

MERCY ROAD

PILOT

by

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INT. HALLWAY - DAY

A meaty fist TAPS ON A DOOR. ROLAND EDWARDS (30's) 6'4" and buff, intense waits. His fist still held to the door.

Roland is the Bishop/Pastor's armor bearer (*church lingo for a volunteer who functions as a loyal assistant*). During church services, Roland is more like a secret service agent making sure single women don't feel up the Pastor or protects him against disgruntled parishioners.

ELI (V.O.)

Yeah.

ROLAND

It's time.

INT. CHURCH GREEN ROOM - DAY

ELI MERCER 40's stares into a hand mirror inspecting his face. Eli the Bishop of MERCY ROAD MINISTRIES, a non-denominational, mega-church in Dallas, Texas.

He is well-built, handsome and oozes Southern charm. He is Bishop T.D. Jakes meets Joel Osteen before Presidential visits or *Time Magazine* front covers.

ELI

(points to a spot on
his cheek)

Right here.

INT. CHURCH GREEN ROOM/INT. HALLWAY - DAY

The MAKEUP ARTIST dusts a layer of powder in the spot. She takes rice paper and blots his face. Eli nods, perfect.

SECONDS LATER the door opens wide. First to step out is LUNA MERCER (47), pretty and youthful. Her hair is knotted in a tight chignon underneath a beautiful wide brim hat, an unshakable sadness fills her eyes even as she smiles.

She walks out first and Eli joins her side. Luna extends her hand to him as Roland closes the door behind them. The two walk hand-in-hand down the hallway a vision of togetherness.

ELI

Mia with the kids at the youth
service?

ROLAND

Yes sir.

INT. PULPIT/STAGE - DAY

They walk onto the brightly lit pulpit to thunderous applaud. The pulpit may as well be Broadway with over 18,000 souls standing to their feet. The Praise leader ANDERSON (30's) hands Eli the mic.

ELI
(booming voice)
Praise the Lord! Praise the Lord!

Luna gives him a genteel kiss on the cheek and takes her seat on the side of the stage in a front row seat. The other ELDERS, PASTORS and WIVES are in the second and third rows.

Eli closes his hand in a fist toward the choir. The musicians stop playing.

ELI (CONT'D)
The spirit is in this place so I'm
just going to move with it. Are you
okay if I move with it?

The massive CROWD of churchgoers SCREAM AMEN, GO AHEAD, LET THE LORD USE YOU.

IN THE PEWS

WOMEN and MEN are dressed to the nines. Women's bosoms are bursting out of low cut tops as crosses almost disappear right down the center. They eye Eli seductively and with adoration.

The MEN wear tailored suits as if the suit and tailoring were all free, all as bait for the vulnerable. It's clear there are mixed agendas in each pew.

ELI (CONT'D)
Many of you know my wife is sick but
the Lord is faithful.

Eli turns to Anderson.

ELI (CONT'D)
I call him faithful.

Anderson knows what that means. The beat of a popular gospel song: "*I Call You Faithful*" by Donnie McClurkin swells up. The CHOIR gives an awe-inspiring, raucous rendition. There's not a dry eye in the room. A WOMAN races across the front of the altar, she stops, dances, and then keeps running.

Luna stands and waves her hand as if testifying to the words. This is church; FILLED with out-of-this-world gospel music. It's *House of Blues Sunday Brunch* meets "*Empire*".

INT. BATHROOM - DAY

The master bathroom is decked out with marble countertops and vintage "his" and "hers" vanity and sinks. It's not just a bathroom; it's a sanctuary.

The buzz of oscillating fans are over a soulful, bluesy tune.

A silver sliver of smoke streams through the air and across the bathroom.

LUNA (O.S.)

She was putting on a show carrying on like that.

ELI (O.S.)

It was the spirit.

Sounds of giggles erupt. We find its occupants sharing the "her" bathtub; the "his" labeled tub abandoned.

INT. BATHROOM - INSIDE THE "HER" TUB

Wig gone, Luna's baby short, silky hair sticks to her scalp like a baby's.

Eli washes her back with a thick porous sponge. She puffs on a joint and passes it back to him. Overzealous, fills his lungs and coughs, choking.

LUNA

Easy does it. Puff, Puff, give...

The two giggle again, they are high on Marijuana. The small bathroom window open, a fan, and incense all to mask the herbal aroma--

LUNA (CONT'D)

Have you heard from Janice?

ELI

She canceled her appointment, now she won't take my calls. I'm going to track her down.

Luna nods in agreement. Then--

LUNA

This is good.

ELI

How do you know what's good? It's been over thirty years.

LUNA
 (beat, giggles)
 You're right. Where did Roland go?

ELI
 Oklahoma.

LUNA
 Oklahoma!?

ELI
 You know churchfolk don't understand
 real-life pain. His cousin deals.

LUNA
 Did he say who it was for?

ELI
 That's why he drove to Oklahoma.

LUNA
 (giggles more)
 Had he said I was dying, maybe we
 could've gotten buy one get one free.

Eli's not there with this joke. He frowns, shaking his head.

LUNA (CONT'D)
 It's true. ...You thought about when
 you want to meet them?

ELI
 Not in the least.

LUNA
 I just want you to be taken care of.

ELI
 (shakes his head,
 more distraught)
 Where's your fai--

LUNA
 --I didn't get 2 months.

ELI
 Other people haven't fallen around you
 but you're still here.

LUNA
 ...But you promised...

ELI
 (sighs)
 ...I promised...

His eyes fill with tears that don't dare brim out of his eyes. He hasn't cried yet, but dammit--

ELI (CONT'D)

...I promised...

Slow, quiet sobs erupt from his lips. He wraps his arms around her shoulder, holding her tight as if death itself couldn't take her from him. She crosses her arms on top of his and lays her head on his arms as tears stream down her face.

TITLE CARD: SEVEN DAYS EARLIER

EXT. DESERT VALLEY - DAY

The sun beats down on a desert valley.

FROM A DISTANCE White bits peak out from under mounds of sand across a vast valley. Closer, we see it's hundreds of thousands of dry bones: partially buried skull bones, femurs, ulna's scapulas, phalanges...

In a suit, Eli stands on top of a low sandy mountain overlooking the dry bones. A quiet faraway voice--

GOD (V.O.)

Do you believe they will rise?

ELI

If you will it.

A hurricane gust of wind overtakes him. Sand burns his eyes. He has to look away. He shields his face with his suit coat.

A healthy Luna: thick full, wavy hair; wearing colorful light fabric that blows in the wind; a broad smile across her face. She waves at him. She is well. The thousands of other bones disappear...

INT. OFFICE - NIGHT

Eli's eyes pop open. The smile fades as he looks around. He's not in a valley. He's at home in his office sitting at his desk. He looks down. Drool smudges his paper.

On the title line reads "*SERMON*". The verse *Ezekiel 37:1-14* is beside the only sentence before he had dozed off: "Say Yes..."

PRELAP: the boom of a bass drum and organ playing in time mumbled voices--

EXT. CHURCH - NIGHT

A massive circular arena-like building has one distinguishing element a tall cross on top. The acreage boasts a 5 level parking tower in an adjoining lot. A sprinkle of cars smatter the front parking area directly in front of the church.

INT. HALLWAY/ROOM - NIGHT

We track down a hallway and hear the loud, yelling voice of KEITH GARRIS, the intercessory prayer leader.

KEITH (V.O.)
 We are not asking for a favor...
 ...We pray for healing! We pray for
 a miracle Lord!

INSIDE THE ROOM

In the middle of the circle with bowed head, same baby short smooth hair is Luna. Every hand touching her body as if each person were a conductor with healing ability from God.

KEITH (CONT'D)
 We come boldly on behalf of our dearly
 beloved sister.

YES LORD'S and AMEN'S resound in hushed murmurs in unison.

KEITH (CONT'D)
 We ask that you remove the cancer
 from her body. We ask for a 100
 percent healed body.

The ORGANIST, a young man, 20's, plays fervently but low in tune with the rhythm of the prayer.

KEITH (CONT'D)
 We stand in agreement. We touch in
 agreement. We stand in faith...

An elderly woman, SISTER MERCY YATES, 85, leans on her cane as she breaks from the circle and presses a hand on Luna's bent head while mumbling. The organ and drums fade...

INT. BEDROOM - NIGHT

Luna in pajamas lies in bed.

LUNA
 It felt good! Felt like a real
 breakthrough happened. Six months
 of prayer...

ELI (V.O.)

Really?

Eli strolls out of the bathroom with a bright smile on his face. He sits on the bed beside her.

ELI (CONT'D)

I think God gave me a vision tonight.

Her eyes betray a "too-good-to-be-true" look.

ELI (CONT'D)

You were healed. No cancer in any part of your body.

