comes out of her room. She makes a funny face at the baby, chucking his cheek gently. She takes the baby. Joan collapses on the couch.

JOAN

What the hell did I do?

PAT

It's just a baby for Christ's sake!

BARBARA

I know you believe it's the right thing.

Pat holds the baby confidently, humming sweetly.

KATHLEEN

Who's going to take care of him during the day?

PAT

Sister Grandma will take care of him. I was the oldest of 13 -- Why do you think I became a nun.

Barbara hands Joan tea.

BARBARA

What about all night?

JOAN

I'll take some vacation time. It's just till Davenport turns up the father through DNA.

INT. PRISON SHOWER -- DAY

Amber and TWO INMATES clean the showers. A GUARD enters.

GUARD I

Willette! You got a visitor.

AMBER

I think you made a mistake.

GUARD I

You gonna argue with me on this?

Amber tosses down her sponge.

INT. VISITING ROOM -- SCI GREENVILLE -- DAY

Tavion sits nervously at a table near the door. He's eating CHIPS. Amber is led in. She sits opposite him. He smiles sweetly, offers a chip as a peace offering.

AMBER

You didn't even get me my own bag?

TAVION
You still mad?

AMBER
What the fuck! You pussy mother
fucker. You just left me!

TAVION
If I waited for you we'd both be
inside. You should be happy I ran.

AMBER
Yeah, right. I celebrated. Right
after I got sentenced to 3 to 5.

TAVION
Shit. That's not even real time. If
I got caught, I'd be doing 10-15.

She looks around, cautiously -

AMBER
How'd you get in?

TAVION
Don't worry! I used a friend of
TaQuan's ID.

Reassured, she takes a chip, crunches --

TAVION (CONT'D)
I miss you, baby. How you holding
up?

AMBER
Fuckin' niggahs in here drivin' me
crazy.

TAVION
Honey, gotta chill with that n word
shit. You're gonna get your white
ass kicked.

AMBER
That's what you came to tell me?

TAVION
Shit, you ain't pregnant no more!
You had the baby!

AMBER
Nice of you to notice.

TAVION
What did we get?

AMBER
A boy.

Tavion is thrilled -

TAVION
I got a son?! A boy! Oh, baby!
What's he look like?

AMBER
He's beautiful, Tavion. He's got
curly dark hair.

TAVION
Yeah, what else?

AMBER
And sweet, soft brown skin.

TAVION
Shit, my first son. Thank you,
baby, thank you.

Tavion has TEARS in his eyes, he is so moved. Their eyes lock
- a moment of love. He reaches for Amber's hands -

GUARD I
No touching!

Tavion pulls his hands away -

TAVION
Where is he? I want to bring him
home.

AMBER
Home?

TAVION
Mama let me move back home cause
she knows I got the baby coming.
She is gonna kiss the ground you
walk on for giving her a grandson!

AMBER
Fuck her! She didn't give a shit.
Wouldn't do anything to help us. I
wouldn't be in here --

TAVION

That was before you had the baby.

Amber stands, angrily. Tavion is genuinely confused.

AMBER

Don't you come here again, Tavion,
or I will rat you out. You and
"Mama" can kiss my white ass. You
ain't never gonna know where MY
baby is.

OFF Tavion shocked and hurt --

EXT. SLUM STREETS -- PHILLY -- DAY

Two story row houses, barred windows, graffiti, garbage, teen
mothers pushing strollers, young men hanging out on the
street corners, cool cars - same shit, another day.

INT. TAVION'S MOTHER'S HOUSE -- DAY

Deep in thought, DEANN HILLS, Tavion's mother, dishes out
macaroni pie for her two sons. DeAnn, in her forties, looks
60. A life of hard work and never enough money, written on
her face and two good for nothing sons. TAQUAN, Tavion's big
brother, twenties, handsome, tough, street, makes money from
drugs and petty crime.

TAVION

Mama, I want to see my boy. It
hurts not getting to see him. She
won't even tell me whose got him.

DeAnn pats Tavion's hand, comforting him, though she is deep
in thought.

