

**THE BODY OF CHRIS**

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OVER BLACK

A CHILDREN'S CHOIR harmonizes.

SERIES OF SHOTS

MACROS of PEOPLE donning their "Sunday Best." We can't tell who they are:

- Mist sprays from a perfume bottle.
- Hands tighten crisp neckties.
- Fingers pull bow ties taught.
- Cufflinks clasp loose sleeves.

CUT TO:

CLOSE ON blades of grass, wavering in the wind.

A ROARING LAWNMOWER approaches. The blades quiver -- CHOP!  
The blade of the mower slices the sheaths in half.

The remnants of that grass, laying on the sidewalk, get trampled on by dress shoes.

REVERSE ON a pair of focused eyes -- SLOW ZOOM OUT to reveal:

CHRIS (30s), face full of turmoil, sits outside a church in a dress shirt.

INT. SANCTUARY - MORNING

CONGREGANTS applaud as the children finish their song.

SENIOR PASTOR JOHN (50, heart and humor of Ted Lasso) is at the pulpit.

PASTOR JOHN  
And he took bread, breaking it, and  
said, "This is my body--"

A SCREAM. Heads turn --

SOMETHING PINK dashes through the frame.

MALE CONGREGANTS bound to their feet. Dart between aisles.

PARENTS leap to cover CHILDREN's eyes.

SMARTPHONES recording everywhere.

Chaos.

CUT TO:

"THE NEXT DAY"

EXT. CHURCH PARKING LOT - DAY

An OLDER CAR sits in the vacant lot.

MARGARET (late 60s, the stern command of Sigourney Weaver), a tiny spec, is inside.

She holds her mobile phone. Listens to a SINGLE RING before--

AUTOMATED VOICE

The mailbox you are trying to reach  
is full.

CAMERA MOVES IN as she types. Her text appears as a GRAPHIC:

MARGARET

*Hi. I know I said I wasn't going to  
bother you. You're busy with your  
life. But I wanted to send you  
something small. It's really  
nothing. Just a little birthday  
present. You know, I've celebrated  
every year since you were born.*

She deletes the last sentence. Sends.

Shuffles PAPERS we cannot read. Reaches for the glove box.

Across the lot...

JADA (22, Asian - the enlightened candidness of Ava from "Hacks") stands beside a car.

She's texting with a FRIEND. Finalizing her transition from a slouchy grunge aesthetic to a professional one using the driver side window as a mirror.

GRAPHIC: *TEXT MESSAGES*

JADA

*What do ppl wear to church?*

FRIEND

*Idk. Robes?*

Jada removes her nose ring and pockets it.

FRIEND (CONT'D)

*U want me 2 pick u up? Or r we  
driving separate?*

JADA

*Together works. If my boss gets  
here soon.*

FRIEND  
*She tryna save you?*

JADA  
*Haha. Probably.*

INCOMING CALL from "SUZIE."

JADA (CONT'D)  
*Gtg. <kiss emoji>*

Jada settles into a professional posture. Picks up the call.

JADA (CONT'D)  
 Hi. Suzie. Am I in the right place?

Jada scans the church parking lot.

SUZIE (V.O)  
 So... change of plans.

INT. CHURCH HALLWAY - MOMENTS LATER

Pastor John is reading on his phone as Jada approaches him.

JADA  
 Hi, are you the father?

PASTOR JOHN  
 Depends... who's the baby momma?

Off Jada's wide-eyed shock:

PASTOR JOHN (CONT'D)  
 That's a joke. Father is a Catholic term. We're Protestant. And yes, I am a pastor here. Pastor John. How can I help you young lady?

JADA  
 I'm Jada Chen. I work for Suzie Thompson.

PASTOR JOHN  
 Oh great! Suze' is such a stellar person to work for. I've seen her train a number of young men and women in PR over the years -- really investing in them, meeting their individual needs, setting them up for success before they grow wings and learn to fly on their own.

(beat)  
 Where is she?

JADA  
 Not coming.

Pastor John lifts his eyebrows.

PASTOR JOHN  
 (come again?)  
 What now?

INT. CHURCH HALLWAY - MOMENTS LATER

John and Jada wind through the church hallways.

JADA  
 Point is, this wasn't supposed to happen for three more weeks. So now she's boarding a standby flight with three layovers, hoping to get there before her daughter gives birth.

PASTOR JOHN  
 And you've been working with Suzie for awhile?

JADA  
 Uhh... a couple of weeks.

PASTOR JOHN  
 Oh. And before that?

JADA  
 I was doing social media for Solomon's Sandwich Shop.

PASTOR JOHN  
 (concealing panic)  
 They've got some good schmear. That place is lox of fun.

JADA  
 Why don't we just wait for her to land on the West Coast. She could conference in?

PASTOR JOHN  
 No need. For all intents and purposes, you're Suzie.

JADA  
 Ok... It's just... I don't really "get" church people.

PASTOR JOHN  
 Nonsense. We're just as awful as everyone else.

John opens a door. They walk into...

INT. CHURCH MEETING ROOM - MOMENTS LATER

There's a 70s aesthetic and a broken air conditioner. Faux wood paneling, olive green drapes, and shag carpet that's faded to a light pink color -- if you dropped a circus peanut on it, you would never find it again. Folding chairs are strewn about the room.

Several ELDERS are present.

John leads Jada to ELI (45, mother-hen / human resources type - the awkward attentiveness of Gabe from "The Office").

PASTOR JOHN

Eli, this is Jada. She's helping us-

JADA

Craft a public statement. About what happened yesterday.

(reads from phone)

"A banal, accurate, and forgettable statement that MUST be textbook complete, or else."

(looks up)

Suzie's word's, not mine.

PASTOR JOHN

(to Jada)

Eli serves as chair of the board.

(to Eli)

You know how these meetings are run better than me. Show her the ropes?

ELI

It would be my pleasure.

John leaves. Eli organizes chairs. Jada instinctively helps.

JADA

So everyone here works for the church?

ELI

Just John. The rest of us are elders.

(off Jada's confusion)

Volunteers. Like a board of directors for a nonprofit. Actually - exactly that.

Jada eavesdrops on a conversation between a very pregnant woman, DAWN (30s, housewife - the naive sweetness of Amy Adams from "Junebug") towering over CARL (60s, old and tired, the "quiet quitting" attitude of Stanley Hudson).

DAWN

Would it be ok if I had Brandon take a look at it before you signed anything?

CARL  
What does he bill hourly?

DAWN  
Oh, he would never charge a friend  
to read over a simple contract.  
It's fine! I don't even send an  
email without him looking at it.

Eli notices Jada listening in.

ELI  
That's Dawn. She's got... gosh I  
wanna say five in our kids program?

JADA  
About to be another.

ELI  
Probably a few. She is *eternally*  
*pregnant*.  
(a beat)  
She just took her husband Brandon's  
spot on the board.

JADA  
What happened to him? Was he fired?

ELI  
People serve a three year term.  
Carl is nearing the end of his.

Eli points to RUHA (late 30's, jolly and irreverent with a  
worldly wisdom - think Fortune Feimster at a rally). She  
smiles ear to ear. Plays John a video on her phone.

ELI (CONT'D)  
You'll like Ruha. She's also a new  
board member.  
(proudly)  
Working towards gender parity!

Ruha and John laugh until they look up and see --

Margaret enters the room.

She has a regal, "tough love" vibe. Even her silence carries  
power.

Everybody quiets and sits down.

It's time for business.

Dawn pulls out her laptop. [*Note: Dawn is in charge of the  
minutes and will be typing everyone's words.*]

ELI (CONT'D)  
(whispering)  
That's Margaret.  
(MORE)

ELI (CONT'D)

She used to teach Sunday school.  
She's been an elder three times  
over the past two decades.

A MUFFLED VOICE emanates through the door.

MATTHEW (O.S.)

I'm not calling anyone's bluff. The  
numbers just don't work.  
(listens and laughs)  
Ha! I invented the term!

A sharp dressed man swings the door open. It's MATTHEW (50s,  
the assured charisma of a small-town Jack Donaghy). He speaks  
into air pods.

MATTHEW (CONT'D)

Alright buddy. I'll pass your  
message along. Yup. Yup. Will do.  
Keep us in the loop over there.

Matthew taps an air pod.

MARGARET

("you're late")  
Thank you for joining us Matthew.  
Where's your compatriot Kevin?

MATTHEW

That was him. He's at the hospital.  
Says start without him.

Matthew sits down. Notices Jada.

MATTHEW (CONT'D)

Our elder board keeps growing.

ELI

This is Jada from Suzie Thompson's  
office. Jada, how do you feel about  
introducing yourself and telling us  
how you plan to help today?

JADA

Uh sure. I'm here 'cause of this...

Jada casts the post from her phone to a TV.

**VIDEO: CHRIS RUNNING NAKED THROUGH THE SANCTUARY.** A black bar  
digitally censors his lower half.

Dawn looks away instinctively. Still fanning herself.

Ruha leans in, curious.

JADA (CONT'D)

Do any of you know who posted this?

Heads shake.



PASTOR JOHN

A lot of people were live streaming. The children's choir had just finished.

RUHA

What timing.

DAWN

(still looking away)  
Shouldn't this be taken down?

JADA

It's been censored, so it's unclear if the algorithm will pull it. If anything, it could spread. As evidenced by...

Jada casts another post to the TV:

SCREENSHOT: Chris looks maniacally euphoric, memed with text:

"WHEN YOU ORDER EXTRA GUAC AND THEY FORGET TO CHARGE YOU."

JADA (CONT'D)

Stuff like this.

Ruha giggles.

Margaret delivers a stern look.

RUHA

Sorry! I wasn't there on Sunday. Didn't get to see it live.

Carl walks over to Jada.

CARL

(mimics Jada's "casting" motion)  
How did you...?

JADA

(ignoring Carl)  
You've even been memed. By a celebrity animal.

RUHA

Which one?!

JADA

Humphrey the leisurewear pup.

Ruha's eyes widen in delight. She grabs Jada's phone.

RUHA

Oh my gosh I love him.  
(watches playback)  
Is it wrong that I feel like I've arrived?  
(beat)

(MORE)

RUHA (CONT'D)

So freaking adorable! You all have to see this.

Ruha casts the video up to the TV.

VIDEO: A split screen "duet". On the left, censored footage of Chris. On the right, a pug wearing a tracksuit and sunglasses. He lifts his sunglasses with his paw and reacts with a shocked expression. It is as if the dog is actually watching Chris. It's fuckin' adorable.

Carl walks over to Ruha.

DAWN

(squinting)

What's the caption say?

RUHA

"Fashion faux paw" P-A-W. Classic.

CARL

(mimicking "casting" motion)

How did you...?

Ignoring him, Ruha navigates to Humphrey's profile.

PASTOR JOHN

25 Million followers! Woah.

JADA

Oh yeah, he's a petfluencer.

PASTOR JOHN

A pet flew what?

RUHA

It's gonna blow up.

MARGARET

Excuse me for interrupting your Colgate comedy hour. But we need to deal with this scandal.

JADA

Oh I wouldn't classify this as a scandal. These sorts of manic outbursts are probably pretty commonplace in big cities. I mean I'm happy to be here, but this is more of a safety and security issue than a marketing one.

PASTOR JOHN

The caption just says "crazy guy streaks through church." It doesn't mention anything about it being our youth pastor.

JADA

Wait. This guy works here?

EVERYONE

Yeah.

JADA

Yikes. Ok. That's a lil' different.

PASTOR JOHN

Suzie didn't tell you?

JADA

Suzie didn't tell me a lot of things.

The door swings open and a head pops in. It's HALEY (35, the relentless positivity of Sue from "Mythic Quest"), the church secretary. Haley really loves her job.

HALEY

Helllllllllloo!

Haley's body remains behind the door. Only her head is inside. She knocks. [*NOTE: Haley only enters rooms this way*].

PASTOR JOHN

Hey Haley. Any calls?

HALEY

Several. We are pop-u-lar today. Any comment for Kay's Community News Blog? About yesterday?

PASTOR JOHN

Oh, a comment. Let me thi--

JADA

(to Haley)

Don't talk to anyone. Refer them to me. Let them know that I will get back with them as soon as I have all the facts. Let them know it will be at least an hour.

(to John)

I'll only share with them a statement that we all agree on.

(to Haley)

But make them feel very important. As if they are the only person asking for a comment.

(to John)

You want the press on your side. If they don't think you will deliver information, they will go looking elsewhere - or make shit up.

HALEY

Yes ma'am. So official!

PASTOR JOHN  
 Woah! God doesn't call the  
 qualified, he qualifies the called!

John looks to Jada. She does not reciprocate this enthusiasm.

Haley leaves.

JADA  
 Exactly what went down yesterday?

ELI  
 About seven minutes into the  
 service, Chris, our youth pastor,  
 ran through the sanctuary,  
 practically naked.

MARGARET  
 Practically naked?

ELI  
 He had one sock on.

JADA  
 (typing into phone)  
 Any idea why?

ELI  
 I'd say cold feet, or foot... but  
 I'm guessing it was more arbitrary  
 than that.

JADA  
 No, why did he streak?

ELI  
 Don't know. After he was  
 restrained, we transported him to a  
 hospital for a psyche evaluation.  
 They've been holding him under  
 twenty-four hour observation.

JADA  
 Was he on drugs?

DAWN  
 Oh I don't want to know.  
 (but then)  
 Was he?

ELI  
 They didn't find any hard drugs in  
 his system. Some sleeping pills.  
 But prescribe-able doses.

JADA  
 Is he mentally ill?

ELI  
They're running a full psyche  
panel.

DAWN  
I can't even imagine.  
(but then)  
Bipolar? Tri-polar? Depression?

Dawn leans in exponentially with each question.

DAWN (CONT'D)  
(excited)  
Does he have that thing where both  
sides of his body have to be the  
same, so if he accidentally touches  
a wet fish with his left pinky he  
has to find another wet fish to  
brush against his right pinky?