LUNA

The both of us...

Eli nods.

LUNA (CONT'D)

I have chemo tomorrow.

ELI

(frowns)

I'll try to be there.

LUNA

Go find Janice, I'd hate to hear something happened to her.

ELI

Are you sure?

LUNA

I promise you'll have another chance, Lord's work comes first this time.

She wraps her arms around him in a tight hug. He kisses her head.

EXT. CHURCH - MORNING

Sunbeams bounce off the tall metal cross. The church parking lot is quiet save for two other cars as Eli pulls in.

INT. ELI'S FRONT RECEPTION AREA - MORNING

Eli strolls into the office area a placard on the front desk reads *BRANDY STREAT* as he passes and enters his office.

INT. ELI OFFICE - MORNING

TAP, TAP on his office door.

ELI

Brandy, bring the calendar, please.

A church member MISTY VANN (30's) peeks in. She wears a too tight couture sweat suit that hugs her, double D breasts--

MISTY

Sorry it's me Pastor. I wanted to stop by before work. Should I come back?

ELI

You bring breakfast? ...I'm kidding.

He laughs brightly and she, unsure, laughs with him.

MISTY

I wanted to talk to you about James?

ELI

He got enrolled okay?

INT. ELI'S OFFICE - MORNING

Across from Eli on the couch, Misty takes a deep breath, arching her back to call attention to her breasts, while she tries to figure out where to start--

MISTY

Thank you for calling the dean and helping with his college loan application.

ELI

He still needs to get a job, but he should be fine financially.

Misty looks down.

ELI (CONT'D)

This isn't about James?

MISTY

(slow tears)

I'm gonna be all alone when James leaves for college. He's the best thing about my life and in three months, I'll be nothing.

ELI

(fatherly, stern)

This is the no whining zone. Dry your eyes.

Misty chuckles drying her tears with her hands.

ELI (CONT'D)

Your job is done. Have you traveled to Paris?

MISTY

(sniffles)

Paris? I've never left Dallas!

ELI

Then that's your new goal! Stop buying fancy sweatpants and save.

MISTY

I guess you're right. Thank you.

ELI

You're welcome.

MISTY

I know it's been crazy for you, but I want you to know you can count on me for *whatever you need*.

ELI

Thank you but I'm good.

He offers a quick smile and stands ending the meeting.

ELI (CONT'D)

These days Pastor Patricia is handling counseling.

MISTY

I know but you were so great with James I just wanted to follow-up.

Near the door, Eli smiles. She gives him a hug, and tries to press her body into his. Eli smoothly extricates himself.

MISTY (CONT'D)

Before I forget... For James and I.

She reaches in her bag and pulls out two sets of different books--

BOOK COVERS: Two copies of "*BEING TAKES MORE THAN BREATHING*" by *Eli Mercer New York Times Bestseller*; and two copies of the second book: "*MOVE THE MOUNTAIN*" by *Eli Mercer New York Times Bestseller*.

ELI

You got a library in there?

Misty sniggles as she hands him the books.

Eli smiles, grabs a pen and scrawls on the inside, then hands it back.

MISTY

Thank you so much Pastor.

He offers a quick smile as she turns excited--

INT. ELI'S FRONT RECEPTION AREA - MORNING

Misty exits as BRANDY STREAT, Eli's very professional, very organized and very pretty "brown-sugar-church-girl", assistant comes in. She hastily fires up her computer as she puts her things away.

BRANDY

I'm so sorry. I had no idea there was a meeting this morning?

ELI

I was early and Misty was a walk-in.

BRANDY

I'll be sure to encourage people to schedule appointments with Pat.

ELI

Sometimes you can't schedule life.

Brandy isn't sure about that as she grabs his schedule for the day, and a few sheets of paper.

BRANDY

Attendance Report from both services on Sunday. Latinos and men are up. No appointments today.

ELI

What's the total?

BRANDY

(hands him the paper)
18,201.

ELI

Need to break 20 by next month. Were you able to track down Janice's address?

Brandy nods, handing him a slip of paper with an address.

BRANDY

Your principal friend was helpful.

ELI
 You're the best. Gonna head out
 after I make a few calls. Get my
 wife on the line first, please.

Brandy dials as Eli disappears into his office.

BRANDY
 (using intercom)
 Went straight to voicemail.

ELI (V.O.)
 I'll text her. Get Bruce at the
 prison please.

EXT. PRESBYTERIAN HOSPITAL CANCER CENTER - DUSK

The parking lot is full.

INT. CHEMOTHERAPY ROOM - DUSK

Luna and her 16 year old daughter EVA wait in the foyer.
 The RECEPTIONIST, older, matronly, clicks at her computer.

RECEPTIONIST
 You're all set. Give me a moment.

The receptionist disappears behind double doors. Luna
 approaches Eva nervous--

LUNA
 You can wait out here.

EVA
 In the foyer?

LUNA
 Please, this is--

Luna gears up for a longer explanation and Eva holds up her
 hand to stop her--

EVA
 I know you don't want me to remember
 the bad and you think chemo is bad,
 but there are no bad parts in this
 life. Now if it makes you feel
 better, I'll wait here.

LUNA
 (stutters)
 It does.

She smiles thankful and embraces her daughter.

LUNA (CONT'D)
Your soul is older than mine.

The receptionist returns, interrupting the moment--

RECEPTIONIST
We're ready for you.

Luna turns back before disappearing behind the double doors.

LUNA
Text your father tell him we're okay.

EVA
Already did.

INT. TREATMENT ROOM - EVENING

Two rows of thick reclining leather chairs with a sprinkling of PEOPLE receiving treatment. A red-headed nurse, CECILY (38) unwraps a couple IV bags.

Cecily turns Luna's left arm over and swabs her forearm with an alcohol strip in preparation for the needle.

CECILY
Another walk in the park.

LUNA
Best walks ever.

CECILY
(smiles, inserts the
IV needle)
Your doctor wanted you to try
epirubicin. ...Your heart's strong.

LUNA
He said it could be more effective?

Cecily nods as she inserts the epirubicin in the additional line from the singular IV needle, then grabs a nearby blanket.

CECILY
You can stay as long as you need
afterward.

LUNA
Thanks.

CECILY
(covers her)
More chills with this one.

Cecily pushes a button and a quiet suction sound, a click, then the liquid slowly dispenses.

CECILY (CONT'D)
You're all set.

LUNA
Audrey running late again? She's gonna be late to her own funeral.

Cecily shakes her head saddened.

LUNA (CONT'D)
(Gasps)
When?

CECILY
Over the weekend.

Cecily walks away. Luna quietly takes this as a blow to her own health.

She is pulled out of her own despair when DESEREE BETHEL (44) takes the recliner next to her. Cecily hooks her up.

CECILY (CONT'D)
Deseree meet Luna; Luna, Deseree.

Luna, grateful, exchanges a smile with Cecily.

LUNA
Hi. Welcome to Chateau Chemo.

Deseree laughs. Cecily grabs a chair and places it next to Deseree's recliner and pushes buttons on the machine.

DESEREE
Everyone has been so wonderful here. The last treatment center everyone was so depressing. I get it most of us won't make it, but can I have a laugh or two on the way.

LUNA
You'll like it here.

CECILY
I thought you two would get along.
(pushes start button)
You're rockin' and rollin'.

Cecily strolls off. Seconds later, CLAYTON (43) takes a seat beside her.

DESEREE
Clayton, this is Luna.

Clayton waves.

CLAYTON
Nice to meet you.

LUNA
Same here.

Clayton finger flips pages on the iPad in his lap.

LUNA (CONT'D)
What do you have?

DESEREE
Stage 4, Thyroid cancer.

LUNA
Stage 3, breast cancer.

Clayton holds up the iPad to Deseree--

CLAYTON
What about her?

DESEREE
She looks like a duck.

CLAYTON
Who's superficial now? Her profile
is cool.

DESEREE
Okay, okay give it a shot.

LUNA
What on Earth?

Deseree turns to Clayton--

DESEREE
May I?

CLAYTON
By all means.

DESEREE
The control freak that I am I signed
my husband up to soulmate.com. The
ironies of life.

Clayton and Deseree laugh.

LUNA
But you're going to make it.

The two laugh.

DESEREE
I'm going to die, and I want to find
someone that will love my husband as
much as I do.

LUNA
(to Clayton)
You're okay with this?

CLAYTON
Not at first, but why not.

LUNA
What if you don't end up marrying?

CLAYTON
Then I don't, but we're making a go
of it.

LUNA
Do you all have kids?

DESEREE
15 year old son and he doesn't know.

CLAYTON
It was hard for me to understand,
and some women walk off after I
explain, so we're holding off on
telling him.