DEANN

Well, you go right up there and
tell them you're the father and you
want to exercise your parental
rights.

TAVION

I can't --

TAQUAN

I told you man. What kind of pussy
uses a bitch to jack a WaWa?

DeAnn is stunned --

DEANN

Not you, Tavion. No, please tell me
no.

TAVION

It was her idea, Ma.

DEANN

I knew that trash was gonna drag
you down.

TAVION

If I go claim that baby they will
know I was the one who was with her
that night. Then I get 10 years.

TAQUAN

No, you asshole. If they could've
IDed you, they would've. You're
cool. Deny deny deny.

Devastated, DeAnn turns on her sons, enraged --

DEANN

Both of y'all, out!

TAVION

I'm sorry mom. We had no money.
And you wouldn't help.

DEANN

Get out! I'm done with both of you.
(she's screaming now) Get out. Get
out.

She pulls TaQuan up by his hair. Shoves Tavion's food onto
the floor.

DEANN (CONT'D)

Get out of my house now!

OFF DeAnn, shattered.

INT. CAMILLA'S ROOM -- NIGHT

Camilla on her knees, rosary in hands, at a small altar she's
created with a statue of OUR LADY OF SORROWS, dressed for May
Feasts. She adjusts the gown on the statue as her father
KNOCKS and ENTERS. She barely notices.

RODRIGO
Mommy made chicken adobo. Why don't
you come eat.

She manages a smile for her father, shaking her head NO.

RODRIGO (CONT'D)
It's delicious --

CAMILLA
I can't, Daddy. I'm busy --

She resumes praying. Rodrigo watches, worried, as she rocks and sways back and forth, her nails digging into the backs of her hands, her prayers more like buzzing than words.

RODRIGO
I don't understand, Cami -- this
hiding.

She hears but doesn't answer.

RODRIGO (CONT'D)
What happened, to you -- You were
making so much money. You had
everything.

CAMILLA
(sharply)
Can't you see this brings me peace?

Speechless, he quietly exits. Camilla adjusts some roses.
HUMS, then SINGS THE MAGNIFICAT.

INT. NURSING HOME - DAY

DeAnn, Tavion's mother, and her COWORKER give a withered old
WHITE MAN a sponge bath, talking over him as they work.

DEANN
Tavion had a baby. A boy.

COWORKER
Congratulations, Gramma! You must
be so happy.

DEANN
Well -- the girl, she's white, got
herself sent up to Greenville,
doing 3-5. Had the baby up there
and I have no idea where he is.

COWORKER

He's probably with her people.

DEANN

Not according to Tavion. She's been on her own since she was 15.

COWORKER

Shit, you better jump DeAnn, before they terminate her parental rights. They move quick up there.

DEANN

Do you know anyone inside? Who can help me find out where my granbaby is?

COWORKER

My cousin Tiana's daughter is doing 18 months for boosting a Hermes Birkin bag. I'll ask.

INT. JOAN'S HOUSE - LIVING ROOM -- NIGHT

Pat paces with a colicky, wailing Bray. She handles him like a pro, kind and patient but she is exhausted.

Joan arrives home from work, tosses down her bag and coat. Reaches for the baby.

JOAN

Aw, Pat. This is too much.

Pat hands the baby off, relieved.

PAT

Forgive me for abandoning you but I'm done.

JOAN

Where are Kathleen and Barbara ?

PAT

(makes air quotes)
"Working late."

JOAN

Both of them?

Pat gives her a look. Joan gets it.

PAT

Don't worry about the noise. I got
ear plugs.

JOAN

I'll call in sick tomorrow. You
need a break.

Without responding, Pat disappears upstairs to her bedroom.

JOAN (CONT'D)

It's just you and me kid.

Joan rocks Bray, kisses his cheek.

JOAN (CONT'D)

Just one more week. We can do
it...yes...yes...yes, we can...

The baby begins to settle. Joan softens - grows tender,
loving, holds Bray closer. She leans down to smell him -
delicious. She sings, softly.

JOAN (CONT'D)

This little light of mine, I'm
gonna let it shine. This little
light of mine....