The entire group stares at Dawn.

DAWN (CONT'D)  
I just want to know how to pray for  
him!

MARGARET  
Chris is where he should be.  
Getting expert medical attention  
from qualified health  
professionals.

ELI  
Oh! I did bring a card to sign.

Eli passes a get-well card around.

PASTOR JOHN  
How thoughtful.

DAWN  
Generalized anxiety? Panic attacks?  
Postpartum?

RUHA  
It's not gonna be that.

PASTOR JOHN  
I'm not aware of any mental issues.

DAWN  
(re: the card)  
Why does it have a soccer ball?

ELI  
He's always at the games.

DAWN  
Really? I don't remember him being  
into sports.

The door swings open and a head pops in. It's Haley! Again!

HALEY  
Hellllllllllooo!

PASTOR JOHN  
Yes Haley?

HALEY  
Just wanted to let you know, The  
Aviso asked for a comment.

RUHA  
The Aviso?

DAWN  
That's my college newspaper.

HALEY  
Yeah, it was a student reporter.

MATTHEW  
That doesn't bode well for us.

DAWN  
It's a tiny local paper.

MATTHEW  
Yeah, but college kids know how to  
spread news.

The group lets that sink in.

HALEY  
(proudly, to Jada)  
I did everything you said.

PASTOR JOHN  
Ok Jada, what goes in this  
statement? Thank you, Haley!

Haley leaves.

ELI  
Yes, thank you Haley!

But she's already gone.

JADA  
(typing on her phone)  
You want to start with a general  
sentiment of concern... for  
everyone involved.

PASTOR JOHN

Easy peasy.

JADA

Then tell people what happened.  
Just lay out the facts. What sounds  
best? Exposed? Naked? Disrobed?

ELI

I like disrobed.

JADA

And most importantly, end by saying  
"Here's what we are going to do to  
prevent this from ever happening  
again." So obviously...  
(returns to typing)  
Fire Chris.

Heads turn to Eli.

DAWN

Is that decided? Are we firing  
Chris?

ELI

Well, it's an option we can  
certainly discuss.

MARGARET

What's there to discuss?

JADA

I mean, it's kinda PR 101.

ELI

Given the stakes of Chris's fate, I  
asked Pastor John to be here today.  
Is everyone comfortable with him  
weighing in?

EVERYONE

Yeah. / Sure. / Of course.

MARGARET

Obviously we are firing Chris.  
Let's put him out of his misery and  
vote to make this official.

RUHA

Well wait a second. I want to make  
sure I have all the facts first.  
Are there any details I should  
know? Other videos to review?  
(defensively)  
It just feels kind of rushed!

JADA  
 From an image management  
 perspective, the faster you make a  
 statement the better.

MATTHEW  
 No one's leaving this building  
 until we figure this out. Agree?

Nods of approval.

MARGARET  
 We need to be on the same page. Let  
 Chris go immediately. All in favor?

Margaret raises her hand. Jada raises her hand.

RUHA  
 (reluctant)  
 On paper, I guess it makes sense.

Everyone follows.

Well, everyone but...

Pastor John.

ELI  
 John? We're voting.

PASTOR JOHN  
 I know. I'm not quite prepared to  
 give Chris the boot.

MARGARET  
 Well, it's a majority.

ELI  
 Yes... but per our Elder Board  
 charter, we must come to a  
 unanimous decision on any  
 employment or excommunication.

JADA  
 Can you come to a unanimous  
 decision quickly?

MARGARET  
 Everyone on the board voted  
 unanimously.

ELI  
 But we invited John into this  
 conversation.

MARGARET  
 When?



JADA

Like. Twenty seconds ago.

CARL

(to Eli)

I think you invited John into the conversation.

(beat)

Can we get some air on in here?

DAWN

Agreed.

PASTOR JOHN

Look. Guys. I get it.

(to Margaret)

You don't need a chaperone,

(to Jada, rhyming)

you don't want to post-pone,

(to Carl)

and I don't wanna be that ache in your temporal bone.

Carl rolls his eyes.

PASTOR JOHN (CONT'D)

I'm not saying that firing Chris is outside the realm of possibility or even probability. I do think we should at least talk about it first. Consider every possible perspective.

Pastor John walks about the room.

PASTOR JOHN (CONT'D)

Chris is a good guy. He's been at this job for a decade and goes above and beyond all the time, hosting video-game nights and other activities he doesn't get paid for. Plus, he's Zingerman's son.

EVERYONE

Oh yeah. / Good point.

JADA

Who's Zingerman?

No one hears Jada.

PASTOR JOHN

I mean, some of you have known him since he was a little kid.

(beat)

We already know Chris wasn't on drugs. This was a stress-induced mental breakdown. Our brother is hurting.

JADA

But people get fired for much less.  
Suzie'd tell you the same thing.

PASTOR JOHN

Alright, but hear me out. Before I moved here three years ago, at my last church we had this associate pastor. One day when he was sick, we sent our secretary to bring him soup. She got a peek into his home and long story short, he was a bit of a hoarder. The board questioned his ability to lead and found budgetary reasons to let him go. Fast forward two years and he had blown up on Twitter. He overcame his disorder and had a massive following surrounding the topic. Dozens of blog entries dedicated to how my church treated him.

Jada uncrosses her arms, softening.

PASTOR JOHN (CONT'D)

The pain and irony he saw in being literally discarded when he needed help the most. How fearful he was to talk about losses he'd experienced which had triggered the hoarding - all because he didn't want to let anyone into his mess.

Jada leans in, considering John's words. But then...

MARGARET

Streaking and hoarding are incomparable in terms of impropriety.

MATTHEW

She's right John. Plus, Chris's incident didn't happen in the privacy of his own home.

PASTOR JOHN

Hell, I'm glad this happened out in the open. All alone... in that state of mind, Chris could have hurt himself... or worse.

(beat)

When we say "come as you are" do we really mean "clean yourself up first" or "come as you pretend to be?" What would someone who wanders in off the street think? Would you trust someone with your life if they didn't even take care of their own family?

MARGARET

I struggle to imagine anyone "off the street" being surprised when we release Chris from his employment here. He is held to a higher standard, as a Christian, and certainly as a minister.

JADA

We really should get a statement out.

PASTOR JOHN

Alright. I said my peace. I know I'm a guest here. So thank you for letting me ramble on for a bit. Eli, why don't you call for another vote. I'll sit this one out. If everyone here is still in favor of letting Chris go, I'll relent.

CARL

Okay, Henry Fonda.

No one else knows what Carl's talking about.

ELI

I think it's important that we create a safe space for expression here. Maybe we should take an anonymous poll.

Eli grabs paper and pencils from a nearby desk.

MARGARET

It's really not necessary.

ELI

I just want to make sure people don't feel pressured to vote a certain way. Is everyone comfortable with the method in which we've been voting?

MARGARET

(raises her hand)

Yes.

ELI

Ok anyone else?

Carl, Matthew, and Ruha quickly raise their hands. John, Jada, and Dawn seem confused.

JADA

Isn't this a little paradoxical?

ELI

Excellent catch.

Eli passes out crayons and paper.

ELI (CONT'D)  
Everyone write down yes or no.

DAWN  
(stops typing)  
So what are we voting on?

ELI  
We are doing an anonymous vote to determine if we are voting anonymously.

DAWN  
Wait, so what are we voting on...?

PASTOR JOHN  
And does "yes" mean we vote anonymously? Or does it mean we are comfortable with not voting anonymously. Cuz that's what you asked before.

MATTHEW  
The phrasing was unclear.

ELI  
Let's say "yes" means we vote anonymously.

Carl GRUNTS. Scratches out his vote. Crumples and uncrumples his paper. Writes something else.

DAWN  
(re: Carl)  
I'm gonna know which vote is his.

RUHA  
Guys, I've seen rickshaws scale Kilimanjaro faster than this. I'm just gonna come out and say it. I'm changing my vote.

PASTOR JOHN  
The vote about how we vote, or the vote about Chris?

RUHA  
The vote about Chris.

PASTOR JOHN  
Well alright sister.

John's excitement is tempered by the less-than-enthusiastic reactions from the group.

PASTOR JOHN (CONT'D)

You know what? I realize we started the meeting without prayer. Should we pray? We should pray. Eli, why don't you lead us in prayer.

ELI

Of course, I'd be happy too. Although I'd also like to point out that we also forgot to adopt the minutes from last month's meeting.

DAWN

Well I typed them, so I know what they say. Motion to adopt! Trusting this vote won't get complicated while I use the ladies room.

CARL

Motion seconded.

Dawn hands her laptop to Carl.

DAWN

Fill in for me.

Dawn exits.

ELI

Any nays?

(a beat)

The aye's have it.

(a beat)

Oh speaking of prayer, I want to remind us all to be interceding for the Jonze family. Aiden is having his spinal surgery tomorrow.

MATTHEW

That's happening today.

ELI

My email says tomorrow.

MATTHEW

Was that email sent yesterday?

Eli investigates his email.

Carl types slowly with his index fingers.

MATTHEW (CONT'D)

It's why Kevin's not here for this meeting. The surgery is going on right now.

PASTOR JOHN

(to Jada)

Kevin is head of surgery over at Saint Vicks. He's also a board member here. Aiden's in our youth group.

RUHA

Is he performing surgery on Aiden? Whew. The pressure.

MATTHEW

No. But one of the surgeons in his department is. He wanted to be there with the family.

PASTOR JOHN

What a week.

Everyone sits in silence for a moment.

Carl's stomach groans. Everyone looks his way.

CARL

It's a perfectly natural response to the lack of snacks in this room.

MARGARET

Back to the task at hand.

CARL

(whispering to Eli)

Is there any cold pizza left over?

MARGARET

We're not eating until this matter is resolved.

ELI

Well that seems a little unnec--

Margaret scolds Eli with side eye.

ELI (CONT'D)

I'm just saying, some people need to eat more regularly out of medical necessity.

CARL

I am not diabetic.

ELI

I'm trying to get snacks Carl.

CARL

Then get snacks. This is your meeting to run.

MARGARET

Ruha, please explain to the group why you feel that endorsing this abhorrent stunt would set a precedent for the kind of behavior we'd like to see in these four walls. If I learned anything from teaching Sunday school for three decades it's give an inch, and they take a mile. Is that what you want? More naked bodies?

RUHA

I've been to four-hour worship services in Nigeria where half the women have their tits out the whole time. We're talking new-momma big.

(anticipating prudish reactions from Dawn and Eli)

Chill.

(back to it)

The problems they are dealing with are massive too. We would bring bread and fruit to the landfills because that's where the poorest families lived and worked. These two cute kids Musa and Sani would stake out the trucks, waiting for a fresh dump of trash so they could sift through it for half-eaten candy bars and wrappers with cheese on them.

Carl, the slow typer, motions for Ruha to get to the point.

Jada notices.

JADA

We're not in Africa.

RUHA

Look, I'm not saying we never fire him. I'm saying, we haven't even talked to him yet. My position for what we do today, right now, is to keep him on.

Dawn re-enters the room, fanning herself.

DAWN

It's like a sauna in here.

Carl promptly returns Dawn's laptop.





MATTHEW

Oh? Are you The Joker's lawyer?

ELI

The Joker is not a pedophile.

PASTOR JOHN

Chris is not a pedophile!

MATTHEW

How do you know? He never remarried after Laura.

MARGARET

Well hold on, there are many reasons not to remarry. I was too busy raising my two boys.

MATTHEW

Chris doesn't have kids. He works with kids.

ELI

He is an attractive guy though - it does kinda make you wonder how he's stayed single.

MATTHEW

An attractive guy in ministry. If that's not a thirst trap in Christian circles, than I don't know what is.

JADA

There's no point in speculating about this. That's what a third party investigator is for. Assuming he's not arrested, you need to be prepared to move forward. Also... You say he's attractive? Let's get an approachable photo of him circulating. Something that puts a different image in people's heads.

EVERYONE BUT MARGARET

Nice! / Good idea!

MARGARET

Zingerman never had press people here telling us what to do. It's wrong to cover this up!

JADA

(to Margaret)

Ok first -- I'm on your side.

(to Everyone)

(MORE)

JADA (CONT'D)

Second our chances of burying this story decrease with every minute you spend throwing shade around in here. Third, Who is Zingerman?!

Eli opens his mouth to respond, but--

RUHA

Wow. Listen to these comments.

(reading captions)

"Church got turnt." "Thanks Adam, can't wait till Eve shows up!"

"That's no Moon." "This man is #blessed" "For a small church, that's a BIG organ." "Holy-Moly what a loooooong--"

DAWN

I thought these posts were censored?

RUHA

It's a biiiiiiiig censor.

ELI

(relieved)

I thought I was the only one who noticed. I don't want to steer us into a tangent, but was it kinda large? Could it be inflamed? Water weight? Maybe Chris should see a doctor?

CARL

(not impressed)

We all saw Chris's enormous penis. It was very impressive.

RUHA

Ha! "Florida man streaks though church."

PASTOR JOHN

Florida?

JADA

(stops her scroll)

Uh oh. Vice posted about it. With details.

(looks up, worried)

They know he's your pastor.

PASTOR JOHN

Woof.

The door swings open and a head pops in. It's Haley! Again!

HALEY  
 Helllllllllloo!

ELI  
 Hello again!

HALEY  
 Just wanna make sure. I can't say  
anything?

PASTOR JOHN  
 Tell 'em they're important.

JADA  
 (correcting)  
 No. Make them feel important. But  
 don't tell them anything.

HALEY  
 How do I do that without words?

Haley makes some CONSIDERATE HUMMING SOUNDS.

HALEY (CONT'D)  
 Mmmmmmm. Ahhhemmmmm. Ooooooh.

MATTHEW  
 What are you doing?

HALEY  
 Workshopping this.

MATTHEW  
 Workshopping what?

HALEY  
 I don't know. Active listening?

RUHA  
 I think it's more of a Oohhhaaaaa.