LUNA
I wouldn't be able to keep that from
my kids. Maybe it could help us
focus on something other than cancer.

DESEREE
It has gotten to be fun. But trust
me not telling your kids will make
it easier.

LUNA
The whole thing takes guts.

DESEREE
That's all we've got left, right?

Luna nods, that it is.

EXT. APARTMENT COMPLEX - MORNING

Eli's navigation ends. He pulls into a parking space of an open-gated complex.

He grabs his phone from the console and pushes a button--

ELI

Mia, can you go to the house and check on First Lady. She should be getting home from chemo and I've got church business.

MIA (V.O.)

I'll head over now.

ELI

Thank you. I mean it.

MIA (V.O.)

I'm sure she's fine. I'll call you.

INT. JANICE WELLS APARTMENT - MORNING

A large red bow hangs off of Smokey, grey handle bars of a bike parked in the corner. The SOUNDS of a boy laughing and people singing the Stevie Wonder version of *Happy Birthday* fills the small, dark living room.

On the TELEVISION SCREEN is a recording of a very alive PHILIP WELLS (15) enjoying his birthday party. JANICE WELLS (late 50'S) sobs, rocking back and forth watching the tape.

JANICE

I was planning another party.

TAP, TAP, TAP--

Janice swings the door open. At first glance she SEES her son, Philip, and hugs him tight. A beat, she steps back and SEES Eli. Her smile fades, and then hot-anger takes hold.

JANICE (CONT'D)

This is your fault.

She pummels his chest violently.

JANICE (CONT'D)

You're the reason my son killed himself! Why didn't you do more?

She punches and smacks him. He shields his face, and half-heartedly tries to restrain her.

INT. HOUSE - DAY

MIA BELL (30's) slender, understated beauty is Luna's straight-talk, armor bearer. Mia keys in and immediately covers her nose. She sees smoke faintly coming from the kitchen. She drops her purse and runs--

MIA
First lady! First lady!

INT. KITCHEN - DAY

A pot is on fire, high flames lick the backsplash. The countertop is scorched and the stovetop fan is blackening.

Mia grabs a fire extinguisher in the corner and blows it out.

INT. DINING ROOM - DAY

She spots Luna passed out on the floor. A creamy-red, bloody vomit pools around her lips.

Mia rolls her over puts her ears to her chest. She can hear a pulse. She places her cheek close to her face--

MIA
First lady. First lady. It's Mia.
Can you hear me?

Mia grabs her phone.

LUNA
(barely audible)
I'm here. I'm okay.

MIA
I'm calling 911.

LUNA
(low groggy, firm)
Don't you dare. Put down that phone
right now. I mean it Lady Mia.

INT. JANICE'S LIVING ROOM - DAY

Eli hands Janice a glass of water.

JANICE
I'm sorry.

ELI
Don't apologize. I wanted to share
a little about what we talked about.
(MORE)

ELI (CONT'D)

You should know that he loved you so much. He talked about feeling alone. ...His dad not being around, and his best friend dropping out of school to work, then his girlfriend breaking up--

JANICE

He had a girlfriend?

ELI

He did. She broke up with him and he was struggling to make sense of the world.

JANICE

He was so sensitive and gentle. He wasn't born for this world.

ELI

I need you to start a journal and write about your memories of Philip and how you feel now. There's a bereavement group called Compassionate Circle they meet Wednesday and Friday evenings at the church. Come, listen.

JANICE

(tears up, sniffing)

None of that will bring back my Philip.

ELI

It's meant to bring you back.

Janice nods. Eli's phone buzzes.

INT. BEDROOM - DAY

Luna is in bed cleaned up. Mia hands her a glass of water.

MIA

(frantic)

I should at least call your doctor. You were bleeding, and what if Pastor asks me and--

Tears fill Mia's eyes.

LUNA

I tried to cook a family dinner. The treatment was stronger and I passed out that's all.

(MORE)

LUNA (CONT'D)

My vomit always looks like that after chemo. No big deal, and I've been wanting a new kitchen.

She tries to muster a smile.

MIA

I don't believe you but I respect you, so I'll let it be.

LUNA

You won't tell Eli?

Footsteps stomp up the stairs. Luna pleads with her eyes--

MIA

(shakes her head)
I won't.

Eli bursts through the door.

ELI

We should go to the hospital?

He rushes over and inspects his wife's face and neck.

LUNA

I'm fine. It was an accident. I was cooking and it didn't go well. I'm fine.

Eli hesitates--

ELI

Thank God you're okay.

He pulls her cover up a bit and caresses her shoulder. He turns to Mia--

INT. OUTSIDE BEDROOM DOOR - DAY

ELI

Spit it out. What happened?

MIA

That is what happened. She's a little shaken but fine.

ELI

I know where your loyalty lies, but I believe if things were life or--

MIA

I would tell you.

Eli finally takes a breath feeling a sense of relief by her response.

MIA (CONT'D)
Call me if you need anything.

ELI
I will. Thank you.

Eli follows her out, and shifts gears--

ELI (CONT'D)
What are your thoughts on Ian's sermon last week?

MIA
(a beat, processing)
You never stop working. MMMHH...
The dog must have ate his real sermon.
And I heard parents complaining.

Eli nods, though he doesn't have time to mull it over.

ELI
Thanks again for everything.

Mia smiles dutifully glad to be of assistance.

INT. BEDROOM - DAY

Eli strokes her brow.

LUNA
I want to talk to you.

ELI
It can wait till the morning.

LUNA
No. I can--

Luna's eyes close as she drifts to sleep. He gazes at her in slumber, his heart breaking.

INT. OFFICE - DAY

TELEVISION SCREEN frozen on a congregation of YOUNG PEOPLE.

Eli sends a text to Brandy: *Reschedule the Principals Meeting. I have a doc appt with First Lady.*

He pockets his cell and presses play on the television screen as PASTOR IAN MORRISON (30's), white male, strolls into frame. Ian has lots of youthful swagger, a pastoral Eminem who we will meet.

Luna enters the office quietly. Eli is focused on Ian as he preaches to a sea of YOUNG PEOPLE. Luna hugs Eli from behind. He smiles and pauses the television as he turns to face her.

LUNA
What's up handsome?

He kisses her on the cheek.

ELI
Sleep okay?

LUNA
I did. You should've woken me.

Eli shoots her an are-you-kidding look. She laughs as she trudges to sit on the couch.

ELI
You gotta take it easy baby.

LUNA
I can't do anything. I thought at the very least I could cook.

Eli feels her pain.

ELI
Soon enough you're gonna be 100%.

Luna shrugs, not so sure.

LUNA
That's what I want to talk to you about. And don't interrupt.

ELI
No, living funeral plans.

LUNA
Completely different. I think you're going to like this idea.

Eli shifts, the remote still in his hand, and accidentally unpauses the TV. Luna turns to look at Ian agitated at the pulpit...

LUNA (CONT'D)
Second week nerves, I see.

Eli pauses the screen again.

ELI

He's not a visiting pastor anymore, he's full-time at a new mega-church with its own youth building, and he's feeling the heat. ...But he's got *it*, we're gonna have to pull it out of him.

LUNA

You gonna talk to him?

ELI

Yep. We need the children's church to deliver or else we're in trouble.

Luna nods.

ELI (CONT'D)

What're your plans?

LUNA

See the kids for breakfast. The school knows.

They both gaze at Ian's frozen image as a distraction.

ELI

You're gonna be around for the kids.

He turns to look at her.

LUNA

That's what I want to talk about...

INT. CAR/GARAGE - MORNING

Ian cranks up his car. SHEILA, (30's) his slender, perfectly coifed, blond-haired wife steps into the garage wearing a robe and runs up to the now open window--

SHEILA

Have a good day baby.

She leans into the car, and kisses him on the lips.

SHEILA (CONT'D)

I'm so proud of you for quitting. I know it's not easy especially now but your ministry is going to soar.

IAN

Thanks honey. You didn't have to get up to tell me that?

SHEILA

I know, but I wanted to remind you
that quitting makes it easier for us
to get pregnant.

IAN

(smiles)

Exactly. I love you.

She blows a kiss to him and Ian catches the air-kiss, then
places his hand on his face. He clicks the garage button,
and the door rolls upward letting in a burst of sun.

IAN (CONT'D)

Why am I in ministry? Should be
like Toni Robbins or something.

INT. OFFICE - DAY

ELI

I hate it. No, absolutely not.

LUNA

Take a day, think about it.

ELI

Let's go with never.

LUNA

You're never going to pick the right
woman.

ELI

You're never going to die.

LUNA

How do you know dying isn't HIS will?

ELI

He showed me His will.

LUNA

Could've been a dream.

ELI

(leans back in chair,
struck)

The chemo is effecting you in more
ways than one.