Bray's coos, drifting off to sleep.

INT. CORRIDOR -- SCI GREENVILLE -- DAY

Joan carries Bray, and a baby bag, toward the Visitor Center.
Davenport approaches her.

DAVENPORT

Sister! Nothing came up matching
the baby's DNA.

JOAN

You're kidding me?

DAVENPORT

Not one black man in the entire
system matches this child.

JOAN

Dammit...

Davenport laughs.

DAVENPORT

Her call. Either she gives up the
father -- or the baby.

INT. VISITORS ROOM -- DAY -- LATER

Joan sits at a table, holding Bray, sharing candy with an 8
year old CHILD, visiting her INMATE MOTHER. Joan knows
everyone here, and their KIDS.

Amber runs into the room.

GUARD I

No running, inmate!

Amber scoops Bray up, hugs him, smells him, covers him with
kisses.

AMBER

Oh my god, I missed you! Isn't he
the most gorgeous baby you ever
saw, Sister.

JOAN

Right now, yes. At 3am when he's
colicky -- well, not so much.

Amber laughs. Joan takes a bottle out of the bag and hands it
to Amber. He opens his eyes, gazing at his mother. Mother and
Baby - in love.

JOAN (CONT'D)

It's wonderful to see the two of
you together....Be even better if
it were all three of you. If his
father could be in his life, too.

Triggered, Amber stiffens warily.

AMBER

(lying)
I told you, I don't know who it is.

JOAN

(skeptical)
You had that many partners around
the same time?

AMBER

(lying)
Well -- I was, you know -- I needed
money --

Joan gets it - disappointed.

JOAN

Oh...Taking care of Bray -- It's
harder than I thought it would be.

AMBER

Grandparents do it all the time.
You'll adjust.

Joan can't help but be amused.

She spots Davenport talking to a GUARD, watching them out of
the corner of her eye. Joan shakes her head, no. Davenport
take this in, stiffens and exits. Pre-occupied with her
baby, Amber doesn't notice.

EXT. YARD -- SCI GREENVILLE -- DAY

It's a warm, sunny day. Amber lies on the grass with a couple
of friends, WHITE INMATES around her age.

INMATE I

First thing I'm gonna do when I get
out is go get me a manicure with
that gel nail polish. They say it
never chips.

INMATE II

Yeah, I saw Kim rockin' it.

AMBER

Fuck that. I want to get a good job
so I can take care of Bray --

INMATE I

How n' hell you gonna do that?

AMBER

I'm signing up for my GED. Sister
Joan said...

They don't notice Dep. Davenport crossing the yard, heading
in their direction, escorted by a CAPTAIN (Head C.O.) and
entourage of CORRECTION OFFICERS.

A tremor of fear passes through the yard. INMATES quiet and
look down as they pass. Davenport and the Captain tower over
Amber and her friends.

DAVENPORT

Up on your arms, inmates!

Amber's friends, sit up instantly.

AMBER

Why?

CAPTAIN

Do not address the Dep. directly,
inmate! No lying flat on the grass.
You have to lean on your arms.

AMBER

Huh?

INMATE I

We're not supposed to be lying on
the grass.

DAVENPORT

But you were doing it anyway.

Inmate I bows her head in response.

DAVENPORT (CONT'D)

That's a ticket. For all of you.

AMBER

Seriously?

INMATE II

Shut up, Willette.

DAVENPORT

That's another ticket.

AMBER

Shit, I didn't know.

CAPTAIN

Shut it, Inmate! Now.

AMBER

(sarcastic)

Yes, sir.

With a rubber truncheon, the Captain SLAMS Amber on the legs.
Amber cries out, falls. Davenport, the Captain and COs head
toward the door. THE WOMEN in the yard relax.

Inmate I kneels down to Amber.

INMATE I

Bitch, you gotta learn some prison
protocol.

INMATE II

Yeah, like shut the fuck up.

Inmate II walks away. Amber stands, rubbing her legs. Still defiant, she can't help saying it -- a little too loudly --

AMBER

At least she didn't get my baby.