<p>(teaching)          Oohhhaaaaa.</p>	<p>RUHA (CONT'D)</p>	<p>HALEY          (mimicking)          Oohhhaaaaa.</p>
--	----------------------	--

JADA  
 You can use words. Just don't give  
 any details away. Buy us time.

HALEY  
 How much time?

JADA  
 At least an hour.

HALEY

Ok you said an hour before. So is it an hour from then. Or an hour from now?

JADA

Just always say an hour.

HALEY

Gotcha.

Haley closes the door.

MATTHEW

One thing we should prob--

The door swings open. Guess who it is?

HALEY

Just so you know, fifty emails have come in from congregants and five more reporters have called.

Haley closes the door.

MATTHEW

As I was saying--

Once more...

HALEY

The Beacon Journal was very rude.

ELI

(legitimately concerned)  
Oh no!

But Haley is already gone. For good this time.

MATTHEW

If no one else is gonna bring up financials, then I will...

PASTOR JOHN

Oooh, the F word.

ANGLE ON Margaret, not amused.

MATTHEW

I know that 20% of the folks who go here provide for 80% of the finances. And I speak for them. And they ain't happy. If we don't have enough money to run the church... Chris loses his job anyways, and so do you John.

(beat)

I'm just stating facts.

(MORE)



MATTHEW (CONT'D)

All of our biggest donors have children in youth group. We can't afford to piss them off. Forget the news. How many of those angry emails are coming from parents clawing for answers? We need to terminate Chris and make it public now. Right Jada?

Jada's nose is buried in her phone.

MATTHEW (CONT'D)

Earth to Jada.

JADA

Yes. Absolutely. Sorry. A few more posts have popped up. Several accounts. Every app. Guys, there's a bunch of different video angles.

ELI

Who is uploading these?

RUHA

Ohhh! Any reverse angles?

JADA

Why?

RUHA

I wanna see all your faces as it was happening.

MARGARET

What action can we take to dissuade congregants from sharing these?

(to Dawn)

Any legal discourse?

Dawn shrugs.

JADA

(concerned)

Was he in pain?

Jada holds out her phone screen:

VIDEO: Chris is on the floor, flailing his legs. The post is censored with a blur.

The group leans in to watch.

PASTOR JOHN

Woa! Censor malfunction.

Everyone instinctively turns and covers their eyes. Ruha laughs.

ELI

(reciting, like a  
counselor)

Now Ruha, when you laugh, it could  
make some of us feel angry, because  
it makes us think you are not  
taking this seriously.

RUHA

Homelessness. poverty. AIDS. Rape.  
Trafficking, Militias, Violence  
against women. Female Circumcision.  
Malaria. Tuberculosis. Opioids.  
Famine. Children at the border.

CARL

Is this going somewhere?

RUHA

There are way bigger issues in the  
world. Do you know the world's  
richest one percent has more than  
twice the wealth --

Carl rolls his eyes.

Ruha finishes anyway - projecting her voice directly at Carl.

RUHA (CONT'D)

-- of six-point-nine billion  
people.

JADA

Yes. Yes. Yes. But narrowing our  
focus back to the topic at hand. A  
statement. Matthew and Margaret are  
right...

(to John)

I'm sure Chris is a nice, non-  
sexually deviant guy and that this  
was almost certainly an accident  
brought on by a heartbreaking  
amount of stress. But if someone  
shows up to work naked, they don't  
keep their job. I don't care who  
they are.

CARL

What about a porn star?

JADA

Okay. Maybe a porn star.

MATTHEW

No. You still have to show up in  
clothes if you're a porn star.

MARGARET

Is this our new standard for behavior? Comparing our youth program to smut.

MATTHEW

Back to what Jada was saying. Whether he meant to or not, Chris exposed himself.

MARGARET

And intent doesn't matter.

Tensions escalate. *Everyone at once:*

PASTOR JOHN

*Oh I think intent matters.*

MATTHEW

*Agreed.*

DAWN

*Children were present!*

RUHA

*How could intent not matter?*

CARL

(annoyed)

C'mon Ruha, embrace the inevitable!

Eli motions to lower the volume.

ELI

Let's simmer down. It's true. We can't overlook the fact that children saw a naked man. Probably for the first time. Although, pornography is pretty widespread online.

DAWN

(righteously/proudly)

It's the first human penis I've ever seen.

Looking at her belly, everyone is shocked.

MARGARET

You have five kids.

DAWN

Brandon and I like to keep the lights off.

CARL

So when you're changing diapers...? You know what, forget it.

DAWN

No, it doesn't count until puberty.

JADA

Please be careful who you say that around.



PASTOR JOHN

I want to make sure it's clear that we're not clinging to the word "pedophile."

ELI

Yes, I think we've well established that pedophilia is different than nudity.

PASTOR JOHN

Jesus is depicted practically naked on the cross.

John points to a painting of Jesus on the cross, hanging on the back wall.

MARGARET

Just because he's not a pervert doesn't mean Chris was ever fit for ministry.

MATTHEW

Exactly. How low are we setting this bar?

Ruha chuckles to herself. Everyone waits to find out why.

RUHA

(genuine discovery)  
I just realized Jesus had genitals.

DAWN

Don't put that image in my head.

CARL

(to Jada)  
That's the second human penis she's ever seen.

Jada snickers.

DAWN

I'm not a prude. I let a gay man wax me! Twice.

RUHA

He was a sexual being. Fully God. Fully man.

PASTOR JOHN

He wasn't a Ken doll.

RUHA

He went through puberty. Probably had wet dreams.

ELI

How did we get on this tangent?

DAWN

And do I have to type this?

RUHA

Its just fascinating when you think about it. Like it had a measurable length... and girth.

(lost in her imagination)

Maybe even a freckle?

PASTOR JOHN

Well we know he was circumcised.

RUHA

Oh man, and then you wonder if there's someone right now with the same length, girth, and maybe even a freckle in the same spot.

Eli, Dawn, and Margaret share a disconcerted look: "Uhhh... Where is she going with this?"

RUHA (CONT'D)

(to Matthew)

Like, what if your junk is a doppelgänger for his? Does it put you that much closer to God?

MATTHEW

Certainly wouldn't help you finish.

This is more than Dawn can handle right now. She hands her laptop to Carl on her way out.

DAWN

I need to use the ladies room.

Carl passes the laptop to John.

MATTHEW

You know Margaret brought up a good point earlier.

MARGARET

Do pray tell.

MATTHEW

Chris may have never been fit for ministry.

PASTOR JOHN

(stops typing)

This feels a little dangerous. And gossipy.

MATTHEW

We've been acting like this incident came out of nowhere. Were we just putting blinders on?

MARGARET

It's a high calling to be a minister of the gospel. In Sunday school, he was at best uninterested in pursuing any sort of truth. At worst, combative of it.

PASTOR JOHN

Combative of the truth?

MARGARET

He would have his head buried in a Pac man the whole time I was teaching, then at the end he would have ten thousand questions, trying to prove me wrong.

JADA

That just sounds like a kid to me.

MATTHEW

What I meant was, what if Chris..  
...is a nutcase?

CARL

His yard's a mess.

MATTHEW

What's that Carl?

CARL

His lawn. It's crazy overgrown.  
Grass is like--

Carl holds his hand up to indicate how tall the grass is.

ELI

You're right. I drove by his place last week.

RUHA

Maybe his lawn mower is broken?

ELI

I don't think he's cut his grass in months.

(beat)

I worry about him.

(beat)

Hey guys.

(correcting)

And girls. Women. Everyone.

(beat)

There could be backlash for firing Pastor Zingerman's son.

EVERYONE BUT MARGARET

Oh gosh. / Yeah True. / Oh man.

JADA

Who is Zingerman!? There's another pastor?

No. PASTOR JOHN Yes. EVERYONE BUT JOHN

RUHA

Chris's dad was the pastor here for over thirty years.

ELI

And before that, his grandfather.

MARGARET

He was my Pastor.

RUHA

What does it go back, like five generations?

PASTOR JOHN

Point is... Chris comes from a long line of Pastor Zingerman's.

Dawn returns.

DAWN

Oh, Pastor Zingerman? He was the best!

Dawn grabs her laptop from John. He appears hurt.

Eli notices.

ELI

Qualitatively speaking. Not a ranking.

(beat)

Who all was here ten years ago?

Matthew, Margaret, Dawn, and Carl raise a hand.

RUHA

I was still overseas.

ELI

How did Pastor Zingerman react to the last incident?

PASTOR JOHN JADA  
The last incident? The last incident?

MARGARET

Yes, this isn't the first time we've given serious consideration to terminating Christopher's employment.

JADA  
You're just telling me this now?

PASTOR JOHN  
Why would Chris be fired?

DAWN  
(to Margaret)  
Pastor Zingerman was mad at Laura.  
Not Chris.

MATTHEW  
Yeah Chris was more of a victim in  
that scenario.

MARGARET  
Victim or not, he didn't have his  
house in order.

PASTOR JOHN  
W-what are we talking about?

MARGARET  
If we fired him back then like I  
wanted to, we wouldn't be in this  
situation now.

JADA  
Who's Laura?

DAWN  
Chris's wife.

CARL  
Ex-wife.

MATTHEW  
She left him.

RUHA  
For an anesthesiologist.

PASTOR JOHN  
Laura left him for another man?

MARGARET  
She had been fornicating.

PASTOR JOHN  
Oh my gosh.

JADA  
No wonder he was shook.

DAWN  
Yeah, maybe we are being too hard  
on him.

MARGARET

Losing a spouse is not carte blanche. I was widowed at twenty-eight.

JADA

Hey guys... before some two bit reporter mines his divorce trauma into a click-bait headline... we should really get a statement out.

RUHA

(to John)

You didn't know?

PASTOR JOHN

I guess it just never came up.

(beat)

We've only worked together for three years. It takes some people awhile to open up. I mean, he could have told me. I'm trustworthy.

EVERYONE

Yeah. / Sure. / Totally.

PASTOR JOHN

Maybe he enjoyed having a friend who didn't know?

(beat)

If everyone knew my business and a new guy came to town, I wouldn't be rushing to expose my deepest wounds.

(beat)

Even to someone whose literal job description is to provide guidance and support.

The door swings open and a head pops in. It's Haley! Again!

HALEY

Hellllll...

PASTOR JOHN

Not now, Haley!

HALEY

...llllllllllloooooooooookay!

Haley finishes her statement while shutting the door.

MARGARET

As I was saying, having a sad life isn't an excuse for poor behavior.

ELI

But Margaret, we don't know the severity of his pain. He could be going through a lot privately.

MARGARET

I was left with twin two-year-old boys and a high school education. No savings. No family nearby. I remember walking through the produce section and thinking "it would be so easy to slip a few apples into my purse."

DAWN

Would it? Apples are kinda big.

MARGARET

Instead I applied for a job.

(beat)

I had to sell our home. The very home that I'd taken a picture in front of with my husband while seven months pregnant. We were just starting our lives. It was not easy getting up every day and finding work. It was not easy being away from my boys. But I did it. Backwards and in high heels. Without a public meltdown.

Silence.

RUHA

This would be so easy if we were Pentecostal.

JADA

Yeah, spin it he's a...

RUHA

prophet?

JADA

Sure.

MARGARET

Spinning sounds like lying.

CARL

Chris is no prophet. Bill Belichick. That man is a prophet.

DAWN

What if it was...  
(plucks clothing)  
Bees?

PASTOR JOHN  
Like... chasing him?

DAWN  
Killer bees.

MATTHEW  
I didn't see any bees.

DAWN  
Hornets.

JADA  
Maybe he thought there were bees?

Margaret holds her head as if she had a migraine.

DAWN  
Fire ants.

MATTHEW  
No, those are further south.

DAWN  
A lot of bugs are moving north.

PASTOR JOHN  
Like what?

DAWN  
(searching)  
Bees. Killer bees. Hornets. Fire  
ants.

MARGARET  
For heaven's sake it's not bees.  
(beat)  
You're all dawdling and you know  
it.

RUHA  
We're not dawdling. We're just  
trying to make sense of all this.

MARGARET  
Oh really? Is that why you're  
asking such probing questions as  
"Did Jesus have genitals?"

RUHA  
Now that was never in question.  
Jesus has genitalia. Or had them.  
Oohhh interesting question: Does  
Jesus still have genitals?

Dawn cradles her temples.



ELI

You mean does the glorified resurrection body possess the same endocrinology and physiology as our current mortal coil?

John rubs his hands together.

PASTOR JOHN

Ohhh. Now this is getting theological.

CARL

For the record, I was not dawdling. My wife is cooking steak fries and those do not reheat well. I do need to hit the head though.

Carl heads to the door but Jada cuts him off.

JADA

Nobody move.  
(newsflash)  
The associated press has picked up the story.

DAWN

Are they... democrats?

JADA

It's national news.

Jada sits down. Gathers everyone around her.

JADA (CONT'D)

Here's a story that just aired.

She plays a video on her phone.

MALE NEWS ANCHOR

-- who has been serving for over a decade as a youth pastor at RiverTree Christian Fellowship

PLAYBACK: Angle after angle of Chris streaking, strategically blurred for modesty.

MALE NEWS ANCHOR (CONT'D)

...shocked congregants -- and the world this past Sunday, when he was seen running through the sanctuary naked and screaming.

JADA

Was there anyone NOT livestreaming this?

FEMALE NEWS ANCHOR

The church has yet to make a statement for the incident that occurred Sunday morning.

PLAYBACK: Footage of the church.

MALE NEWS ANCHOR

It really makes you wonder, why and how something like this occurs. Was substance abuse involved? Some sort of bad publicity stunt?

Jada squints at her phone.

JADA

That's my car.

Looks up in a panic.

JADA (CONT'D)

They're here now.

(beat)

Someone grab Haley.

ELI

On it.

Eli scurries away.

PASTOR JOHN

Do they know we're meeting?

Dawn looks up and around the room.

JADA

Oh shoot.

Jada types.

MATTHEW

(re: Jada's typing)

Bloomberg? New York Times?