LUNA

That was low. I understand how you
might feel but you have no idea how
I feel.

Eli realizes the depth of her statement, guilt washes him.

ELI

I know it's not easy to fight through
the pain, but please keep fighting.
We... I need you to.

Luna goes to him and holds his face in her hands.

LUNA

I am dying. I can feel it.

He gazes into her eyes then lets his head fall into her belly.

ELI

I've counseled so many people. I
know a ton of scripture, but all of
them fail me at this moment. ...Can
you at least wait until after we see
the doctor?

Luna nods.

EXT. COFFEESHOP - DAY

Luna takes a deep breath. The sun shines on her face and
she takes it in like never before.

Her attention turns to her laptop on the metal bistro table.
SOULMATE.COM fills the screen. Luna begins clicking away.

She clicks an upload button, then attaches an unnamed *jpeg*.
ELI'S FACE fills the designated box. Under *STATUS*, Luna
types in *Widower*.

She smiles to herself. The cursor hovers over *Activate*
button. She doesn't click it; instead, she closes the device.

Moments later her 15 year old son CALEB hovers over Eva's
shoulder reading the computer screen as Eva scrolls down. He
is visibly disturbed.

EVA

I don't get it. Is this a joke?

CALEB

You get it and it's a horrible joke.

LUNA

I said keep an open mind.

CALEB

My mind was open and then it closed.

LUNA

Eva?

EVA

I'm processing what it means. I'm grieving.

Luna realizes their sorrow and anger, but she's already grieved over her own funeral.

LUNA

You two will need someone who really cares about you and gets what it means to be a PK of a mega-church... Your father has big goals and you two are old enough to notice that most successful pastors are married. It keeps them protected--

EVA

--From whores and groupies.

LUNA

That's one way to put it. I want to make sure all of you are taken care of and if I'm not going to be here, I want to pick the best number 2 possible.

Eva looks up at her.

EVA

I don't know if I agree with it but you're right about dad. Though, she could just end up being a rebound--

CALEB

(erups)

I can't believe you two! I'm sorry mom but I'm not ready. It's crazy. I'll be in the car--

He rushes off.

LUNA

Talk to him. Please.

EVA

I'll try but you do understand how we feel?

Luna nods.

LUNA

And you understand my concerns?

Eva nods. She gathers her belongings to go after her brother.

INT. CAR - DAY

Eva and Caleb drive in silence--

EVA

I know how you feel but don't be selfish.

Caleb throws her a death stare.

EVA (CONT'D)

You're not the one dying.
We still have dad and each other.
Mom is dying by herself. Who knows
if this works but mom needs this and
that's all that matters...

Eva glances toward him for a second, then turns her eyes back on the road. Caleb gets it. He turns toward her--

CALEB

For the record, I don't like it, but I'll do whatever mom wants.

EVA

That's all she wants. We can humor her if it helps her feel better.

CALEB

I wonder what dad thinks?

INT. ELI'S OFFICE - DAY

Eli sits in front of Ian in a chair and Ian sits on the couch.

ELI

You'll find I'm a no-nonsense kind of guy and don't hold much back.

IAN

Thank you Bishop. Is this about--

ELI

I have one question... What moment did you realize you wanted to be a Pastor?

IAN

Man...

(ponders)

17, 18 I knew my life would be centered around talking to people.

(MORE)

IAN (CONT'D)

Motivating, encouraging them. I just knew. I wasn't an outspoken kid or anything. I just knew God gave me something to say.

ELI

What happened the first time you preached? Did you kill?

IAN

I preached a mini-sermon at a youth camp that mom's made me go to. ...It felt amazing! It came so easy. All those people there really liked what I had to say. Eventually, when I got paid for it I felt like I should give the money back.

Eli nods smiling, he can relate.

IAN (CONT'D)

My mom told me people are too crazy. She liked that I loved church but being a pastor was too much of a burden. My old man didn't care. He was there in body but not spirit. He grunted a lot and watched football. ...I knew it was ministry.

ELI

When did that change?

Ian tries to shake his head no--

ELI (CONT'D)

When did you start second guessing your calling and wanting to be a gardener? ...It happens to us all.

Ian's eyes widen.

IAN

I don't think I'm quite there.

ELI

I need you to tap into the spirit that led you to enter ministry.

IAN

I know on Sunday--

ELI

--I need you to tap into that spirit.

Ian understands, and nods slowly.

ELI (CONT'D)

That's all sir. Painless. Don't be too hard on yourself. This is not an easy church. ...See you on Sunday.

Ian smiles as he stands.

IAN

Yes sir. Sunday.

Bishop watches him go and sighs.

INT. CHURCH - DAY

The BAND plays a sweet, hypnotizing melody. A throng of PEOPLE are in front of the long stage/altar praying and being prayed for by other MINISTERS and DEACONS wearing black robes. Eli's calm, smooth voice beckons firmly, definitively--

ELI

God is calling you right now. You've been running for a long time. You're tired and sweat all down your face. You can stop running. Come.

Eli hops down from the stage, into the BODIES gathered. Roland quickly follows behind. Eli hands him the the wireless mic. A MAN quickly moves toward him, dubious intentions, but is blocked by Roland.

Eli effortlessly moves another way and lays his hand on a YOUNG MAN and whispers a prayer in his ears. The man falls to the ground--slain in the spirit--as churchfolk call it. Roland quickly moves to break his fall.

Eli beckons the mic from Roland.

ELI (CONT'D)

I want you to know there is no mistake too great that God can't fix. Stop pretending that you don't need help. I promise your life will get better. Come!

INT. KITCHEN - DAY

Eva, Caleb, Eli and Luna quietly eat lunch. Eva eyes everyone, and decides to break the painful silence--

EVA

Great sermon dad.

Caleb grumbles out in agreement.

LUNA

I'm going to table the idea of trying to play living matchmaker. We see the doctor tomorrow and I'm thinking we're getting a miracle.

Eli takes her hand.

ELI

Thank you. This family has faith for you.

Tears stream down Caleb's face. Luna quickly goes to him and hugs him.

LUNA

I'm not going anywhere.

INT. CAR - DAY

Luna leans back in the passenger seat.

ELI

We're gonna get the news we've been praying for.

LUNA

What's that? I'm healed? I'll live 10 days. The chemo is working but I have 20 more rounds to go? I don't know how much I can take.

ELI

(takes her hand)

What happened from Sunday to now?

Luna chuckles, derisively.

LUNA

My faith is under an anvil. I move an inch but it's still on top of me.

ELI

I mean it. I have faith for the both of us.

She turns to him.

LUNA

Promise me if he gives me a death date you will let me build a profile.

Eli shakes his head at "death-date".

ELI

This is fear talking.

LUNA

It's not fear. It's love. I need to do this for you.

ELI

You don't, I promise.

LUNA

I believe in God. But I don't know His ways or His will.

ELI

Truth? I don't understand poison curing poison. I only understand how God heals.

LUNA

I want you to be okay. I know your plans to run for public office and you'll need a great wife.

ELI

And I have one.

LUNA

What if God's will is different than ours? I need you to promise me that if I get 2 months to live you will do this for me. You're never going to date. I don't want you choosing a Jezebel out of grief. You're going to be an even bigger leader that you think. ...What about the kids?...

ELI

Where is God in your plan?

LUNA

How do you know this isn't God's plan? It's better if we do this together. It's better...

Her breathing grows heavy, her eyes fill with tears, pleading.

ELI

(looks away a beat)

Two months it is. The odds are in my favor.

LUNA

Promise me. Promise me.

INT. DOCTORS OFFICE - DAY

A row of four MRI scans line a lighted board.

Luna's face is in a daze. DR. WILLIAMS, 50's, affable doctor who's seen just about everything. He points to the full body scan--

DR. WILLIAMS
 (points to brain,
 chest, abdomen...)
 It's spread to here, here and here.

Eli frowns as he holds Luna around the shoulders.

DR. WILLIAMS (CONT'D)
 At this point, I can write a
 prescription for medical marijuana
 to manage the pain--

ELI
 --What are you saying?

DR. WILLIAMS
 I'm sorry you have one month if we're
 lucky. You--

Luna can't hear anything. Dr. Williams's lips are moving. Eli's lips are moving. She can't respond.

ELI
 Luna? Luna?

Laughter bubbles out of her lips. She covers her mouth. Eli's eyes go stark blank.

LUNA
 You promised.

INT. CHURCH - DAY

Roland sits in front of Eli who abruptly stands up distraught.

ELI
 I need your help.

ROLAND
 Anything.

ELI
 Can you get your hands on Mary Jane?

ROLAND
 What?

ELI

Luna's gonna be in a lot of pain...
and in the city--

ROLAND

Don't say another word. In the world
but not of the world, I have a cousin
who doesn't live here.