Davenport pauses - she heard it. So did other women in the yard. She nods to the Captain and exits the yard. Before we realize it, Amber is surrounded by THREE COs. CAPTAIN slams her to the ground with his truncheon. They grab her and drag her, screaming, out of the yard.

INT. SOLITARY HOUSING UNIT (SHU) - PRISON - DAY

Amber is being dragged along the corridor. A heavy metal door is opened. Handcuffed. She is thrown to the floor. The CO removes her handcuffs.

CAPTAIN

This is SHU. Get your clothes off or we'll take them off. Strip.

AMBER

Okay, okay.

Amber looks around. No window, no bars. A box. Amber strips. CO takes her clothes, exits.

After a moment, Davenport enters. Amber tries to cover her body with her hands - of course she can't.

DAVENPORT

You've got it all wrong, Willette. Sister Joan may have the baby, but I have you.

Amber's eyes fill with tears.

DAVENPORT (CONT'D)

I want to know who the baby's father is. And if he's not fit to take your son, you will give up your rights to that child - so he can have a real family.

Amber drops her arms, stares defiantly at Davenport. Silent.

DAVENPORT (CONT'D)

Ten days.

ACT FOUR

EXT. ESTABLISHING FUNKY BOARDING HOUSE -- DAY

Holding Amber's file, rings the bell. This is Amber's last known address. Poor neighborhood. Shabby house. Painted bright colors. ROOMS FOR RENT sign in the window. An ELDERLY HISPANIC WOMAN opens the door.

WOMAN

No rooms, now.

JOAN

I'm not looking for a room. This is the last address I have for Amber Willette. A young Caucasian girl? Pregnant.

WOMAN

She's in jail.

JOAN

Yes, I know. I'm trying to find her boyfriend. Did he live here too?

WOMAN

(wary)

No men allowed. I got food on the stove. Good day --

JOAN

Please, Ma'am, I'm trying to help Amber. She had the baby. I need to find the father.

The Woman shrugs, indifferent to her problem.

JOAN (CONT'D)

Please. I'm a NUN. I work in the prison. I'm trying to help Amber.

WOMAN

(starting to cave)

What do you want him for?

JOAN

He has a beautiful new baby. With the mama in jail, if I don't find him -- she's gonna lose her son.

WOMAN

(softens)

He was hoping for a son. They were
in love those two. True love.

JOAN

So he was her only boyfriend?

WOMAN

You never know but --I'd say so.
She rented the room, but he was
here all the time. She was tough.
But he seemed like a good boy.
Couldn't wait to be a daddy. Tavion
--

JOAN

Tavion --?

MAN

That's all I know --

INT. BAR FROM OPEN -- NIGHT

Joan and Juney sit at the bar having a drink. Joan scratches
off some new instant lottery tickets.

JUNEY

You know how many TAVIONS's there
are out there?

JOAN

Can't you ask around?

JUNEY

Whyn't you find me a nun called
Bridget?

JOAN

So, forget it?

JUNEY

You don't even know if he's from
Philly. Could be Allentown,
Pittsburgh. Wisconsin or, or Kenya.

Joan downs her drink, picks up her ticket.

JOAN

Hey, I won two dollars.

JUNEY

What are you going to do if you win
big some day?

JOAN

Give it all away. Then buy more
tickets.

They laugh. She downs her drink.

JOAN (CONT'D)

Juney -- I saw the surveillance
video of the robbery. I was there.

Juney questioning --

JOAN (CONT'D)

It was that night last winter I was
in Philly to meet you. I stopped to
get gas before heading upstate.
There I am - on the tape - the kids
were in the back, waiting till I
left.

JUNEY

(laughs)
Welcome to the other side!

JOAN

What do you mean?

JUNEY

You are now one of the fallen.
Unless you report the boy's name --
you're an accessory after the fact.

JOAN

What the hell --

JUNEY

It was the hand of God, Sister.

JOAN

Ya think?!

JUNEY

Never doubt God's call, Sister.
That child is with you for a
reason. For three to five.

He stands to go. Reaches in his pocket for a roll of bills.
Hands it to Joan.