DAWN

The Hufflepuff Post?

JADA

No. Just canceling some plans.

MARGARET

Well sorry the future of our congregation is such a cross for you to bear.

Eli reenters with Haley.

JADA

Haley. It seems that news trucks have just arrived.

HALEY

Oh no they've been here for awhile.

PASTOR JOHN  
And we're just finding out about  
this now?

HALEY  
You are. I've known for a bit.

CARL  
Why didn't you share this  
information sooner.

HALEY  
(pointing to John)  
He told me not to interrupt.

All eyes on John.

PASTOR JOHN  
For like a blog! This is a pretty  
major escalation.

JADA  
I just want to reiterate that  
nobody talks to them except me.

MARGARET  
Why you?

JADA  
Because right now, I'm Suzie.

ELI  
Is it possible to just field some  
general questions? Say we'll get  
back to them on the rest? Maybe  
then they'll retreat.

JADA  
It's gotta be a complete statement.  
If the media thinks you are holding  
anything back, they'll stop  
trusting you and come back hard  
like a boomerang.  
(to Haley)  
Haley, they're gonna try to trick  
you into giving them a comment.  
Either by being intimidating... or  
super friendly ...

ELI  
(re: her hair)  
Or complementing your side part.

HALEY  
Maybe I should just lock the front  
doors and hide.

JADA

Just stay inside. Take the calls. Don't let them manipulate you into offering information or opinions "off the record". Nothing you tell them is "just between you and me", and their impending deadline is their problem, not yours.

(to everyone)

But on the record, between ya'll and me, their impending deadline is absolutely our problem. We need to make a statement now. At this point, I don't care what it is, it just needs to be complete, and you all need to stand behind it.

MARGARET

You shouldn't be leading us if you don't care darling.

JADA

I'm not here to decide one man's fate. I'm here for a freaking statement. Don't you get it? This isn't some earth-shaking scandal that will rock everybody's faith to its core. Ya'll are not the main character. Christians are already canceled. This is just gonna make you a bigger laughingstock than you already are.

DING! - a PHONE alert. Jada glances at her screen, swipes open and reads.

JADA (CONT'D)

(not looking up)

No matter what you do, someone's going to be upset. We'll frame the story as best we can, but --

MARGARET

Canceled?

Jada looks up.

MARGARET (CONT'D)

A movement that started eons ago with a group of twelve people -- twelve martyrs -- and has spread to every inch of this globe, canceled? A movement that endured while the hostile empires that vowed to snuff it out have since crumbled to dust, canceled?

(MORE)

MARGARET (CONT'D)

Christianity has survived for over two thousand years while popular culture continually reinvents itself to appease the gods of relevancy. How much money did your parents pay for your "dope shoes," and how soon will they be out of style?

DAWN

(re: Jada's shoes)

Woah. Docs are timeless.

MARGARET

Your trends, your slang -- your children will ridicule them. The next generation will roll their eyes when you say all the things you did to make the world better because it will never be enough.

(beat)

When you gaze proudly upon your diploma, think about the original universities, founded by the church fathers. When you preach for healthcare reform, think about the ancient sisters opening the doors for the first hospitals. When you champion women's rights, remember the bishops and deacons who pledged their resources to care for widows, to save them from exploitation. The church has provided all kinds of societal advancements that you are happy to overlook and unknowingly benefit from, Jada. Centuries of amelioration.

JADA

The crusades. The Spanish inquisition. Jim Crow.

RUHA

Not our best work.

MARGARET

The existence of counterfeit money does not negate the value of legitimate money.

JADA

Circulate enough of it and it sure has an effect.

MARGARET

(frustrated)

You advise us to consider public opinion?

(MORE)

MARGARET (CONT'D)

In its earliest, purest form - before the corruption of man-made governmental power tainted it, the church was inherently counter-cultural. And on its best days it is still that way. Think about the underground railroad.

(beat)

These were times when we stuck to our convictions, and didn't worry about what people were thinking of us. If we are going to be a laughingstock regardless, we just stick to our integrity, and we do what's right.

PASTOR JOHN

Whew. That was inspiring. I feel like we should pray. Carl, you want to pray.

JADA

Oh my God.

CLOSE ON Jada for her revelation.

JADA (CONT'D)

You can't fire Chris.

EVERYONE

What?

MARGARET

What could possibly have changed your minds in the last five minutes?

JADA

It's what you just said.

MARGARET

What I just said? Clear your ears child, because I don't think you were hearing me.

JADA

You said "During it's best days, the church has always been counter-cultural."

(beat)

So stop caring what everybody thinks. Do something surprising. You have fifteen minutes of fame. Waddya wanna do with it? Attempt to placate angry church people?

PASTOR JOHN

Oh I don't think anyone can placate angry church people.

JADA

Do something good with the spotlight. Find out what Chris is actually going through before you throw him to the curb.

Jada darts about the room, full of ideas.

JADA (CONT'D)

Host a wellness fair. Raise money for a nonprofit -- team up with mental health organizations and show the community that you care for people who are hurting. Have an expert come educate your congregation. Don't just hand out a pamphlet.

(beat)

And do it because it's the right thing to do, not because you want to be featured on the Good News Movement's feed. It's my job to make sure this response makes you look good. Not yours.

MATTHEW

You are wonderfully idealistic.

PASTOR JOHN

Hey I'm a fan.

CARL

Let's just fire Chris and throw a wellness fair. Can that be the statement?

JADA

No. That's gonna send the wrong signal. You gotta help him get back on his feet. Give him some paid time off.

MATTHEW

You've sure found a lot of ways to spend our money in the last two minutes.

JADA

Did you ever consider that Chris's job might have contributed to whatever stress triggered his episode. I mean, I've been here for less than an hour and can already speak from experience.

MARGARET

Darling, we admire all of your ideas, but ultimately this is our church, and our decision.

MATTHEW

And our decision hasn't changed.  
Unless... Ruha? Stand up if you  
want to fire Chris.

Ruha and John stay seated.

Carl struggles to his feet to join the rest.

Looking around the room, Eli changes his mind--

He sits.

MARGARET

(fuming)  
Because of what she said?

ELI

Well yes. But also your rousing  
speech.

(to everyone)

If we should stick to our  
convictions and do the right thing -  
- even if it is unpopular -- then  
isn't the right thing to forgive?

Dawn sits down.

MATTHEW

Dawn?

DAWN

If it's all the same, why can't we  
give our friend another chance?

RUHA

That's what I've been saying. Let's  
not rush this.

MARGARET

Indecision still has consequences,  
even if they aren't reputational.

(to Dawn)

What would Brandon say?

Carl gingerly bends his knees. Returns to his seat.

CARL

I'm changing my vote.

MARGARET

Why?

MATTHEW

He's siding with the majority  
because "steak fries don't reheat  
well."



CARL  
 Agree to disagree.  
 (beat)  
 Not about the fries though.

CLOSE ON Margaret's beet red face. Nostrils flare.

DAWN (O.S.)  
 Think about it Matthew. What if it  
 was your brother? Or like, your kid  
 five years from n--

MARGARET  
 Matthew's children are at Yale.

JADA (O.S.)  
 Do you know how much benzo gets  
 pushed around Ivy campuses?

MATTHEW (O.S.)  
 I dunno--

RUHA (O.S.)  
 You *don't* know.

JADA (O.S.)  
 Any one of us could snap.

MARGARET  
 You don't have to listen to them  
 Matthew.

MATTHEW (O.S.)  
 I can think for myself Margaret.

ELI (O.S.)  
 It's okay to change your mind.

DAWN (O.S.)  
 I do it all the time.

ELI (O.S.)  
 Intellectual humility is a sign of  
 high intelligence. "Consistency is  
 the hobgoblin of little minds."

MATTHEW (O.S.)  
 (recognizing the quote)  
 Jeff Bezos.

ELI (O.S.)  
 Precisely.

RUHA (O.S.)  
 Entertain our perspective for a  
 moment.

PASTOR JOHN (O.S.)  
 Did Jesus ever turn anyone away?

MARGARET  
 (loudly interrupting)  
 Let's take a break.

Ruha opens her mouth to speak. But before she can--

MARGARET (CONT'D)  
 We're taking a break.

Everyone stands and slowly scatters.

ELI  
 How's everyone feel about a break?

Margaret dons some reading glasses. Pulls out her cell.  
 Opens a blank text message. Types.

INT. SECRETARY'S OFFICE - LATER

Haley is busy, eating pistachios while on a landline phone.  
 KNOCK KNOCK - Eli pops his head in.

ELI  
 Permission to enter.

Haley holds out one finger.

HALEY  
 (to the phone)  
 In about an hour. Uh-huh.  
 (beat)  
 Do you feel important?  
 (beat)  
 Oh good! Okay. Bye now.  
 (hangs up)  
 Eliiiiiii!

Eli, grinning ear to ear, enters Haley's office.

ELI  
 Do you think you could look through  
 the kitchen and find some snacks  
 for the group?

HALEY  
 Of course!

ELI  
 People are getting a little grumpy.

HALEY  
 Understood.

ELI  
Speaking of snacks, I couldn't help  
but notice your pistachios.

HALEY  
Yeah! Want one?

ELI  
(way too touched)  
Thank you.

Haley tosses Eli a nut. Eli inspects it. Shows it to Haley.

ELI (CONT'D)  
In Iran they call it the "smiling  
nut."

HALEY  
Oh.

RING! - Haley's landline, again.

She reaches for the phone. But before she can pick it up...

ELI  
Do you prefer them without the  
shells? Or do you like removing the  
shells yourself?

HALEY  
Either.  
(beat)  
I'm just gonna...  
(picks up the call)  
RiverTree Christian, this is Haley.

ELI  
Sometimes I have to have a separate  
bowl, just for the shells.

Haley points to her own separate bowl.

HALEY  
(to the phone)  
Uh-huh.

RING! Haley's landline phone rings again.

HALEY (CONT'D)  
Can you hold please?

Haley hits a flashing button on the phone.

HALEY (CONT'D)  
RiverTree Christian, this is Haley.

ELI  
 And it's kind of fun. Because as  
 one bowl empties, the other one  
 fills up.

HALEY  
 ("active listening")  
 Mmmmmhmmmmmm.

ELI  
 Like a sand clock that measures  
 hunger.

Haley covers the phone receiver with her hand.

HALEY  
 (politely, to Eli)  
 That's uh... nuts.

INT. CHURCH HALLWAY - CONTINUOUS

Margaret watches Eli flirt through a window in the door.

ELI (O.S.)  
 Good source of Manganese.

A scheming smile lights up her face. She turns --  
 -- and runs straight into Jada.

They stare each other down before continuing on past.

INT. WOMEN'S BATHROOM - MOMENTS LATER

Dawn washes her hands.

RUHA (O.S.)  
 How often does the janitor clean  
 the restrooms?

FLUSH. Ruha exits stall. Dawn repeatedly tries to pump soap.

RUHA (CONT'D)  
 I had to hover because the seat was  
 all moist.

DAWN  
 Ruha. I really don't care for your  
 language.

RUHA  
 Yeah. Moist. That's a gross word.  
 Sorry. I wonder when the janitor  
 cleans though? I lack the leg  
 strength to squat.

DAWN

No. All that talk of Jesus's...  
genitals.

Ruha grabs the soap bottle. Adds water to it. Swirls.

RUHA

Oh, would you prefer a more  
clinical term?

Ruha extends the soap pump to Dawn. Dispenses some in her  
hands. An olive branch.

RUHA (CONT'D)

Know what you're naming the baby?

Dawn about-faces and enthusiastically addresses Ruha.

DAWN

It's going to be my first girl.

RUHA

Wow. You're really outnumbered!

DAWN

Yeah. Brandon got the boys he  
wanted. Robbie, Russel, Rodger,  
Richard, and Randee. Now it's my  
turn. Not that I don't love them  
all. I didn't mean that. I just...

(confessing, as if a sin)

I really want to go to the American  
Girl doll store.

Ruha taps her nostril - offering to keep the secret.

Dawn grabs Ruha's hands and confides in her once more.

DAWN (CONT'D)

What do you think of the name  
Delaney?

RUHA

(hates it)

Preeeeeeeeetty.

DAWN

Oh I know! Brandon likes the name  
Ryan.

INT. CHUCH HALLWAYS - MOMENTS LATER

Jada explores the church. Eventually finds herself in the...

INT. SIDE CHAPEL - CONTINUOUS

A small room with colorful light dramatically emanating from stained glass. (Remember this place for later!)

She notices something on the floor -- blades of grass.

Jada holds up her phone.

Colored light dances across her face.

JADA  
Oohh. Holy Drip check.

Snaps photos.

On Jada's screen, a shadowy figure rises from behind her.

JADA (CONT'D)  
Ahhhhh!

But it's just Pastor John.

Equally jolted, he falls backwards - sprawled out on a pew, holding a bag of frozen peas over his forehead.

PASTOR JOHN  
It's just me. It's just me.

JADA  
Sorry. The light was just...

PASTOR JOHN  
Oh yeah. It does that. You should see it on a Sunday morning.

JADA  
Oh yeah?

PASTOR JOHN  
Even better. It's like God's screaming at you with light. But gently. Like a powerful whisper.

Pulls a second frozen bag from behind his back.

PASTOR JOHN (CONT'D)  
The folding chairs'll kill your back. Worst part of the job. Raspberry?

Jada declines. John shrugs. Rips open the bag.

PASTOR JOHN (CONT'D)  
Not many people here can hold their own with Margaret.

JADA

Helps that I don't care what she thinks.

PASTOR JOHN

You two have that in common. I mean, Margaret doesn't care what anyone thinks. I guess it's kinda commendable when ya think about it. Agree or disagree with her, but she's always going to advocate for what she thinks is right.

JADA

Sounds fun. She have your email? Or just like to slip into your DMs when feeling particularly opinionated?

PASTOR JOHN

Ha. Well we use to have a complaint box around here, but now we just call it office hours.