ELI

Thank you.

INT. CHURCH INTERCESSORY PRAYER ROOM - NIGHT

Luna moves from the center of the circle to take Keith's
outstretched hands to join the circle.

KEITH

Thank you Father, Amen.

A few GROUP members say there "goodbye's" to Luna. She turns
to gather her belongings when Sister Mercy approaches--

MERCY

First Lady, whatever you's about to
do, reconsider.

LUNA

(smiles)

Sister Mercy what are you talking
about?

MERCY

I don't know what it is, but the
Lord told me to tell you, don't.
We're praying for you.

Sister Mercy leans on her cane and cryptically limps away.

END OF FLASHBACK

PRESENT DAY

INT. BATHROOM - MORNING

Eli cleans up the incense, unplugs the fans from the night
before and moves them into their walk-in closet.

INT. BEDROOM - MORNING Luna sits up in bed.

LUNA

What's on the books for you?

ELI

I wish I could stay here with you
but we have a board meeting to
introduce the new CFO and I need to
prep him.

LUNA

Life goes on. My last day of chemo,
exciting. Then, I have a support
group meeting.

Eli sits at her feet. He places his hand on her leg.

ELI

Seems like they make you think you're
biding your time.

LUNA

No one else knows what it's like to
be told you have one month to live.
Which reminds me of a promise...

ELI

Can we please talk about it later?

She nods. He rises and kisses her on the cheek.

LUNA

Date night tonight?

ELI

Wouldn't miss it for the world.

LUNA

I'll meet you there.
(off his look)
I'll Uber.

ELI

I love you.

LUNA

I love you more.

He smiles and heads out. Luna's smile disappears.

INT. LIVING ROOM - MORNING

Luna's laptop is in her lap, legs folded under her. Her head
covered with a scarf.

ON THE COMPUTER SCREEN

She opens Eli's profile on SOULMATE.COM. She clicks *mailbox*
and discovers *88 new messages*.

Eva strolls in and she closes the laptop.

EVA

You ready?

Luna looks up.

INT. CHEMOTHERAPY ROOM - MORNING

The treatment is well in progress. Luna's face is pale and sickly. She turns to Deseree--

LUNA

My last visit.

DESEREE

Good news I hope.

LUNA

Doc gave me one month. Said I should finish treatment, could buy me a little time.

DESEREE

I would've run like hell.

They chuckle, then Luna turns serious.

LUNA

His inbox is full, it's only been one night since I activated it.

(off her look)

Soulmate.com. I wasn't expecting it to happen this fast. What do I do?

DESEREE

(chuckles weakly)

Pick a few, then meet with them.

LUNA

Me?

DESEREE

He's not gonna. You gotta explain to them the situation and let them figure it out.

Luna leans back pondering--

INT. BATHROOM - DAY BATHROOM VANITY MIRROR

Luna applies a hint of blush to her perfectly made-up face. She pulls the scarf off revealing her bald head. She takes a thick bob length wig off the stand and arranges it on her head. She stares at herself.

EXT. CAFE - DAY

Wigless and enjoying the sun on her face Luna smiles skyward. In front of her a piece of paper with seven names with times.

Luna opens her eyes and spots a WOMAN we will meet, MILLIE WATTS, 45, pretty and stylish wonders out of the cafe. Luna stands--

LUNA

Hi, Millie?

Millie turns confused. Luna smiles brightly as Millie approaches--

MILLIE

First Lady?

Luna's smile turns to a frown.

INT. ELI'S FRONT RECEPTION AREA - MORNING

Brandy types up the memo as Deak moseys past, toward Eli's office.

BRANDY

(sits up straight)

Pastor Smith. How can I help you?

Deak does a slow about-face to her desk.

DEAK

Is Bishop available?

BRANDY

Unfortunately, he's all booked up.

DEAK

Uhm.... It's an urgent matter.

She buzzes Eli.

BRANDY

Do you have a moment to speak to Pastor Smith?

ELI (V.O.)

I do.

BRANDY

(to Deak)

He'll see you.

DEAK

Thank you.

INT. ELI'S OFFICE

Safe inside Eli's office, Deak looks at the door.

DEAK

She's a tough cookie.

ELI

Great isn't she, had a hard time finding her. Don't run her off now!

DEAK

I can't run her off, I'm scared of her. These new age women. Thongs made of brass.

ELI

(chuckles)
You're just old.

DEAK

(sinks into the seat)
That I am. How's Chaison doing?

ELI

You can ask him at the board meeting when I introduce him.

DEAK

Pastor Ian has a problem.

ELI

Brother. Scale of 1 to 10?

DEAK

You went there. Only weird sermons.

ELI

(relieved)
We talked.

DEAK

Did you give him pointers?

ELI

You can. If it's me again he'll get more nervous.

DEAK

I can see that. ...With all you're dealing with at home to be on top of this... you're a better man than I.

ELI

Truth is the job is the easy part.

INT./EXT. PARKING GARAGE - DAY

Parked on the top level, Ian's car is in a corner spot. We hear GRUNTING sounds. His seat is pushed all the way back. His eyes closed as his arm pumps up and down. He masturbates hard for a few more seconds then--

IAN

Oh, Oh, Oh--

His body falls limp. He reaches over then bends down and inhales a line of cocaine off of a Gospel magazine.

EXT. CAFE - DAY

Five names are crossed off her list.

LUNA

I know this is unconventional.

A lovely woman, sweet face, JOYCE EVERS (40's), smirks--

JOYCE

You are a good wife. I don't know if I could do what you're doing.

LUNA

You don't mind he's a Pastor?

JOYCE

My father was a Pastor, a good man.

LUNA

You understand the hours?

JOYCE

24/7.

They both exchange knowing smiles.

LUNA

What happened to your first husband?

JOYCE

Had a heart attack playing golf. I wish I could've said goodbye.

LUNA

Goodbyes are overrated.

JOYCE

I'm sure you're right.

LUNA

Do you attend church?

JOYCE

After he died I stopped going. Too many memories and opinions about how I should grieve.

LUNA

I know what you mean.
 (mimics with pained expressions)
 "How you feeling? Don't you worry we serve a living God."

The two laugh.

LUNA (CONT'D)

They're right, but this same living God is okay with me dying of cancer.

JOYCE

Exactly.

Joyce sips her tea, the two have struck a chord.

INT. OFFICE - DAY

Eli sits with CHAISON DANIELS (55). His clean-cut visage screams banker with dark suit and tie.

ELI

Roosevelt is the grandfather of the church and he can be pretty tough. But he's been a part of a lot of churches and has great insight.

CHAISON

Ornery oldtimer, got it.

Eli chuckles.

ELI

He's a good soul, no one more loyal.

CHAISON

Thanks for the insight, it's helpful.

ELI

Not everyday someone leaves a big job at a bank to run a church.

CHAISON

What can I say, I like your vision.

ELI

I hope you like it for a long time.

CHAISON

Don't change. ...How's First Lady?

ELI

She's a fighter.

CHAISON

My sister-in-law passed of cancer last year. Rough stuff.

Eli fidgets with his fingers--

INT. RESTAURANT PATIO - NIGHT

Eli unfolds his napkin a few PEOPLE stare at him but don't want to disturb him. Just then, TINA DAVIS (40's) tall, curvy, glances at him from her picture of him on her cell phone.

TINA

Hi, Eli? I'm Tina.

She extends a hand to him. He's hesitant and confused but shakes it. She waits for a moment, then pulls her seat out and sits.

The two stare at each other.

ELI

I'm sorry, can I help you?

TINA

When I spoke to your em... I guess she's still your wife she said to meet you here.

Eli tips his head skyward--

ELI

You are mistaken that's not what this is.

TINA

She said you didn't like the idea but you've come around. Eli stands puts money on the table--

ELI

I'm sorry this has been a huge misunderstanding. I'm so sorry--

Eli eases up, and walks away. Tina looks a little crushed--

TINA

At least I get dinner this time.

She picks up the menu.

INT. LIVING ROOM - NIGHT

Eli storms inside the house. Luna's buried under covers. She closes her eyes and shifts into "sick" mode. He hovers over her.

ELI

You can open your eyes now.

Luna pulls back the covers, and cracks open one eye.

ELI (CONT'D)

C'mon, on our date night and such a public place--

LUNA

I'm sorry baby, I had to, you weren't ever gonna let me.

ELI

Yes, I would've.

She sits up and eyes him: "yeah right"

ELI (CONT'D)

I like to take my time.

LUNA

It's a bigger promise for me.

ELI

What if this woman goes to the church? And people were staring.

LUNA

I chose women far away. Christian, but don't go to church regularly. You can meet in a private room at Supper Club for lunch or dinner. Mia's sister manages the place. Told her you were conducting a few staff interviews there. ...You can walk in and out at separate times.