JUNEY (CONT'D)

Babies cost money. That's why I
don't have any.

Joan reluctantly takes the money --

JOAN

Junej --

JUNEY

And get yourself some scratchies.

Joan laughs, grateful for the cash --

JOAN

God bless you, Marcellus!

INT. BAR BATHROOM -- MOMENTS LATER

CLOSE SHOT: Joan unrolls the bills. As she starts to count, she spots STREAKS OF RED on a few of the bills. She realizes it's BLOOD.

Trembling, she catches a glimpse of herself in the mirror. A painful moment. She scrapes the dried blood off the bills. Hands shaking, she takes out her bottle of Holy Water. Praying fervently, she sprinkles HOLY WATER on the bills, desperately trying to purify the money.

EXT. CATHEDRAL BASILICA OF ST. PETER AND PAUL -- PHILLY - DAY

High Mass lets out, BISHOP NOWAK, MITER, STAFF, VESTMENTS - greets exiting PARISHIONERS, Camilla among them.

When Nowak reaches her, Camilla grabs his hand, kisses his ring and throws herself to her knees.

CAMILLA

Most Reverend Father.

Nowak blesses Camilla.

CAMILLA (CONT'D)

Forgive me -- I am not worthy of
thine blessing. Please, I beg you,
hear my confession.

The priests around him, rush for Camilla to pull her away from his holiness. He catches a glimpse of the desperate pain in her eyes. Gestures for the priests to let her go.

INT. CONFESSIONAL - DAY

In the dark, shadowy enclosed booth, the Bishop sits on one side of the LATTICE, Camilla kneels on the other, a rosary taut around her knuckles.

BISHOP

Lust is the greatest temptation the devil puts before us. We've all struggled as you have.

CAMILLA

Struggled yes -- but not yielded.

Their eyes meet through the lattice. His condescending attitude seems to evaporate. He is taken aback by the fervor in her eyes.

Camilla quietly begins an ethereal Byzantine chant.

CAMILLA (CONT'D)

Miserere mei, Deus, secundum magnam misericordiam tuam.

As if in a trance, her voice grows louder and louder. Camilla finishes, the sound ringing through the church. It's almost as if Camilla is cleansing him. He is moved. SILENCE.

BISHOP

The Church can't afford to give up on zealots like you.

CAMILLA

-- peccavi visu, auditu, gustu, odoratu et tactu --

BISHOP

I'm not sure what to do with you.

CAMILLA

Please, Most Reverend Father, let me serve God.

EXT. NURSING HOME PARKING LOT -- DAY

DeAnn leaves work, heading toward her beat up old car. Tavion is waiting for her. He looks terrible, dirty, tired and very sad.

DEANN

I told you I didn't want to see your face.

TAVION

I'm sorry, Mama. I fucked up.

DEANN

Fucked up doesn't begin to describe it, Tavion.

TAVION

You gotta forgive me.

DEANN

Why?

TAVION

I got a job. I'm working at Modell's. But I got no place to stay. Please can I come home.

DEANN

(shakes her head, NO)

Welcome to life. It's a bitch, ain't it.

TAVION

You don't care that I'm living on the street?

DEANN

I spent my whole life trying to teach you right from wrong. If this is what it takes for you to get it? So be it.

DeAnn moves to get into her car.

TAVION

How can you be so hard? I lost everything.

She hesitates, holding her feelings in check. Tavion is so young, suffering --

DEANN

I found out where out where your son is --

OFF DeAnn's stricken face --

EXT. STREETS OF GREENVILLE -- DAY

Rodrigo Navarro drives Camilla through the dreary, hard bitten streets, his sleek car hitting pot holes. A successful

doctor, this is not what he wants for his daughter. He grows angrier by the moment. They pass a sign - SCI Greenville 2 miles. They turn toward the church.

EXT./INT RODRIGO'S AUDI - JOAN'S STREET -- DAY

The car drives past Joan's house and pulls up outside the church next door, in front of the rectory.

RODRIGO

You're sure you want to do this,
Camilla?