(laughs)

Worst part'a the job. Well, until--

John again offers a raspberry. Jada accepts.

JADA

No one should blame you for this.

PASTOR JOHN

Place has been under my watch for three years. I've done a real cleanup job.

JADA

You got blindsided by a freak occurrence.

PASTOR JOHN

But... there's a pattern.

(beat)

My old church. It didn't survive long after we let that pastor go.

JADA

The hoarder?

PASTOR JOHN

I was already gone when the doors closed for good, but writing was on the wall long before I left. His dismissal caused a brushfire of rumors that never quit burning.

John licks his raspberry stained fingers, clearly distraught.

PASTOR JOHN (CONT'D)  
 Everyone's going to take sides,  
 Jada. This is going to destroy  
 friendships.

JADA  
 You're a shitty landlord. All this  
 regret...  
 (points to John's head)  
 ...living rent free. History  
 doesn't always repeat itself.

PASTOR JOHN  
 Yeah. This'll be worse. Cause there  
 wasn't an immediate spotlight last  
 time. Plus, you see what it's like  
 in there. That's the elder board!  
 They are supposed to be the mature  
 ones in the congregation.

(beat)  
 The really awful thing... Coulda  
 been avoided.

(beat)  
 So much of my energy is going into  
 mollifying all the many different  
 Margarets -- the easily offended,  
 the loudest bullhorns. And now once  
 again, I've got a blind spot to the  
 people who are actually hurting and  
 need real help -- even in my own  
 office. Even at the desk across  
 from me.

(beat)  
 Everyone's got an opinion. And my  
 employment depends on their dollar.  
 How can I pastor? Telling people  
 what they need to hear but don't  
 wanna hear. Worst part of the job.

JADA  
 There's a lot of worst parts of  
 your job.

PASTOR JOHN  
 Lotta worst parts of any job.

Jada sits.

JADA  
 What do I need to hear?

INT. CHURCH MEETING ROOM - MOMENTS LATER

CLOSE ON Dawn's eyes.

CLOSE ON Jesus's crotch (not the real Jesus - the painting of  
 Jesus hanging on the wall).



INTERCUT between them. Dawn keeps looking away, but her eyes continually dart back.

She shifts in her seat, uncomfortably.

HALEY (O.S.)

Cream?

Dawn looks to Haley, who's creating a food and beverage station. She's holding individual creamers.

HALEY (CONT'D)

These good? Or is this group fearful of lactose?

Eli enters. Helps with the snacks.

Margaret watches Eli's pitiful flirting.

MARGARET

So Haley. What do you think of all this?

HALEY

Well, not my best work I'm afraid. Bit top heavy in the food pyramid.

MARGARET

No no. What do you think of this situation we find ourselves in. With your colleague, Christopher?

HALEY

("duh")

Uh... it's unfortunate.

Carl waddles in with a pink box. Inspects the snacks. Seems disappointed in the spread. Removes a donut from his box.

Ruha, Jada, and John walk in.

PASTOR JOHN

Ooooh. Where'd you get donuts?

Carl shields the box from John.

CARL

AA meeting. Other end of the building.

(defensively)

They had plenty.

MARGARET

Haley. If Chris were to be released from the psyche ward and return to his job here at the church, what do you imagine it would be like?

HALEY  
 (alarmed)  
 Why?

Eli turns to Haley.

MARGARET  
 I'm curious for your thoughts. If someone were to advocate for the devil and say "Chris should keep his job", what would you say? How would that affect you, personally?

HALEY  
 I would say... you all might run into him on Sunday. I'm staff. There are weeks where I see him every day.

Eli considers Haley's words.

HALEY (CONT'D)  
 At the worst he's dangerous. At best, it's gonna be really awkward.

MARGARET  
 Eli is in favor of allowing Chris to continue his employment here.

ELI  
 It's a fluid stance.

Matthew, the straggler, reenters with --

MATTHEW  
 Look who I found!

BRANDON (40, a smooth talking Joel McHale type). Probably rowed or played lacrosse. Puffed chest. Involuntary winking. He's chummy with Matthew and holds a paper bag.

PASTOR JOHN  
 Hey Brandon.

BRANDON  
 Am I hearing right? Half of you wanna continue employing this streaker with our hard-earned tithes?  
 (to Dawn)  
 Hello Lamb Chop.

Brandon hands the bag to Dawn. They share an awkward peck.

BRANDON (CONT'D)  
 Not exactly the kind of headlines we want to be making. How long has that news truck been out front?

JADA

Don't talk to them! You didn't talk to them, did you?

BRANDON

Well aren't you the little firecracker.

ELI

Brandon, this is Jada. From Suzie Thompson's office.

BRANDON

(sizing her up)

O-kay.

(to the men)

Eli, John, Carl?

Brandon and Matthew gather the men. Carl refuses to leave his chair so they huddle near it as he digs into donut #2.

Ruha joins.

BRANDON (CONT'D)

Excuse us for a moment.

Ruha throws her hands up, conceding. Walks away.

BRANDON (CONT'D)

(to the men, private)

My oldest is gonna start youth group in a few months. I don't want him around this dick swinger.

ELI

Unnecessary.

BRANDON

What? The man's flaccid dick was bouncing about the sanctuary and now the whole world's seen it.

MATTHEW

What kind of legal trouble could we be in here, Brandon?

BRANDON

I mean if there's another incident, and he hurts someone... Or worse... We could be liable.

ELI

Oh.

BRANDON

It wouldn't even take that though.

Brandon turns to the room.

BRANDON (CONT'D)

Look, you all need to understand.  
Anyone can sue anyone... or any  
organization... over anything.

(points to Eli's nose)

If I don't like his nose I can sue  
him over it. Emotional distress.  
Will I win? Maybe. Maybe not. I can  
get him to spend a lot of money in  
the process.

ELI

What's wrong with my nose?

BRANDON

Just an illustration, your nose  
is...fine.

(to Dawn)

Here you go, honey.

Hands Dawn a water bottle.

ELI

Why did you have to wait a beat?

BRANDON

Point is, this is America. Can't be  
too careful.

PASTOR JOHN

Alright we get it. Land of the free  
and home of the lawsuit. Thank you  
for your perspective Brandon.

(beat)

Dawn, a quick word?

BRANDON

Anything you can say to her you can  
say to me.

PASTOR JOHN

This is a closed meeting, Brandon.

Dawn bites into a slice of gas station pizza. Her attention  
veers back toward that painting of Jesus...

BRANDON

Hey I just came to bring some  
nourishment to my wife, who is  
doing God's work, carrying our  
unborn son.

DAWN

(mouth full of food)

Daughter.

BRANDON

We'll see.

RUHA  
 (amused)  
 Is that like a threat?

BRANDON  
 I think the sonogram was at a weird angle.

MARGARET  
 Just because he doesn't get a vote doesn't mean we can't hear what Brandon has to say.

JADA  
 (aside, to Ruha)  
 Why do I get the feeling that she already knows what he has to say.

MARGARET  
 He served on this board for three years. If this incident had happened three months ago, he'd be a deciding vote.  
 (to Eli)  
 Ruha and Dawn were just appointed. This is only their second meeting.

RUHA  
 You can think for yourself Dawn. You don't have to keep texting him on your "bathroom breaks."

DAWN  
 (incorrect use of air quotes)  
 I'm not "texting him". I didn't know he was "coming".

Jada gently guides Dawn's air quote-hands back down.

JADA  
 He knew specific details about the meeting.

ELI  
 Where are you getting your info?

Brandon and Margaret lock eyes. Then quickly look away.

PASTOR JOHN  
 Ah! What was that?

BRANDON  
 What was what?

PASTOR JOHN  
 Ya'll shared a look.

They make eye contact again.

PASTOR JOHN (CONT'D)  
That look right there.

RUHA  
(to Margaret)  
You're meddling!

MARGARET  
No.

JADA  
You invited Brandon. And you're  
playing Eli like a fiddle?

What? ELI MARGARET  
(to Jada)  
You don't go here.

RUHA  
(to Eli)  
Everybody knows you have a crush on  
Haley!

Eli's face goes red. He looks to Haley.

HALEY  
I mean. There's probably some  
people that don't know.

Awkward silence.

PASTOR JOHN  
Ok, Brandon... Thank you for your  
perspectives. I think we can take  
it from here.

As Brandon exits --

BRANDON  
FYI, the uncensored version is all  
over Pornhub.

MARGARET  
Pornhub!?

BRANDON  
Several million views and counting.

The door closes behind him.

JADA  
How is this anyone's kink?

RUHA  
They're rubbernecking. It's the  
drama of it.

DAWN

For sure. It's definitely the most dramatic thing that's happened here.

PASTOR JOHN

Well, we did have that kidnapping.

Everyone turns to John.

PASTOR JOHN (CONT'D)

But then the kid woke up.

Groans. Carl holds a plastic fork millimeters from his eyeball.

PASTOR JOHN (CONT'D)

Sorry. Misread the room!

BUZZ! Matthew's phone.

MATTHEW

(checking text)

Speaking of kid's waking up, Aiden's out of surgery. You'll know more when I do.

DAWN

Should we get the meal train going for Brian and Melody?

PASTOR JOHN

We have a meal train?

DAWN

We used to.

MARGARET

It's a shame Zingerman isn't here.

RUHA

Technically, he is.

JADA

Like, spiritually?

PASTOR JOHN

No. He's in the building somewhere.

ELI

Haley... do you know where Zingerman is?

HALEY

Yeah, I'll go get him.

PASTOR JOHN

That's not necessary.

But she's already gone.

DING - Jada's phone gives an alert. She types.

ELI  
 Maybe we should consider how our  
 decision will affect *his* legacy.

Dawn stands, lifting her belly. Hands laptop to Carl.

DAWN  
 I need a break.

Carl passes the laptop to Jada.

JADA  
 Uhhh? Okay.

Dawn staggers from her chair towards the back of the room  
 where the Jesus painting hangs.

ELI  
 After all, it is his son.

MATTHEW  
 And his church.

Heads nod in agreement.

PASTOR JOHN  
 Is it?

DING! Jada's phone.

Matthew holds his hands out, weighing the balance.

MATTHEW  
 I suppose they cancel each other  
 out. If you think about it.

ELI  
 Exactly. We could have trusted him  
 to remain unbiased.

PASTOR JOHN  
 We can trust the hypothetical  
 version of Pastor Zingerman that  
 you're collectively crafting in  
 your consciousness right now?

MATTHEW  
 He served here thirty years. We've  
 certainly spent more time with him  
 than you.

ELI  
 I wonder what he would suggest.



PASTOR JOHN  
 What would hypothetical Pastor  
 Zingerman do?

ELI  
 Exactly.

MARGARET  
 He would fire Chris.

ELI  
 Are you sure?

PASTOR JOHN  
 WWHPZD?

MARGARET  
 I'm quite sure.

DING - Jada's phone goes off.

PASTOR JOHN  
 Should we wear matching bracelets?

The door swings open and a head pops in. It's Haley! Again!

HALEY  
 IIIIIIIIIIIIIII found him!

Haley holds her hands out, revealing:

An urn.

JADA  
 (deadpan factual)  
 You keep a dead pastor in your  
 church.

Haley places Zingerman on an empty chair.

MATTHEW  
 More like a third of a dead pastor.

ELI  
 About a leg and two arms worth.

MATTHEW  
 He's been sprinkled all over the  
 place.

Everyone now faces the urn.

PASTOR JOHN  
 I feel like he's staring at me.

Pastor John walks past the urn slowly.

PASTOR JOHN (CONT'D)  
Like the Mona Lisa.

ELI  
Being in his presence does make me  
feel connected to him.

HALEY  
I felt that when I carried him in.

PASTOR JOHN  
"In his *presence*"? He's not God.

ELI  
He is with him though. We could  
really use his wisdom right now.  
(to the urn)  
Who would you take care of? Your  
flock, or your son?

Close on the urn.

Silence.

JADA  
Do you really think this is a good  
use of time?

No! MARGARET Maybe? ELI

ELI (CONT'D)  
Actually, everybody hold your  
thoughts.

Eli hums and plugs his ears. Grabs and hands out paper.

In the background, Dawn is stacking books and other objects,  
building a structure directly beneath the painting.

PASTOR JOHN What is this? CARL What are we voting on now?

ELI  
We're voting on whether to... "ask"  
the pastor.

PASTOR JOHN  
I'm the pastor!

ELI  
Yes. And when I invited you into  
this without an anonymous vote,  
they got mad at me!

DING! Jada's phone.

Brandon bursts back into the room.

BRANDON  
 (to Dawn)  
 Can I speak to you for a moment?

Dawn's tower obscures the lower half of the painting. She crowns it with a flower pot that cover Jesus's loins.

ELI  
 Brandon, this is a private meeting.  
 We can't have you slowing down our  
 process.

MARGARET  
 What process?

BRANDON  
 (to Jada)  
 You. Fix this.

Brandon holds out his phone.

PLAYBACK: A GIF of Dawn from Sunday morning. She's covering her face with her hands. Then peeking through her fingers at Chris with widening eyes.

Ruha grabs the phone from Brandon.

RUHA  
 You peek-er!

DAWN  
 What?

Dawn grabs the phone from Ruha.

DAWN (CONT'D)  
 I was checking to see if it was  
 over!

RUHA  
 No. You totally peeked!

HALEY  
 It does look like you peeked.

DING! Jada's phone!

BRANDON  
 You said you looked away as fast as  
 you could.

PASTOR JOHN  
 C'mon Brandon. She's not the only  
 one. We all saw it.

RUHA  
 Except me.  
 (to Dawn)  
 I would trade with you if I could.

BRANDON

You're not all Chris's ex-girlfriend!

HALEY

Ooooooh! Record scratch!

MARGARET

You were romantically involved with Christopher?!

DAWN

No! We dated for two weeks in "middle school".

JADA

No, you "dated" for two weeks in middle school.

BRANDON

You went to prom together!

DAWN

As friends!

MARGARET

So this is why you don't want to fire Chris?