Eli sighs shaking his head, relenting--

ELI

You thought of everything. ...Tell Brandy they're contractor interviews. Initial the first name.

LUNA

Thank you.

ELI
I'm only doing this for you.

She leans over and hugs him.

LUNA
I love you so much.

ELI
Are you sure, you trying to give me
away?

The two laugh.

LUNA
What did you think of Tina?

ELI
Too many issues.

LUNA
You couldn't have talked to her.
(off his look)
She's dealt with most of them.

ELI
Right.

LUNA
I'm saving the best for last anyway.

ELI
You are, are you?

He tickles her rib. She's surprised and he launches into a barrage of tickles. She laughs uncontrollably.

INT. ELI'S OFFICE RECEPTION - MORNING

Brandy reads off the calendar.

BRANDY
The prison director, Bruce, is
stopping by to discuss possible
inmates for the program. Then a
contractor meeting at lunch.
I also have research information
about Prison re-entry Initiatives.

Eli nods, half listening and half in his head. He strolls off.

ELI
Send him in when he arrives.

INT. RESTAURANT - PRIVATE ROOM - DAY

Eli shifts anxious. He looks around. The room is baroque and feels secretive. He shakes his head--

A stunning bi-racial woman, ALEXIS, (40'S) with hazel eyes curly hair is ushered into the room by a WAITER who promptly leaves. Eli quickly stands to help her with her chair.

ELI

Hi.

Eli can't take his eyes off of her full lips curved into a pleasant smile. He pulls out her chair.

ALEXIS

Thank you.

As she sits...

ELI

I know this is awkward.

He heads to his seat.

ALEXIS

Pastor, I'm so happy that the man of God decided to meet me.

ELI

You don't have to call me pastor or man of ...any of that.

ALEXIS

Definitely not the situation I was expecting, but I've been praying for a husband. You'll never believe how God answers prayers...

(shrieks with laughter)

I have to show you...

She grabs her purse and digs through it and whips out a thick folded square, piece of paper. She hands it to him. Eli humors her and unfolds a legal size piece of paper that looks like it's been through a wash and dry.

ELI

Don't tell me it's your wishlist?

She shrieks with laughter again, Eli cringes.

ALEXIS

Pastor, I know you've heard all about our lists. Look at number 60? Right there.

ELI
 (whispers)
 60. ...Ah a Pastor.

She shrieks with laughter as she takes the paper back.

ALEXIS
 God answers prayers.

Eli nods. Then picks up the menu--

ELI
 Should we order a bite? I actually
 have a meeting directly after lunch
 that I'll need to prepare for.

ALEXIS
 Of course, of course Pastor. I
 understand you are in complete service
 to your flock. Please order for me.
 You know what's best.

ELI
 Are you sure?

ALEXIS
 Absolutely. You have the gift of
 discernment so you probably already
 know what I like.

ELI
 I promise I don't.

Alexis shrugs. Her best submissive, demure smile bundled
 together. Eli sighs.

INT. HOMELESS SHELTER - DAY

Mia stands beside Luna as she hands a full plate of food to
 a HOMELESS WOMAN and then a smaller plate to her CHILD.
 Mia's phone rings--

MIA
 It's pastor he probably wants to
 talk to you.

Mia hands her the phone.

LUNA
 (answers upbeat)
 Hi babe.

ELI (V.O.)

I don't believe you thought she was a good match.

LUNA (giggles)

You said you made a mistake and should've married a submissive.

ELI (V.O.)

I was joking. That was a disaster. The very least this is entertaining.

LUNA

I'm glad you're having fun.

She smiles.

ELI (V.O.)

How's the tea?

LUNA

Lovely.

ELI (V.O.)

Don't do that again.

She laughs as she hangs up.

MIA

He still thinks you're at a tea.

LUNA

He does. He won't want me doing this. He'll say I'm too weak.

MIA

He's right. The homeless aren't all gonna get jobs and homes tomorrow.

LUNA

This is good for me. I need to help.

Mia shrugs, we get the sense she said her piece.

INT. CHURCH CONFERENCE ROOM - DAY

Brandy sits at a table in the back with her computer and notepad taking notes. The board meeting well underway.

Each chair is occupied. Deak is beside PATRICIA (PAT) QUIMBY, 50's sits stiffly with her hair in a stiff bun. ROOSELVELT JONES (73) is a spry old-timer, and the ornery grandfather of the church. He hails from five generations of pastors. Ian, then Chaison sit on the other side of Eli beside Deak.

CHAISON

We should be accepting work applications from bank tellers instead of allowing regular folk to count tithes and offering.

ROOSELVELT

That's not church young fellow. Where else can we trust people 'cept church?

CHAISON

I've gone through the books and the average intake should be around \$40,000. During economic hardship it's going to dip but for previous years the numbers are too inconsistent. We need to protect the givers and the church.

PAT

That makes sense to me.

ROOSELVELT

Of course it would to you.

PAT

I'm not going to assume I know what you mean Sir.

IAN

Everyone going to church ain't saved.

DEAK

Amen.

Eli can see the meeting is starting to go south as usual--

ELI

We need to do whatever we can to safeguard everybody as well as our ministries. We have a 50 million dollar mortgage from all the renovations. We are rolling out the Prison Re-entry initiative and we need payroll for staff. We can't afford to lose anything to theft.

DEAK

We need growth like yesterday.

ELI

Growth comes when people trust.

EXT. PARKING LOT - EVENING

The Pastoral staff heads to their cars. Eli walks with Deak.

DEAK
That went well.

Eli chuckles.

ELI
Everyone is passionate. It's good.

DEAK
Yeah passion.

ELI
Have a good night.

DEAK
How's First Lady doing?

ELI
Same. Fighting the good fight.

DEAK
Take it from me, whatever makes her
happy that's what you gotta do.

ELI
Yes, sir. I've been trying.

INT. RESTAURANT - PRIVATE ROOM - NIGHT

Eli sits. He looks around then checks his watch. He looks a little nervous--

JOYCE
Hi.

Joyce, from Luna's earlier meeting is in front of him. She's as pretty as a breath of fresh air.

ELI
Hi. You're Joyce?

He stands and moves her chair so she can sit and easily pushes it in place.

JOYCE
I am. Thank you.

Eli goes to his seat.

JOYCE (CONT'D)
I know this can't be easy.

ELI
It gives us something to talk about.

JOYCE
(laughs)
I bet. Hopefully I'm not fodder.

ELI
Of course not. Not you.

Joyce erupts with musical laughter. Her sense of humor on her sleeve. Eli laughs it's been a while--

ELI (CONT'D)
I usually laugh so I don't cry.

Joyce eyes him--

ELI (CONT'D)
I shouldn't have said that.

JOYCE
After my husband passed away people wanted me to be done grieving. I tried to laugh all the time because I thought it would speed the process but most times I was depressed.

Eli nods in agreement.

JOYCE (CONT'D)
Your wife is amazing. She's so strong.

ELI
She is. She's suffering right now and I can't help.

JOYCE
You are. Every time she sees your face.

ELI
Thanks for allowing me to talk about her.

JOYCE
She's here. It would be wrong not to. Consider me a friend.

Eli smiles, he likes that.

HOUR LATER

The waiter clears away the main course as both laugh heartily.

JOYCE (CONT'D)

...I know what you mean. My daddy would have parishioners in the house at 1AM praying the devil out of this man's drunkenness and wife beating. Same folks every week. They needed AA Jesus.

ELI

Ah the saints.

They chuckle. Eli stares at her as if for the first time.

ELI (CONT'D)

This was fun. ...I have a long day visiting the shut-in.

JOYCE

I don't miss those.

ELI

I'm joking. I work on larger initiatives to benefit the city. You gonna have to come to the house of God. The saints aren't that bad.

JOYCE

They're not, I am.

The two laugh again.

INT. BEDROOM - NIGHT

Luna lies in bed the covers up to her chin. Eli exits the bathroom in his pajamas. Luna's tired eyes slowly open to tiny slits.

LUNA

How was it?

ELI

Not too bad.

LUNA

You don't have to lie to me. I'm a breathing corpse and you walked among the living, I get it.

Eli sinks into the bed.

ELI

It was alright.

That's all he will allow himself to share.

LUNA

Good. She was the last one.

ELI

The best for last.

She nods.

LUNA

We haven't made love in almost nine months. I can feel my breath leaving me.

ELI

You gonna prostitute me now.

LUNA

(chuckles)

No. I'm just saying I'm not a stupid woman. I'm a woman on her death bed with her only wish is for her husband to be happy.

He takes her hand--

ELI

You're a control freak. You want to make sure Miss Morris doesn't put the moves on me.