CAMILLA

Of course.

RODRIGO

Help me understand.

CAMILLA

I'm serving God.

He turns away, angrily.

RODRIGO

I didn't question your decision to be cloistered but this -- You were - You're a lawyer. Top of your class in law school. You had an important job.

CAMILLA

Keeping rich businessmen out of jail?

RODRIGO

Doing good. And making a lot of money. You had a bright future.

CAMILLA

You're a man of faith. I know you understand. I've been called.

RODRIGO

(angry)

To be a maid for two priests?! No!

Camilla reaches to hug him but he turns away.

RODRIGO (CONT'D)

It's a sin to waste your gifts!
Now, I say, shame on you.

CAMILLA
I love you, Daddy.

She gets out of the car.

INT./EXT. RECTORY, CHURCH -- DAY

Camilla knocks at the door, knocks again. Rodrigo watches from his truck. She glances back. Finally Father Juan Miguel answers.

FATHER JUAN MIGUEL
Yes?

CAMILLA
I'm Camilla Navarro -- Bishop Nowak sent me.

Takes him a moment to register this --

FATHER JUAN MIGUEL
Yes, yes. Come in.

Camilla and Juan Miguel standing in the entryway --

FATHER JUAN MIGUEL (CONT'D)
Please excuse me, I am Skyping with my mother in Bogota.

He bounds up the stairs, calling.

FATHER JUAN MIGUEL (CONT'D)
Father Bernard! There is a nun here! A young, pretty one!

Camilla stiffens at that.

EXT./INT. JOAN'S HOUSE -- LATER

With suitcase in hand, Camilla faces the four very angry nuns.

CAMILLA
Father Bernard, just told me this is where I'd be living.

PAT
How dare he send you here without asking us?

JOAN

Who are you? Why are you here,
anyway?

CAMILLA

Bishop Nowak sent me take care of
the priests.

PAT

The Bishop can kiss my ass.

CAMILLA

Look. I can sleep anywhere. I
really don't mind the couch or the
floor.

PAT

Take your pick.

Pat storms off, leaves Camilla with Joan. Barbara and
Kathleen exchange looks.

OFF Camilla, embarrassed and uncomfortable.

INT. CHURCH -- DAY

Sunday mass. Father Bernard gives out COMMUNION HOSTS to the
PARISHIONERS. Father Juan Miguel assists him.

Pat, Kathleen, Barbara share a pew with Joan, who holds
sleeping Bray tenderly in her arms. Camilla, wearing an
elaborate lace mantilla over her head takes communion, then
kneels before the statue of Mary and Child. She prays
ardently. Pat watches her, fascinated.

PAT (CONT'D)

(whispers)

Old school.

JOAN

This is the last thing we need
right now.

KATHLEEN

Definitely fallen from grace.

BARBARA

She has to have been sent here for
penance.

JOAN

My money's on lust.

The women giggle like school girls.

INT. JOAN'S HOUSE -- LATER

The house is now overrun with BABY EQUIPMENT, BLUE BALLOONS, Parishioners and the Priests giving a baby shower. Joan looks miserable.

BOUNCERS, BOTTLE WARMERS, CASES OF DIAPERS and ONESIES cover the dining table. A mammoth, ALL TERRAIN STROLLER fills the front hall. A HIGH CHAIR crowds the kitchen, where every counter holds cases of FORMULA and BABY FOOD.

In the living room the two Priests wrestle with assembling a CRIB.

Pat passes Bray around to church ladies, who coo and dote adoringly as they pose for selfies with him. Stunned, he puts up with it.

JOAN

I'm sorry to break up the party but
it's time for Bray to visit his
MOTHER.

She grabs the baby, a diaper bag and with forced smile, exits. DISAPPOINTED GROANS --

INT. VISITORS ROOM -- SCI GREENVILLE -- DAY

Joan sits at a table, holding Bray. She's been waiting some time -- Finally, a CO enters, approaches her, concerned.

C.O.

Sister, I guess no one told you.
Willette is in SHU.

JOAN

She's what?

C.O. shrugs, helplessly.