DAWN

He's like a brother to me.

MARGARET

A brother? So you are close.

BRANDON

(to Jada)

Take it off the internet.

JADA

I can't do that.

MARGARET

How can we trust her? This is a conflict of interest.

CARL

Oh what do you care. She's just gonna do what her husband says, and his vote is clearly--

Carl slices his hand across his throat.

MATTHEW

Yeah, until he leaves the room. Then she'll just side with whoever spoke last.

DAWN

Do you not see me? I'm right here!

Dawn's assertiveness catches the group off guard.

DING! DING! Jada's phone!

Jada sets down the laptop. Picks up her phone.

MARGARET

Dear, silence your texts.

JADA

These aren't texts. This is an alert I set up for whenever we are mentioned in the news.

DING! DING! DING! Jada's phone punctuates her point.

JADA (CONT'D)

Another segment just aired.

She sits back down and gathers everyone around her. Brandon huddles in.

PASTOR JOHN

Wait. Can we remove him first?

BRANDON

Remove me?

PASTOR JOHN

I don't think you should be here.

Eli opens his mouth.

PASTOR JOHN (CONT'D)

And we're not voting on it.

Brandon takes stock of the room.

BRANDON

Fine.

(to Jada)

But I want this video top priority.

Brandon leaves.

Margaret chides John with silence.

PASTOR JOHN

What? He's not on the board.

MARGARET

You're not on the board.

JADA  
 (announcement!)  
 I'm going to play the video!

Jada plays the video on her phone.

FEMALE NEWS ANCHOR (V.O.)  
 Like to unwind from a stressful  
 week by seeking sanctuary? You just  
 might be in for a nude awakening.

MALE NEWS ANCHOR (V.O.)  
 That's right Marianne. There's a  
 new trending challenge that's  
 taking the internet by storm  
 whereby people are streaking  
 through churches.

ELI  
 Oh boy.

FEMALE NEWS ANCHOR (V.O.)  
 It's called the Zingerman  
 Challenge, and it has exploded in  
 popularity in the last hour.

HALEY  
 I better get back to my desk.

Haley exits.

INSERT: #ZINGERMANCHALLENGE loops on the lower third.

PLAYBACK: SUPER BLURRED FOOTAGE OF ZINGERMAN CHALLENGES.

RUHA  
 I mean, I can barely see it.

Ruha lifts her phone. Types.

PLAYBACK ON JADA'S PHONE: A new angle on Chris streaking.  
 Censored by an eggplant emoji.

FEMALE NEWS ANCHOR (V.O.)  
 The church still has yet to make a  
 statement regarding the incident  
 that inspired this trend, which we  
 reported on earlier tonight.

RUHA  
 (scrolling her own phone)  
 Woa. These are funny. And not  
 censored.

FEMALE NEWS ANCHOR (V.O.)  
 It kinda looks like he was running  
 away from bees.

Dawn triumphantly hoists her arms in validation.

MALE NEWS ANCHOR (V.O.)  
 What do you think was going through  
 his head, Marianne?

FEMALE NEWS ANCHOR (V.O.)  
 I really couldn't say, but I'm  
 excited to see what they do with  
 this on SNL.

RUHA  
 I know exactly what they're going  
 to do!... Spoof this.

Ruha casts her phone to the TV.

PLAYBACK: Humphrey the Leisurewear Pup "streaks" through a  
 church. Set to the audio from the OG Chris streaking post.

JADA  
 Is that Humphrey again?

RUHA  
 It's his first nude!

DAWN  
 (reading)  
 Sponsored by Axe Body Spray.

MATTHEW  
 Definitely Weekend Update material.

ELI  
 Is his leg broken?

PASTOR JOHN  
 It's not a cast. It's a black sock.

DAWN  
 (a clue!)  
 Chris was wearing one black sock!

ELI  
 So technically, not a nude.

RUHA  
 The commitment to details!  
 (chef's kiss)  
 I really needed this today.

Ruha can't stop laughing. Margaret glares.

MARGARET  
 They called us out for not having  
 made a statement yet. Can you just  
 focus Ruha.

RUHA  
 At least one of us should know  
 what's out there. I volunteer as  
 tribute.

Ruha sneaks Carl a peek of a video. Concedes a laugh.

CARL  
 Text that one to me.

Ruha texts.

DAWN  
 Why would anyone do this?

ELI  
 Who would do this?

MARGARET, JADA, PASTOR JOHN  
 Kids!

DAWN  
 (re: her phone)  
 Brandon says this is "dicey legal  
 territory."

RUHA  
 Hey! Better job with the air  
 quotes.

JADA  
 So teeeeeeechnically, posting,  
 reposting, or even texting these  
 images could maybe be a felony?

Realizing she's looking at teens, Ruha throws her phone to  
 the ground.

RUHA  
 Bleehhhhh! Carl. Delete that text.

CARL  
 How do I...?

Jada and Ruha stand behind Carl, guiding him.

JADA  
 Open up the chain.

CARL  
 Chain?

RUHA  
 The text chain. Between me and you.

Pastor John joins the huddle behind Carl.



PASTOR JOHN

Hold there.

Matthew joins.

RUHA

Now tap there.

JADA

Swipe.

MATTHEW

Other direction.

CARL

You're making me nervous!

Jada grabs Carl's phone.

MARGARET

(mocking Jada)

All we risk is being a laughing stock? We've inspired a movement of porn pushers!

(beat)

Oh but you know what? Let's just have a wellness fair! That'll solve everything.

JADA

I still think it's solid.

MARGARET

We need to go out there and openly denounce copycats.

MATTHEW

Isn't that just an admittance of guilt for causing it?

MARGARET

It's the right thing to do.

JADA

The best way to get people to streak through church, is to go on the news and tell them not to.

PASTOR JOHN

This *is* dicey legal territory. Maybe I shouldn't have kicked Brandon out.

BAM! Door swings open. Brandon bursts in.

BRANDON

Never use the word "sorry."

DAWN

He hates that word.

ELI

Were you listening the whole time?

DAWN  
 (sotto)  
 Unless someone says it to him.

MATTHEW  
 (to Brandon)  
 How can we distance ourselves from  
 this? Clearly it's not our fault.

JADA AND MARGARET  
 But what if it is--

They look at each other. Surprised to be in agreement.

BRANDON  
 (to Jada and Margaret)  
 Shuuushhh.  
 (to everyone)  
 Exactly. It's not your fault. Every  
 single one of you needs to believe  
 that this incident was not our  
 fault. People can get away with  
 murder when they convince  
themselves they are not at fault.

ELI  
 (horrified)  
 Are these your clients, Brandon?

BRANDON  
 No.  
 (beat)  
 I couldn't tell you anyway.  
 Attorney client privilege.

RUHA  
 This has gone dark.

PASTOR JOHN  
 How about we just text you if we  
 have a legal question?

BRANDON  
 Happy to stay. Kids are playing in  
 the gym.

DAWN  
 Well Randee and Rob have homework.

BRANDON  
 They got their schoolwork with 'em.  
 (to Matthew)  
 Here's how I think this plays out--

DAWN  
 But they could really use your help  
 with those fractions.



BRANDON (O.S.)  
Don't do that.

PASTOR JOHN  
Oh man, if streaking's all it takes to get a raise, I would have done it years ago!...

ELI  
Oh, I don't like the precedent this sets.

PASTOR JOHN  
Say the word and I'll drop my pants before the end of this meeting.

CARL  
(to John)  
Stop trying to make me laugh. You are not funny. I don't like you.

PASTOR JOHN  
Well that's ok.

RUHA  
A little harsh, Carl.

PASTOR JOHN  
I don't need everybody to like me.

He does.

JADA  
Nakedness is shocking. You need an equally radical response. Some sort of gesture. To show the world...

Carl motions for Jada to get to the point.

JADA (CONT'D)  
...to show *Chris* that ya care more about him than you do your--  
(to Carl)  
Excuse me, Carl! Don't  
(mimics motion)  
-- me! Okay?

Carl relents.

JADA (CONT'D)  
Now if it were up to me...

MARGARET  
But it's not up to you dear. Your *opinion* doesn't matter.

JADA

Clearly! Why do you think I never stepped in here before - even though I've lived five minutes away my entire life? I literally only walked into your building cuz I'm receiving school credit to be here!

PASTOR JOHN

(come again?)  
What now?

MARGARET

(staring down Jada)  
Eli, are we being instructed by an intern?

Eli looks to John.

PASTOR JOHN

I didn't know!

MARGARET

So you lied?

JADA

Don't you mean "spun?"

PASTOR JOHN

Jada never misrepresented herself. It's my fault. I just assumed--

MARGARET

Why are you defending her? She doesn't care about you -- or our congregation for that matter.

Jada makes an "excuse me" expression.

PASTOR JOHN

Suzie sent her, so she must trust her! Intern or what-have-you, Jada's advice has been spot on.

Dawn, Eli, Matthew, and Ruha nod.

MARGARET

You've let your fondness for your colleague cloud your judgement, and everyone else's. If it were up to me, Chris wouldn't just be fired. He would never walk through those doors again!

PASTOR JOHN

Margaret, if it was up to you, there wouldn't be a board.

(MORE)

PASTOR JOHN (CONT'D)  
 You would just be the board all by  
 your lonesome. Because you *always*  
 know what's best.

MARGARET  
 Fine. Persecute me for remaining  
 steadfast.

RUHA  
 Okay, this is not persecution.

MARGARET  
 I am in the right!

PASTOR JOHN  
 You are in denial! Deeper in denial  
 than de Baby Moses.

MARGARET  
 Someone has to prioritize holiness  
 and sanctification if you won't. A  
 little yeast works its way through  
 the whole batch of dough.

PASTOR JOHN  
 What's that supposed to mean?

MARGARET  
 You're a pastor and you don't know  
 the Bible?

PASTOR JOHN  
I know what it means, I just want  
 to know what you think it means!

MARGARET  
 It means Chris's behavior is  
 spreading like a virus. Sickos are  
 literally getting off on depictions  
 of his misery. Young men and women  
 all over the country are imitating  
 him like it's a joke and getting  
 arrested. If we don't contain this  
 soon, we won't be able to contain  
 it at all. He may be your friend--  
 your colleague-- your "brother" --  
 but Chris is a limb that can't be  
 saved. So we cut it off. And --  
 (stares down John)  
 Any other limb that refuses to let  
 him go. We gotta cut that off too.

Close on John, he understands the power of Margaret's threat.  
 Close on Jada, angry.

Margaret turns to address the group.

MARGARET (CONT'D)

We go out there and we fire him because what he did was wrong, no matter why or how he did it. We apologize to anyone impacted by this, we condemn copycats, and we take responsibility for not having made a statement sooner.

Silence. Eyes dart around the circle.

Fed up, Margaret storms toward the door.

JADA

Where are you going?

MARGARET

To use the restroom.

DAWN

Oh, good. I'll join you.

MARGARET

No.

Dawn freezes. Eyes wide in uncertain shock.

DAWN

O-kay.

Slowly lowers herself down to her seat.

Margaret glances back at Jada before charging out the door.

CLOSE ON Jada, eyes concentrated on the door.

PASTOR JOHN (O.S.)

Whew. I didn't think it was possible, but the temperature just got a tinge hotter in here. We should pray. Dawn, you wanna pray?

RUHA (O.S.)

You always do that. Say we should pray, then volunteer someone else.

PASTOR JOHN (O.S.)

I don't do that.

DAWN (O.S.)

You do. You just prayer bombed me.

EXT. CHURCH PARKING LOT - LATER

POV OF NEWS CAMERA

CAMERA ADJUSTS FOCUS ON a FIELD REPORTER (Female, 40s), mic'ing up Margaret.

FIELD REPORTER  
 (to her Camera Person)  
 She's the one who turned me onto those keagle exercises. It's like crossfit for your pelvic floor.

Margaret checks her blouse. Fastens top button.

Field Reporter taps her earpiece.

FIELD REPORTER (CONT'D)  
 They're passing the baton.

INSERT SUPER: "LIVE BROADCAST"

FIELD REPORTER (CONT'D)  
 Is it ok to bare it all in church?  
 (beat)  
 I'm standing here with Margaret Siebert, an elder at RiverTree Christian Fellowship.

Deep in the background, Jada appears, exiting the church. A tiny spec. She storms directly towards Margaret.

FIELD REPORTER (CONT'D)  
 Margaret, yesterday your youth pastor Chris Zingerman streaked through a Sunday service, inspiring a viral movement of copycats.

Jada rapidly approaches.

FIELD REPORTER (CONT'D)  
 What does your board have to say about all of this?

Jada could put mall walkers to shame with her pace when something stops her in her tracks. She looks to her right.

JADA  
 Oh shit!

Suddenly a figure darts across the background. It's a NUDE RUNNER dashing directly behind all three women.

NUDE RUNNER  
 Zingerman Challenge!

Field Reporter sees the Runner. Turns to CAMERAPERSON.

FIELD REPORTER  
 Jamie! Soft focus!



CAMERA ADJUSTS FOCUS and follows the Runner. Shaky cam.

Field Reporter continues, out of focus.

FIELD REPORTER (CONT'D)  
A developing story here at  
RiverTree Christian --

Jada enters frame for a nanosecond as we --

END POV NEWS CAMERA

Jada dodges a near-collision with the news crew as they scurry away. She charges toward Margaret, following her across the lot to her car.

Margaret gets in. Closes the door.

JADA  
That's fine. Go home.

Starts the engine.

JADA (CONT'D)  
You'll just have to trust the rest  
of us to make the statement.

Margaret rolls her window down.

MARGARET  
Oh, I'll be making a statement.  
(off Jada's bewilderment)  
She gave me her direct line.

Margaret holds out a business card.

Jada launches for it but Margaret quickly tucks it away.

JADA  
You are not authorized to speak on  
behalf of this organization.

MARGARET  
That's rich coming from you.

Margaret puts the car in reverse. Backs up.

Suddenly in her rear view mirror - Jada blocks the car.