LUNA

She sat in the front row and opened her legs with no panties. She needed a holy wallop over her head.

ELI

(laughs)

A holy wallop.

Luna laughs harder and blood sprays from her mouth onto his face. It won't stop.

ELI (CONT'D)

Baby. Baby. Baby...

He can't pull his phone out fast enough.

DISPATCHER (V.O.)

911 what's your emergency...

ELI

Please, my wife...

INT. HOSPITAL - MORNING

Eli paces. His son Caleb and Eva sit side-by-side barely holding on to their sanity. Dr. Williams finally emerges. Caleb and Eva stand beside their dad.

DR. WILLIAMS
She's stable.

Eli takes a breath, relieved. Caleb hugs his dad. Eva wraps her arms around them both.

ELI
Can we go in?

DR. WILLIAMS
Don't stay too long. ..She shouldn't exert herself feeding the homeless. She doesn't have much time.

Eli raises his eyebrows.

ELI
With all due respect, my wife will live. She will beat this.

Dr. Williams nods, he's heard this before.

INT. LUNA'S HOSPITAL ROOM - DAY

Caleb runs in and places his head on his mother's heart.

LUNA
Hi honey, you playin' hookie?

Caleb laughs. Eva hovers over her. Eli watches with a smile. Luna extends her hand, and he takes it. He dare not let his brave face falter for the sake of his children.

ELI
Feeding the homeless huh?

Luna manages a smirk.

ELI (CONT'D)
Please don't do that again.

LUNA
Aye, Aye captain.

Bittersweet smiles so neither cries.

INT. COFFEE SHOP - DAY

Eli sits with Joyce sipping on her coffee.

ELI
I was so scared. I thought that was
it. There was so much blood. But I
told the doctor she would live.

JOYCE
Do you believe that?

ELI
I do.

JOYCE
So we'll remain friends.

ELI
We will.

JOYCE
I'm good with that.

ELI
I need my wife. I need--

He breaks and cries. Joyce looks around--

JOYCE
C'mon, not here.

At the checkout, a woman, we will come to know as MISS MORRIS
(50's) polished, watches as Eli leaves with Joyce.

INT. CHURCH HALLWAY - DAY

Service over, Miss Morris, the woman from the coffee shop
approaches Luna and Eli as they exit. Luna continues, too
weak to engage. Roland takes Luna's arm.

LUNA
Good to see you Miss Morris.

MISS MORRIS
Good to see you First Lady? God is
a healer.

LUNA
(calls after)
Yes, he is.

ELI
What can I do for you Miss Morris?

MISS MORRIS

(hedges)

I know in First Lady's condition you must be struggling. I'm... here for you.

ELI

I don't think that'll be necessary Miss Morris.

MISS MORRIS

I saw you the other day with a woman. ...At the coffee shop. I would hate for First Lady to hear about that close encounter.

A chuckle erupts from Eli's lips. He can't hold his laughter...

ELI

God bless you Miss Morris.

He walks off laughing. Miss Morris is left confused about what just happened.

EXT. BACKYARD PATIO - DAY

Eli and Luna eat dinner. Her frail body looks thinner.

LUNA

Don't avoid her. I know that's what you're doing.

ELI

I'm working.

LUNA

It's okay to hang out or grab coffee. Your adoring parishioners will assume she's my sister in town.

ELI

(clicks his teeth)

Now I'm courting her?

LUNA

No, she's being your friend.

ELI

If you die and I suddenly show up with a woman at church, they'll say I'm a faithless Pastor and an adulterer.

LUNA

You can tell them the truth. I'll even leave a letter that you can post to the church website.

Luna smiles. Eli shakes his head laughing.

MONTAGE

EXT. PARK - DAY

Joyce and Eli are on a leisurely stroll laughing and talking.

INT. HOME OFFICE - NIGHT

Eli talks animated, smiling on the phone walking around the room. Luna peaks in then quietly backs out, unseen.

INT. RESTAURANT - PRIVATE ROOM - NIGHT

The two seem to be enjoying a friendly debate that ends with laughter.

END OF MONTAGE

INT. BEDROOM - DAY

Luna sits up nervous. Eli breezes in... happy.

ELI

Hi baby.

He kisses her on the cheek and heads to the bathroom.

LUNA

You smell like perfume.

He eases out...

ELI

No, no, no you don't get to do this. You don't get to be the jealous, grieving, dying wife.

LUNA

Cut me some slack.

ELI

I knew it, I knew it, I knew this was a bad idea.

LUNA

I'm sorry.

ELI
You're my wife. You're alive.

LUNA
It was my idea. It's what this family needs.

ELI
You underestimated how this would make you feel. I should've--

LUNA
--Look at me.

He turns to face her.

LUNA (CONT'D)
I'm okay with this. I need you to be happy. I want you all to be happy.

Eli's shoulders slump--

ELI
Nothing serious is going on.

LUNA
Come here.

He slides in bed beside her and she strokes his head.

INT. ELI'S OFFICE - DAY

Deak sits in front of him. Eli looks confused--

DEAK
Giving you a heads up, they got wind of you hanging out with some woman.

ELI
It's nothing. It's not that.

DEAK
You're gonna have to give em something.

ELI
This is crazy.

DEAK
You moved from a regular pastor to a celebrity with this new church and all its members. Plus, two New York Times Bestselling books. You have to know that.

Eli shakes his head in disbelief.

INT. BOARD ROOM - DAY

The Pastors sit around the table. Eli strolls in and silence wraps the room. Eli takes note as he sits at the head of the table. Everyone looks down. No one offers any info--

ELI

Sitting at the head of the table can be misleading. Usually the one at the head has the least power.

Pat looks up at the remark.

ELI (CONT'D)

What is troubling you all? Pastor P. I can always count on you.

Pat passes a photo down. No one looks at it, they've already seen it.

Eli takes the photo. PHOTO: *It's him with head bent and Joyce's arm under his elbow.*

Eli stares at the photo then looks up.

PAT

Is that a sister, an aunt, cousin who's in town visiting?

ELI

(shakes his head no)
She's a... friend.

ROOSEVELT

Does First Lady know about her?

ELI

That's between me and my wife.

ROOSEVELT

In my day most had an understanding.

PAT

That doesn't work anymore. Eli, help us out.

(a beat)

Unfortunately, Mercy Road Ministries and Church has swallowed our personal lives like Jonah inside the whale. It owns us and we have to do what it says.

ELI

Our personal life is our business
but I can assure all of you it's not
what Miss Morris is insinuating.

DEAK

Miss Morris is going to share that
picture along with her insinuations
to anyone who will listen even Dallas
tabloids.

PAT

She could destroy us all.

ELI

Nothing shady or underhanded is going
on. No one is going to say I'm having
a love child. I'm not that Pastor.

PAT

(sighs)
Thank God.

IAN

With all respect sir how are we
supposed to believe you with so much
at stake.

ELI

Faith son. Faith. Does anyone have
faith anymore? Are we living in such
times where our faith has been reduced
to what we can see and touch. My
book says faith is evidence of things
unseen. Is faith that elusive?

ROOSEVELT

You betta preach Pastor.

DEAK

I'm gonna run a lap in here.

EXT./INT. CAR - EVENING

Eli waves goodbye to his Pastoral staff and hops inside his
car. He drives out of the parking lot.

Once on the main road, he gulps in air as if hyperventilating.

PITCH BLACK SCREEN

ELI (V.O.)

Can you meet? It's urgent.

The scraping SOUND of METAL being moved is heard.

JOYCE (V.O.)
 Can it wait till tomorrow? I'm
 already at home.

The SOUND of a chair being moved across the floor is heard.

ELI (V.O.)
 No. I can come to you.

JOYCE (V.O.)
 I'm kind of far out.

ELI (V.O.)
 What's the address?

INT. BACKYARD PATIO - DAY

Luna has a tri-pod with camera setup. She's camera ready in the most modest of ways.

LUNA (to camera)
 I love you guys. I want you to know that. I know I wasn't a perfect mom or wife but I tried to be there. In your life you will make mistakes...

INT. INTERCESSORY PRAYER ROOM - DAY

Sister Mercy stands in the center of a circle the ORGAN plays booming IN THE BACKGROUND, "*I Wanna Be Right*" by Mississippi Mass Choir.

Mercy's moving animatedly. Her head toward heaven, her lips moving but no words can be heard over the MUSIC. Every one holds hands tightly as she prays.

LUNA (V.O.)
 Don't be afraid of them or of failing. Without those mistakes how would we grow or become better. God gave us those mistakes...

The ORGAN CONTINUES playing the song in the background. Luna sits on the porch, tears in her eyes as she talks to the camera.