C.O.

You don't mess with the Dep.

Furious, Joan grabs the baby bag and rushes out of the Visitors Center.

INT. PRISON ENTRYWAY -- SCI GREENVILLE -- CONTINUOUS

Joan rushes through, heading toward the offices --

ANOTHER C.O.

Sister Joan, no children allowed
beyond this point.

Joan ignores her.

ANOTHER C.O. (CONT'D)

Sister, you know the rules!

Joan turns, hands Bray and diaper bag to the CO, rushes off.

ANOTHER C.O. (CONT'D)

Sister!!!!

OFF CO, helplessly wrangling Bray --

INT. PRISON HALLWAYS -- SCI GREENVILLE -- DAY

Joan storms down the long hallway to --

INT. DAVENPORT'S OFFICE -- SCI GREENVILLE -- CONTINUOUS

Joan barges in without knocking. Davenport, at her desk.

JOAN

Why is Amber Willette in SHU?

DAVENPORT

You better change your tone right
now, Sister.

Joan -- pauses.

JOAN

(more politely)

I was waiting in the Visitors
Center for an hour. No one told me.

DAVENPORT

Three tickets for bad behavior and
insolence. The girl needs some time
to understand where she is.

JOAN

Ten days? Ten days in SHU --

DAVENPORT

It takes some girls longer to appreciate their situation. Especially when my authority has been undermined.

JOAN

Oh --

Joan gets it --

DAVENPORT

I tried doing this your way, Sister, but since you didn't find the father, this baby has no traceable family.

JOAN

He has a mother who loves him with all her heart. He needs his mother. Why should he be punished?

DAVENPORT

That child needs to be gone. You are setting precedents that are untenable.

JOAN

How? In what way?

DAVENPORT

How are you going to tell the next pregnant inmate with no next of kin she can't keep her baby? And the next one and the one after that --

Joan looks away -- hadn't thought of that.

DAVENPORT (CONT'D)

As long as that baby is around here, there is going to be trouble. It's time for Willette to RELINQUISH her son. Give him a chance to be adopted.

Long pause.

JOAN

I'm sorry, Dep. -- no.

DAVENPORT

You know there are wonderful foster families out there.

JOAN

Yes, of course.

DAVENPORT

You're going to keep that baby for three years - till that trash is out?

JOAN

I am.

DAVENPORT

You know I can make sure she serves all five years.

JOAN

Dep. please believe me, I am not doing this to oppose you. I have tremendous respect for you. I made a promise -
(working it)
To God. I can't break it.

Davenport opens a drawer, takes out the envelope with the FOUR ONE HUNDRED DOLLAR BILLS from Juney --

DAVENPORT

You play fast and loose when it suits you though. Where did this money come from again?

JOAN

(nervous)

Exactly where I told you. I took up a collection. For the children to celebrate Mother's Day. Here, with their incarcerated mothers.

DAVENPORT

Uh, huh. Really?

OFF Davenport's threatening look --

INT. THIRD FLOOR CHAPEL -- NIGHT

TILT DOWN FROM THE PLAIN WOOD CROSS above the altar to the PAINTED, PLASTER VIRGIN MARY. REVEAL Joan, on her knees, clutches her rosary, deep in prayer.

INTERCUT WITH:

INT. JOAN'S BEDROOM - CONTINUOUS

Bray sleeps peacefully in his bassinet.

BACK TO CHAPEL:

PUSH TO ECU: Joan's dark eyes blazing with zeal and determination -- OFF SCREEN, BRAY WAKES UP AND WAILS.

EXT. JOAN'S HOUSE - CONTINUOUS

BRAY'S CRIES CARRY FAINTLY OUTSIDE -- where DeAnn WATCHES the house from her old car, parked across the street. PULL BACK TO REVEAL Tavion getting out of a crappy car service junker. He crosses the street toward the house. Spotting him, Deann gets out of her car.

DEANN
(hisses quietly)
Tavion!

Tavion turns.

TAVION
(forcefully, stakes his
claim)
That's my son!

SNAP TO BLACK:

END OF PILOT