Margaret backs up anyway, in short bursts. Jada takes small steps back, not backing down.

It's a game of chicken.

Margaret exits. Storms towards Jada, leaving her door open.

Jada backs up, luring Margaret to follow her.

Thinking fast, Jada darts around the car. Grabs Margaret's keys from inside. Holds them up. Toying with her.

JADA  
Can't get far without these.

MARGARET  
You get younger by the moment.

JADA  
Why thank you. It's my toner regimen.

Margaret charges at Jada. They circle the car.

Jada taunts Margaret by throwing the keys in the air and catching them repeatedly. As Jada catches the fob, lights flash and the car BEEPS.

CAMERA TAILS Jada as she walks away from the car.

JADA (CONT'D)  
Not use to someone else getting their way are ya?

MARGARET (O.S.)  
Oh. So that's all this is really about for you? You don't like me so you try to hurt the church?

JADA  
Yup. You got it. I'm wet for revenge.

MARGARET (O.S.)  
I'll drive to Channel 8 myself if I have to. Because I actually care about these people.

JADA  
Ok. Take several steps back.

Jada turns -- realizes Margaret is no longer following her.

Instead, Margaret stands at her passenger door.

MARGARET  
Do I seem like a woman without a contingency plan?  
(points inside the car)  
I have a spare.

Jada holds out the fob. Hits the lock button.

Too late.

Margaret has already opened the passenger door.

Jada bolts back to the car.

Margaret reaches for the glove compartment.

Jada dives through the driver side window.

Their hands collide at the glove box, wrestling through papers to get their hands on the spare key first.

Margaret wins.

MARGARET (CONT'D)

Ha.

JADA (O.S.)

What is this?

Jada, feet still out the window, has her head below the glove compartment. She pulls herself into the drivers seat. Lifts some paper folders from the floor.

There are a ton of photographs, all of the same UNKNOWN MAN. Telephoto lens. Voyeuristic AF.

Jada riffles through them, disturbed.

JADA (CONT'D)

What the hell are these?

MARGARET

They're none of your business.

Jada holds them out of reach. Looking closer.

JADA

What are you planning... a hit? Are you a serial killer. It's always the religious ones.

Margaret fruitlessly grasps for the photos.

MARGARET

You are truly disturbed.

JADA

I'm not the one with a buttload of surveillance shit.

Jada pulls out her phone. Takes photos of the evidence.

JADA (CONT'D)

Maybe I should show these to your friend at Channel 8.

MARGARET

Jada! Stop!!!!

(beat)

(MORE)

MARGARET (CONT'D)

A few months ago I hired a private investigator.

(beat)

To find my son.

(beat)

My firstborn, Jeffrey. I did not give him that name. I don't know who gave him that name. I had not seen Jeffrey since the day he was born.

JADA

Oh shit.

MARGARET

My twins moved to Europe eight years ago. I haven't seen them since I visited for Christmas half a decade ago.

Margaret points to the key chain in Jada's hand. On it, a photo of Margaret and TWIN MEN at the Eiffel Tower.

Jada runs her finger over the photo. She hands the keys and surveillance photos back to Margaret.

JADA

Are you going to contact him?

Margaret studies a photo of Jeffrey.

MARGARET

He still lives in the area. In a halfway house. On his way to getting his life back. Kept the same job for four months - at that very supermarket where I considered stealing apples. He's a custodian. Started shopping there again, around nine pm when his shift starts. Always commend him for how nice the floors look. He nods, thanks me, nothing more.

(beat)

Last month I sent a letter. Saying I wanted to help. Heard nothing.

JADA

A lot of people have a hard time accepting help. He is your son after all.

Margaret continues, reserving her emotion.

MARGARET

The investigator also sent me his number. I tried texting, calling. There was no name on the voicemail, so I wasn't sure.

(MORE)

MARGARET (CONT'D)

So I went to the store. Watched for twenty minutes as he fielded texts while on the job. I waited until two am. His smoking break. Got eyes on him and sent a text. His pocket lit up instantly and he read the message. I poured my heart out. I told him I would stop contacting him if he wished. Then I watched him respond. That one and only time.

Margaret puts the pictures in the glove box.

MARGARET (CONT'D)

(off Jada's look)

I am not a victim here. I am at fault. When I was fifteen I told myself he'd be better off without me. By the time he was that age, he'd been in and out of juvie a dozen times. I'd tell myself I was sacrificing for his benefit. But maybe I just didn't want to take responsibility. I spend my life alone because I made choices that have consequences. Emotion doesn't change that. A young man's life is forever ruined because of me.

After a long beat -- Jada hugs Margaret.

Margaret remains stiff as a board. She doesn't embrace Jada, but doesn't stop her either. Eventually Margaret pulls back from the embrace.

MARGARET (CONT'D)

Chris doesn't have a monopoly on having a sad life.

(pointing out the window)

If I got naked in that room right now, they wouldn't have me as an elder anymore.

HALEY (O.S.)

Hellloooooo!

MARGARET AND JADA

Gah!

Haley pops her head through the window. Knocks on the glass.

HALEY

You two having a mother-daughter moment? So sweet.

(beat)

Everyone's wondering where you are.

MONTAGE - NEWS FOOTAGE (TV SCREEN)

## GUY WITH TRUCK

If you play the audio from the post backwards it sounds like they're chanting "socialism."

Channel changes.

## MOM HOLDING CHILD

I think it's a vaccine side effect.

Channel changes.

## AOC TYPE WOMAN

Another example of white male fragility.

Channel changes.

## JACKED JOGGER

Thin guy. Not so toned. It's all about the core. In my crossfit--

Channel changes.

## CHARISMATIC CULT LEADER

I think it's beautiful. In our church, the Brethren of the Druid Sun, clothing is always optional. We spread love in all its forms.

Channel changes

## FEMALE NEWS ANCHOR

Sally Maven continues to literally chase this story--

PLAYBACK: Field Reporter (Sally) chases the Nude Runner.

## FEMALE NEWS ANCHOR (V.O.)

-- as a public stunt in the form of another Zingerman Challenge took place right on RiverTree's Campus.

PLAYBACK: The nude person streaks behind Margaret and Jada.

CAMERA TRACKS BACK TO REVEAL:

INT. CHURCH MEETING ROOM - CONTINUOUS

The whole gang watches news on the TV.

The door swings open. Jada, Margaret, and Haley enter.

HALEY  
 (fanning herself)  
 It's toasty in here.

Playback repeats on the monitor. The gang fumes.

CARL (to Margaret) What in the hell?  
 MATTHEW What did you do, Red?

Margaret stalls. A deer caught in the headlights.

HALEY  
 Did ya'll not know she tried  
 talking to the news?

EVERYONE BUT JADA AND HALEY  
 You did what? / The news?!

CAMERA WHIPS around the room, flying from face to face.

CARL  
 Somone had to go outside and shoot  
 the damn dog. We should thank her.  
 (points to John)  
 For saving us from this sackless  
 crusader.

ELI  
 If you can't say something nice...

MATTHEW  
 (to Carl)  
 You think you're the only one who  
 wants to go home?

CARL  
 I don't want to microwave a dinner  
 that was meant for an air fryer.

ELI  
 We're all making sacrifices. I'm  
 missing trivia night.

PASTOR JOHN  
 Ya'll are like some crushed grapes.

CARL Don't you dare --  
 PASTOR JOHN (CONT'D)  
 (at Carl anyway)  
 Full of wine!

CARL (CONT'D)  
 No more puns! You will never be my  
 pastor. You have miles to go before  
 you reach mediocre.

ELI  
How could we phrase that  
constructively?

Carl rolls his eyes.

MATTHEW  
Yeah... keep rolling your eyes. You  
might eventually find a brain.

CARL  
Really? If I wanted to kill myself,  
I'd climb to your ego and try  
jumping to your IQ.

MATTHEW  
You couldn't climb a step ladder.

CARL  
I've endured a thousand  
conversational detours and still no  
one's shown me how to make my phone  
go on my TV! Someone tell me now--

Carl wields a plastic fork like a weapon at John.

CARL (CONT'D)  
Or I will cut a bitch!

Ruha laughs.

Carl turns to Ruha with the fork.

Ruha pulls something from her purse. Aims it at Carl.

PASTOR JOHN  
Is that a mint spray?

RUHA  
It will still burn your eyes out.

Haley grabs a banana and a water bottle. Aims them like guns.

RUHA (CONT'D)  
What are you doing Haley?

HALEY  
I wanna be a part of this! I've  
been stuck alone in a room all day.

ELI  
Guys, our insurance doesn't cover  
horseplay.

Pastor John lifts ZINGERMAN'S URN above his head.

MATTHEW  
Put that pastor down.



PASTOR JOHN  
Not till ya'll play nice.

John tosses the urn. Catches it.

MATTHEW  
Wha-wha-what are you doing?

PASTOR JOHN  
What's he got that I don't?  
(another toss)  
Did his poop smell like roses or  
something?  
(another toss)  
Poop-pouri?

EVERYONE BUT DAWN & MARGARET  
No more puns!

Chaos erupts. Everyone yells over one another.

Jada grabs the urn and sets it on the ground.

JADA  
Y'all need therapy.

ELI  
(shouting over the noise)  
Maybe we should raise our hands  
when we want to talk?

The shouting continues. It's indecipherable.

Eli picks up a hymnal.

ELI (CONT'D)  
Pass the conch shell!

Eli throws the hymnal to Carl. Hits him in the head.

Shouting somehow escalates! Until--

DAWN  
I CAN'T STOP THINKING ABOUT JESUS'S  
PENIS!

CRACK!

Dawn looks down at her feet--

Zingerman's urn is broken. Ashes are everywhere.

DAWN (CONT'D)  
Whoops.

Silence.

Suddenly, from outside the room, a LOUD CRASH ECHOES. All heads turn toward the door --

Matthew opens the door, revealing --

PASTOR JOHN

Chris?

Yep. It's Chris.

He is on his hands and knees next to a broken cardboard box, picking up scattered office supplies.

CHRIS

(head down)

Sorry. I'll get out of your hair.  
I'm not here. I'm not here.

Chris attempts to rebuild the box. Folding each flap to overlap and interlock. Failing terribly. He eventually gives up in a grand gesture. Chooses one thing. His stapler.

CHRIS (CONT'D)

This is good. I really only came  
for this. I'm just gonna go.

Chris starts leaving, but comes back.

CHRIS (CONT'D)

I'll get Haley to help clean  
this...

(sees Haley)

You know what? We'll Taskrabbit it.

Chris slowly closes the door while talking through it.

CHRIS (CONT'D)

Just gonna fire up that app now.

Door is closed.

Seconds later it bursts open.

CHRIS (CONT'D)

I get that the church comes first.  
I just need you to know that I get  
it. I get it.

PASTOR JOHN

They discharged you?

CHRIS

Yeah, no. Just an overnight visit.  
A three night stay's gonna cost you  
a slit wrist or a threat to shoot  
up a school -- Nope! Can't say  
that!

Warily, Jada pulls out her phone.

Chris paces before pointedly turning.

CHRIS (CONT'D)  
 You know what? Why can't I say  
 that? It's factual. Fact-tu-al. If  
 something's true, can't I say it?

Staples fall as Chris nervously squeezes the stapler.

ELI  
 You know you can tell us anything.  
 (beat)  
 Is someone staying with you?

CHRIS  
 They bunked me with this guy who  
 said he couldn't get off unless  
 someone watched him. Boy was he  
 happy to finally have a roommate  
 again. He was happy several times.  
 (turning on a dime,  
 greeting Jada)  
 Hi, Chris Zingerman, very nice to  
 meet you.

Chris shakes her hand, then picks up staples.

CHRIS (CONT'D)  
 I became lucid the moment I  
 arrived. Made it ten times worse.  
 (beat)  
 I knew my fate then and I know it  
 now. Since you're all together  
 here, it saves me sending an email.  
 I resign in disgrace.

The elders glance side to side -- was the resolution really  
 that simple?

CHRIS (CONT'D)  
 You can tell the press or anyone  
 that asks that Chris Zingerman no  
 longer holds a leadership position  
 with this church. Now, down the  
 road, if someone invents one of  
 those Men In Black thingies that  
 erase everyone's memory - mine  
 included - maybe then I'll slip in  
 the back for a quick visit -- but  
 that'll be up to you.

Chris waves goodbye with the stapler.

ELI  
 Do you need a ride?

He exits the room without responding.

Everyone looks around. No one enjoys what just happened.

JADA

I guess I'm drafting up a statement? I'll uh, have it to you in the next half an hour. Keep your phones on.

PASTOR JOHN

I'm gonna go check on him, but can I stay and be a sounding board?

JADA

Sure.

CARL

Soooooooooo... Meeting adjourned?

Chris bursts back into the room.

CHRIS

I just want you to know that the earth is 4.543 billion years old. I just need you to know that. It's science. Science. Are those up for grabs?

Chris motions to the snack bar along the side of the room. Walks over. Eats a goldfish cracker. A few more. Then a fist-full. He notices a Capri Sun - elated.

CHRIS (CONT'D)

Feels good to be trusted with a sharp object again.

Chris pierces the Capri Sun with the "sharp" straw. Slurps.

CHRIS (CONT'D)

I'll always be ten years old to you Margaret. I'll always be a sermon illustration. Remember when my dad detailed my journey into manhood from the pulpit?

Chris clocks the broken urn.

CHRIS (CONT'D)

I see he still gets a vote. That's a little weird. Tracks though.

LOUD SLURP. The juice is near empty.

CHRIS (CONT'D)

I know you all loved him. And I know he loved me. I should be grateful.

(to God)

I should be grateful!

(to everyone)

I'm grateful. I just... I made this.

Chris takes a small craft out of a pocket. A sculpture made of pipe cleaners, googley eyes, and popsicle sticks. Very pathetic. He passes it around the room.

CHRIS (CONT'D)

There's a limit to what you can make in a facility without glue or scissors.