LUNA (CONT'D)
 It's inevitable. No matter what you do in life God is with you. He will never leave you or forsake you. I am so happy to have been your mother.

INT. CAR - DAY

The organ continues to play in the background. Eli drives down an very open freeway. He passes only one or two cars.

LUNA (V.O.)

Mom is hanging with the angels and harassing Jesus on your behalf. I love you and I still miss you.

Eli passes a sign that reads "*Welcome to Denton, Texas*" turns down a dirt driveway and follows a short path to modest two-story house. The ORGAN FADES...

EXT. FRONT PORCH - DAY

Joyce swings open the front door. Eli can't help but smile.

JOYCE

You made it.

ELI

Never pictured you as the country girl.

JOYCE

My dad left it to me. Come on in.

INT. LIVING ROOM - DAY

The mantle brims with old family portraits.

ELI

How long you had this house?

JOYCE

10 years. I renovated and added onto it. Left the outhouse in the back as a reminder--

ELI

That plumbing is indeed a miracle.

The two chuckle.

JOYCE

Lemonade?

ELI

Yes, please.

She heads toward the kitchen the floor plan very open so they can continue--

JOYCE
I know you're not here to talk
plumbing. Don't tell me...

ELI
No, no, no.

JOYCE
Your kids?

ELI
I don't think I can do this with
you.

JOYCE
Do what?

ELI
Be friends.

Joyce nods as she hands him the beverage.

JOYCE
Did something happen?

He takes a sip, then puts it down on a nearby table.

ELI
I have big plans for this city and
for my ministry. I want to help
people... I built that church--

JOYCE
You didn't build the church.
...Sorry, but you don't need a church
to help people.

ELI
Your father was a pastor so you know
when I say I was born to Pastor and
that's all I know how to do.

Joyce nods.

JOYCE
I thought this would end badly. For
me.

ELI
(turns to her)
And for me.

She eyes him not expecting the admission.

JOYCE

Next lifetime we have a shot.

ELI

Except we don't believe in that.

JOYCE

Darn.

ELI

...I better head back. It'll take a fortnight to get out of these boondocks.

JOYCE

Keep talking.

Eli walks toward the door. She follows at a measured distance behind.

ELI

It was good meeting you. I really needed this.

JOYCE

Same here. I was losing hope. ...You didn't have to come by to tell me.

They both stand by the door.

ELI

I owe you that much.

Joyce nods. Neither have the courage to move.

ELI (CONT'D)

See you around.

He extends a hand. Joyce laughs and goes in for a hug. Eli goes still. His body untouched for months can't even handle a single hug. Joyce looks down unsmiling.

ELI (CONT'D)

It's been a while. A long while.

She looks him in his eyes as she moves closer and closer to his lips, eyes open as they kiss. Eli resists for as long as he can before he gives in and kisses her back passionately, deeply, in abandon.

The ORGAN STARTS up playing "*I Wanna Be Right*" in the background.

He pulls on her blouse. She sheds it. She unbuckles his pants.

They don't relocate they make love right there on the floor.

TIME LAPSE

The two lay on the floor both looking at the ceiling. No words pass their lips.

INT. KITCHEN - NIGHT

The ORGAN continues playing the song low in the background.

Luna sits in the kitchen drinking a cup of tea. The clock reads midnight.

Eli stands in the kitchen entryway. He looks at the back of Luna willing himself to go to her... a beat.

He looks down and backs out of the entryway.

Luna turns around just as he disappears.

INT. INTERCESSORY PRAYER ROOM - DAY

The ORGAN CONTINUES playing in the background when the song crescendos...

Tears and sweat run down the faces of Keith and MANY of the WOMEN praying.

Sister Mercy waves her cane toward heaven... We know her demands from earlier prayer sessions.

The drenched organist slams HIS fingers on the keys and ends the number. Sister Mercy collapses to the floor. The whole group encircles her lifeless body.

INT. HOSPITAL ROOM - DAY

Luna rushes into the room. Sister Mercy frail and weak in her bed.

LUNA

Oh!

SISTER MERCY

(eyes drawl open)

Get a hold of yourself woman. I'm fine. I've never had cancer.

Luna laughs.

LUNA

You shouldn't be out so late carrying on. I'm fine. I'm at peace.

SISTER MERCY

That's not good enough suga. I know a God I don't think you've had the privilege of meeting. I had grandparents who made it through slavery and parents who survived Jim Crow and grandchildren in college. I will introduce you to that Jesus.

LUNA

Yes ma'am. God is faithful.

SISTER MERCY

You say it but you don't understand it. I've met many a pastor and their wives in my day, but you and Eli have work to do. ...You're not the only one with dying wishes.

Luna stutters, but never recovers with words.

SISTER MERCY (CONT'D)

Go see your doctor. Go see him today.

LUNA

I understand how you feel Sister, but the cancer is everywhere. It's in my brain. God is calling me home. I can feel Him.

SISTER MERCY

(chupes with her teeth)

Woman go see your doctor. I have no time for this. Go. Go. Go!

Luna startled by Mercy's aggression, stands and heads toward to the door... She turns back and Sister Mercy smiles shewing her with her wrinkly hand...

Luna smiles. She walks down the hall and stops. She hesitates, but keeps walking and exits the hospital.

EXT. FUNERAL GROUNDS - DAY

Tears run down Eli's cheeks as he stands in front of the podium.

ELI

She was stronger than all of us. She knew people well. She could tell someone they were going to the pits of hell as easy as she could love on them.

He chuckles.

Luna uses her kerchief to wipe her tears. A sea of people consumes the area wearing bright colors.

ELI (CONT'D)

She wouldn't want us carrying on
like this. Sister Emily send Miss
Mercy home!

SISTER EMILY in a red dress takes the podium and sings the most upbeat version of the song "*Gonna Be A Lovely Day*" by Kirk Franklin.

Eli takes Luna's hand. She pulls it away and puts it on her lap.

FLASHBACK

EXT. HOSPITAL PARKING LOT - DAY

This is the same day Luna saw Sister Mercy in the hospital. Luna is outside. She stops mid-stride, turns around and goes back inside the hospital.

END OF FLASHBACK

INT. CAR - DAY

IN THE REARVIEW MIRROR Luna looks at the funeral grounds in the distance. Eli drives.

ELI

You have another doctor's appointment
tomorrow?

LUNA

Doctor Williams called me. Probably
about some new clinical.

ELI

Are you gonna do it this time?

She shrugs, doesn't know.

ELI (CONT'D)

How do you feel?

LUNA

I have more energy. Kind of good
for a change, but I'm not on chemo.

Eli takes her hand and this time she doesn't pull away.

LUNA (CONT'D)

I'm sorry. This was all my doing.

ELI

It was mine. ...I'll be there
tomorrow.

Luna nods, as slow tears roll down her cheeks.

INT. ELI'S CHURCH OFFICE - DAY

Eli has his belongings, walking out the door.

ELI (CONT'D)

(to Brandy)
I'll be gone for the day.

Brandy nods just as Janice unsure walks in, her eyes red.

JANICE

(voice shakey)
You told me to come by anytime.
It's Philip's birthday today...

Janice struggles to keep it together. She digs in her purse
and pulls out a gun... Eli and Brandy stop in their tracks...

JANICE (CONT'D)

(sobs)
I found this in Philip's drawer, but
he hung himself. I found this...

Eli easily takes the gun from her shakey hands...

ELI

Let's talk.

He lightly drapes his arm around her. She leans on him.

Over his shoulder, he speaks very low to Brandy--

ELI (CONT'D)

Call Pat.

Brandy nods. Eli leads Janice toward his office.

EXT. HOSPITAL - DAY

The sun begins to dip.

INT. DOCTOR'S OFFICE - DAY

She sits in the waiting room wringing her hands.

RECEPTION

Mrs. Mercer.

INT. EXAMINATION ROOM - DAY

A bevy of scans line the wall. Dr. Williams turns to her.

DR. WILLIAMS
Should we wait for Mr. Mercer?

LUNA
He'll be happy to hear the summarized report.

DR. WILLIAMS
I think he might want to hear this.

LUNA
It's okay, he's had enough bad news.

Dr. Williams hesitant, continues--

DR. WILLIAMS
I had two different colleagues unfamiliar with your case review your scans. ...I don't believe it, but... they are all clean.

LUNA
What does that mean?

DR. WILLIAMS
There is no sign of cancer anywhere in your entire body. None. Zip.

Luna covers her mouth, her breath catches in her throat.

DR. WILLIAMS (CONT'D)
It's a miracle.

Tears flood her eyes.

Eli quickly rushes in not reading the room. More of the same is on his mind.

ELI
Sorry I'm late. Counseling session ran long.

They both look at him.

ELI (CONT'D)
What's wrong? What happened?

THE BEGINNING