Eli inspects the craft project.

ELI

Oh! Is this supposed to be you as a child?

CHRIS

Of course it's me as a child!

Chris watches his craft travel the room.

Jada makes eye contact with John. Then glances down to her phone to lead his attention there.

She has 9-1-1 ready to dial. Her thumb hovers over send.

She lifts her eyebrows.

CHRIS (CONT'D)

I never wanted to be in ministry. I remember when I finally got invited to slumber parties. I was so stoked to play GoldenEye and Mario Kart. One of my friends had a TV so big that each quadrant was like it's own TV.

Chris holds his arms out to measure.

CHRIS (CONT'D)

And then some asshole kid pulls out his guitar and starts singing "Lord I lift your name on High" and I'm like... Ok, I guess that's what we're doing now. And it's not that I didn't want to lift his name on high. I just didn't have an N64 at home.

(beat)

Nothing I liked or cared about was holy enough. I got volunteered for everything. There was always a funeral to attend, a driveway to shovel, or a loser to befriend.

(to Eli)

No offense.

Eli looks over his shoulder, confused.

Chris grabs a folding chair.

CHRIS (CONT'D)

After Laura left me, I wallowed for awhile. I blamed myself. Blamed this job. Blamed myself again for staying in this dead-end job.

Chris works to open the chair. It's stuck.

CHRIS (CONT'D)

You know, my yearly salary is less than her husband makes in a month. I don't earn enough to support a family.

Chris leans the chair against his legs, freeing up his hands to make gestures.

CHRIS (CONT'D)

I'd be a good dad. I'd clip their little newborn fingernails so they didn't scratch their face. And spring for the cool bandaids with Barbie or Batman. Whatever characters they wanted.

Chris lifts the chair again. Tries to pry the seat open. He gives up on the chair. Sets it down.

Chris turns to Pastor John.

CHRIS (CONT'D)

Three years ago when you replaced my dad -- that was the first time I realized I could do something else. The trajectory of a youth pastor is to eventually become a senior pastor right? And don't get me wrong, I didn't want your job -- but the fact that Pastor Zingerman's son wasn't interviewed or even considered got me thinking.

(beat)

Right before he died, my dad told me he was going to retire.

Murmurs. This is news to everyone.

CHRIS (CONT'D)

Yeah! Move to the Keys. Buy a boat. We never even had any alcohol in our house, and he was about to be wasting away in Margaritaville.

(beat)

And look. Jesus turned water into wine, and we're still talking about that party two thousand years later so I'm not saying my dad was doing anything wrong. It's just...

(MORE)

CHRIS (CONT'D)

If ministry is so important, and yet, you can just retire from it - I realized maybe I could move on too.

Chris pulls out his phone. Types and scrolls, searching.

CHRIS (CONT'D)

I read this article. It was like a science article. Not Buzzfeed or anything like that. No disrespect. I think their quizzes can be fun. But this seemed very reputable. They were quoting their sources and had pictures of their authors.

Chris gives up. Stops looking for the article.

CHRIS (CONT'D)

Anyhow, this article talked about how plants can feel pain. When we cut a blade of grass, it screams at a frequency that our ears just cannot pick up on. We can't hear their pain. We can smell it a bit.. You know, the smell of freshly groomed lawn...that's just one patch of grass warning the rest of it that danger's coming.

(beat)

I don't think I slept for a week after reading that article.

Chris lays on the ground. Cradles his temples.

CHRIS (CONT'D)

How are we all gonna fit in heaven?

John takes Jada's phone. Flashes it left and right, showing the group the 911 screen. They shrug, deferring to John.

DAWN

(murmuring)

With the news still outside?

CHRIS

I'm serious. How are we all going to fit?

Chris makes eye contact with Pastor John.

CHRIS (CONT'D)

Do you know? Someone tell me.

ELI

Well some scholars say--

CHRIS

When I was 14, my grandpa was found dead holding a birthday card I wrote him. What was he thinking about as he died?

A long beat. Jada brings Chris a tissue.

CHRIS (CONT'D)

There's not a glowing job market for a ministry major with a minor in outdoor leadership.

Chris blows his nose.

CHRIS (CONT'D)

Brian and Melody's kid, Aiden.

(deep breaths)

Aiden's a good kid. I mean he's a teenager with all his urges and whatnot but - a good person. Doesn't bully or anything like that despite being popular and good at soccer. But Brian's been worried about him.

(beat)

You know a teenager is not gonna start talking to you unless it's his idea. So I start going to his soccer games, and by some miracle this teenager and I eventually find a rhythm where we're talking after every match. I don't have to go looking for him. He comes to me, and we go on a walk and we talk about our week. Starts out as regular venting type stuff - he's annoyed about a bad grade or feeling a little pinned down by his girlfriend but over time he opens up about deeper issues.

Chris is back on his feet. Pacing.

CHRIS (CONT'D)

This is right around the time I read that not-Buzzfeed article. And we're walking on the soccer field, and he's asking me what I think it means when the Bible says we will have "glorified bodies"... and I just keep thinking about the grass. If my body gets redeemed, what about the grass? Is there room in heaven for each blade of feeling, screaming, life-giving grass because each step I'm taking is like a massacre.



Chris grabs the folding chair again. It still won't open.

ELI (O.S.)  
(whisper)  
This is why his lawn looks crazy.

JADA (O.S.)  
What about animals?

Ruha brings Chris a plush rolling chair.

CHRIS  
(screaming)  
Yeah! What about animals?

Chris kicks the rolling chair across the room.

Jada lifts her phone again. Heads turn to John, in search of his opinion.

CHRIS (CONT'D)  
My neighbors growing up had a pit bull that was always charging at us, or the mail lady, or a squirrel. Always trying to get away. So they got one of those invisible fences. I remember the yelps I heard when the dog was learning the boundaries. I felt so bad for that dog. But now, I just wanna be that dog...

John dials.

MUFFLED RINGS.

CHRIS (CONT'D)  
'Cause I don't want to run away either. I really don't. I don't want to run down the street and then get hit by a car on my way back home.  
(beat)  
And I know Aiden feels the same way.

OPERATOR  
(muffled)  
9-1-1, what's your emergency?

Chris almost cries. Stops himself.

John holds the phone to his ear. Silent.

CHRIS  
Couple Fridays ago, after Aiden's game, he told me that sometimes he's not sure if he believes in God anymore.

John hangs up.

CHRIS (CONT'D)

He wants to. He really wants to. You know. But it's hard. He's going on and on about all the reasons he's having a hard time and instead of empathy, I get angry. I'm angry that someone else is allowed to feel that way. I'm angry that he's digging the knife deeper into my soul. I cannot unhear these things that he is saying. And they are affecting me. I cannot take this leap of faith with him because I don't know what kind of...

Chris jumps around on his tip toes.

CHRIS (CONT'D)

...broken shards of glass we are gonna be landing on.

(to Dawn)

Was that your foot? Oh God. I'm sorry. Was it your pinky or your... Did I crush it.

DAWN

It's fine. I'm fine.

Chris returns to pacing.

CHRIS

Instead of saying "I get it man" or "I don't know either" - instead of engaging in pain with him, I put an end to the whole thing. I tell him the worst possible thing that one human can tell another in this situation. I said I'd pray for him.

(beat)

I could just feel him shrinking away from me in that moment. Hasn't been to a single youth activity since. He would've been with us Saturday night instead of wrapping his car around a telephone pole.

Chris breathes heavily.

CHRIS (CONT'D)

You know he got three full ride offers to play soccer. He was being wined and dined by Ivy League coaches. None of that matters now.

CUT TO Margaret. Face softening upon the realization of the guilt Chris feels.

CHRIS (CONT'D)  
 A young man's life is forever  
 ruined because I couldn't ask for  
 help when I needed it.

Back to Chris as tears start to flow.

He looks down at his hands.

They shake as he clasps them.

FLASHBACK - INT. SIDE CHAPEL - MORNING

It's D-day. Yesterday morning. Moments before the streaking.

Chris enters with clenched fists, shaking.

He treads warily. Light gloriously spills in through the  
 stain glass windows, just as John described.

Chris unclenches his trembling hands.

Mowed blades of grass cascade through his fingers onto the  
 floor.

CHRIS  
 When are you going to stop  
 stringing me along?  
 (beat)  
 You're worse than Laura. She was a  
 cold-hearted Jezebel, but at least  
 she made it clear when the  
 relationship was over.  
 (beat)  
 Aiden's in critical condition! Why?  
 Because he was asking the same  
 questions as me? Wondering if gay  
 llamas go to hell? This is how you  
 answer him -- with punishment?  
 'Cause I can tell you, he cares  
 about you a lot more than the rest  
 of the kids who made it home safe  
 last night.

From down the hall, the CHILDREN'S CHOIR harmonizes. It's the  
 same song from the opening.

CHRIS (CONT'D)  
 This was supposed to be between you  
 and me. You didn't need to bring  
 him into it. He's just a kid.

Chris pulls at his collar.

CHRIS (CONT'D)  
 You finally gave me one skeptic who  
 understands, and it's a kid that I  
 need to protect.  
 (MORE)

CHRIS (CONT'D)

I wanted to say "you're gonna get to the other side of this buddy", but I dunno know if that's true. That feels like a lie too. I'm actually convinced that I may have wasted my entire life. My degree. My marriage. My job. I could have masturbated so much more. None of my sacrifices brought you any closer to me.

Chris pounds the pews with his fists.

CHRIS (CONT'D)

Every time I make a decision, I consider what you would think.  
(beat)  
I'll still do it. You know I will. I just need to know you're real. I just need a nanosecond of... a feeling... a.

Chris removes his belt. Thrashes it against a pew.

CHRIS (CONT'D)

This...

Chris gestures from his heart towards the sky and back.

Chris whips his belt in anger.

CHRIS (CONT'D)

This is fucking abusive. It's toxic. You wanna break up with me? Do it. Give me a clean break.

Walking around the room, Chris's pants droop. He kicks his legs about like a tantrum, and his trousers hit his ankles.

He trips, landing on his hip. Winces in pain.

He takes his frustration out on the pants, kicking them off as if defending himself from an enemy.

Still on the ground, Chris crumples up his pants and screams into them like a pillow.

CHRIS (CONT'D)

(screaming)

Just let me leave you goddammit. I fucking hate you because I fucking love you so much, and I don't even know if you're fucking real.

Chris throws the pants. He slaps his face, punishing himself.

CHRIS (CONT'D)

I'm sorry. I'm sorry.

Chris gathers the loose grass from the floor.

CHRIS (CONT'D)  
But of course you're real. The very  
fact that I care about Aiden and  
this stupid fucking grass is how I  
know you're real.

Chris rises, in a fighting stance.

CHRIS (CONT'D)  
You're just ghosting me.

Now with a slight limp, Chris continues on his feet "Risky Business" style - wearing black socks and a button up shirt.

Chris swings his arms, a raging bull showing no mercy to the air before him.

CHRIS (CONT'D)  
Smite me, you coward.

A HIGH PITCHED BUZZ drowns out the angelic choir.

Chris throws his arms behind his back, grabbing the shirt fabric between his shoulder blades, he pulls his button up shirt off like a pullover. Stuck in place, it momentarily blinds him.

Chris rends his undershirt in two.

Weeps.

CHRIS (CONT'D)  
I miss you.

Chris's weeping grows more and more violent.

His tattered shirt hangs on his back.

He violently itches the skin beneath the fabric.

Discards the shirt...

... a sock.

... and the rest...

INT. SANCTUARY - MOMENTS LATER

Double doors separate revealing--

Chris, baring it all.

CLOSE ON his face, as he floats down the aisle in anguishing slow motion.

In a SERIES OF CUTS we revisit angles from before.

But it's different now.

No humor. Only pain.

Tears.

END FLASHBACK

INT. CHURCH MEETING ROOM - CONTINUOUS

Chris finally realizes the obvious.

CHRIS

Oh my God -- you've seen me naked.

He is completely overcome with embarrassment, and the tears from the flashback now carry over into the present day.

CHRIS (CONT'D)

You've seen me naked. You've seen me naked.

Chris cries full-on snotty tears that seem to go on forever. He can't look anyone in the eye. He can barely catch his breath because the tears are so intense.

Everyone shows concern for Chris, especially Margaret. She's overcome with empathy, seeing the human behind the act for the first time.

Margaret looks to John and the others. Her face says, "Do something!", but no one knows what else to do.

The intensity of Chris's cries grow until he is heaving.

His body convulses.

Eventually, almost out of tears and still whimpering, Chris looks up. Shock comes over his face - and he's not alone.

The whole group sits, jaws on the floor.

Margaret has removed her blouse.

Her tattered wireframe bra on full display. She holds gaze with Chris.

Though he has stopped crying, Chris still breathes heavily. Margaret breathes in and out, matching his rhythm. Helping him come down.

Others remain in shock. Concern even.

Jada sees their concern, but also:

Margaret and Chris's faces, slowly warming in unison.

Margaret's eyes become wet - as if allowing herself to emote for her own son, her own husband, her own self - for the first time.

Margaret scans the room, feeling naked in her underwear.

She gulps. Looks to Jada.

Jada looks around once more.

Stands up.

Looks to Margaret. Then Chris.

Removes a small layer.

That's when the others glance side to side and realize that the ball is rolling. Are we all doing this? They look to Pastor John, in search of what to do.

John stands. All eyes are on him as he slowly unbuckles his belt. He looks around the room for a nod of approval. He lowers his pants an inch and turns to Dawn. She's covering her eyes, but motioning with her hand to continue.

Pastor John lowers his pant legs revealing boxer briefs with a cartoon cat pattern.

The rest of the group follows. Everyone removing something small as a gesture. A sock, a necklace -- one by one baring their varicose veins, scars, stretch marks, Spanx, and sock garters. Dawn reveals her bare baby bump. These are not perfect bodies. These are real bodies.

Chris is overcome with relief.

The group stands, united in vulnerability - they have reached their unanimous response.

FADE TO BLACK.