

WEDDED BLISS

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FADE IN

INT. CARTER KITCHEN - MORNING

It's just after breakfast. There's still coffee in the pot, dishes from breakfast haven't been done yet, and the trash sits by the door ready to go out.

On the table, there is a cup of coffee, a cell phone, a laptop, a glass ashtray, and a thick JACOBS FAMILY scrapbook. Camera pans up to reveal SHARAE (40) smoking a menthol cigarette, sitting at the table.

She opens the scrapbook and starts her trip down memory lane. She's casually dressed, not too trendy, not too frumpy. Her hair is neat, but she's not wearing any makeup.

She looks through pictures of her family -- two parents, a twin sister, an older brother, a younger sister, and herself. The pictures progress through the years, with no more of her twin sister after what looks to be age 25, and no more of her parents after what looks to be age 65.

Going through the pictures produces a range of emotions.

Happy, sad, longing, wistful, and back again. They don't seem to be overly upsetting her or changing her overall mood.

She lingers on a few pictures, stroking the faces in them. She smiles and almost starts to cry, but laughs and blinks back the emotion.

SHARAE

Miss you guys.

She laughs again and stubs out her cigarette. Enjoying her coffee, she closes the scrapbook and touches the top of it. She plays with the word "Jacobs" on the front, tracing each letter, then the word.

She looks at the wall next to her. There are two collages. One has ten pictures of her and her husband ELI (40s) and their daughter from birth through her current age of 9. In the middle of the collage, it says "Denise Jasmine November 26, 2004".

The other collage is of her, Eli, and their infant son. In the middle of the collage, it says "DeAngelo Maurice June 21, 2003 - October 9, 2003".

In between the collages is a wedding picture of Sharae and Eli, with "The Carters April 10, 1994" embossed at the bottom.

SHARAE (CONT'D)

Good morning, baby boy. Thought you might like to see the rest of the family today. Did you enjoy breakfast? I sure did.

She smiles lovingly at their son's collage, then props the scrapbook up underneath it, pictures facing out into the kitchen.

She winks at the pictures, blows them a kiss, then stands and does the dishes.

She freshens up her coffee and sits back down to light another cigarette. She turns on her cell phone and examines it.

SHARAE (CONT'D)

Know what, baby boy? Just a few days from now is your daddy and my anniversary. Can you believe it? Twenty years. Mm mm mm.

She taps through her phone, checking calendar, appointments, text messages.

SHARAE (CONT'D)

Wait 'til you hear what I have planned. Your Aunt LaSheryl is taking your baby sister for the weekend. It's going to be a long weekend. Your daddy doesn't even know what all I have planned. Necie goes to Auntie's, and then your daddy gets to see what Victoria's Secret has to offer. Which reminds me...

She scans through the phone to find LaSheryl's number and touches it.

SHARAE (CONT'D)

LaSheryl? Hey girl. Look, I know it's early and you got your things to do, but I wanted to check with you while I was thinking about it. Still good to go for next Wednesday, right? Yeah. Uh huh. Oh, you did? Girl, look at you. No no, not that nasty kind. All right. Cool. You did what? Get outta here! All right, yeah. Yeah. We will be there around four, probably. Girl, I get your couch again?

(MORE)

SHARAE (CONT'D)

Nah, that's comfy. Fits my ass right. No, he still doesn't know anything. You're so stupid, shut up. All right then. Be up at your place Wednesday at four, then Thursday... bow chicka wow wow!

She laughs, then hangs up the phone.

SHARAE (CONT'D)

(to the collage)

Oh, I shouldn't say that in front of you. Course, if you were here, you'd hear it anyway. So stupid.

She goes back to examining her phone. After a moment of doing that, she sets in on the table and leans back. She stares at her wedding picture.

SHARAE (CONT'D)

Damn, Eli, we been through some shit, huh? Twenty years. Told them we was in it for the long haul, didn't we? Til death do us part. Ain't none of our shit killed us yet.

She grows quiet and looks at the table.

SHARAE (CONT'D)

Damn, we been through some *shit*.

She looks morose, deep in thought. She absently stabs out the cigarette, though it's not done yet. After a moment, she rubs her face.

SHARAE (CONT'D)

Girl, you don't need to go back there. It's all good. Made it and fuck 'em all. Damn, wonder when the doc's gonna call.

She gets up, stretches, and sets out some meat from the freezer for dinner.

She catches a glimpse of herself in the window and ignores it.

She sits back down and opens the laptop. The date says April 4, 2014.

The browser home pages to her blog, "Color of Progress". She opens a document to review something she's written, titled "It's Not About Passing, It's About Not Looking Ghetto." Amused with herself, she reads parts aloud.

SHARAE (CONT'D)
Ghetto fabulous is not a way of
life.

She laughs and sips her coffee.

SHARAE (CONT'D)
Your aspiration should not be to
fully mutate into a Walmartian.

She gives that a studious scowl.

SHARAE (CONT'D)
I should probably link to that.

She types "People of Walmart" into her search bar, copies the address, then attaches the hyperlink to the word "Walmartian".

SHARAE (CONT'D)
(reading from her document
again)
Why would we want to prop up
stereotypes? Culture shouldn't
equal demonstrable lesser status.

She shakes her head, on the verge of laughing.

SHARAE (CONT'D)
Oo, Lord.

Satisfied with what she has, she copies and pastes it into a new blog entry and hits "post". She sits back and laughs at the screen.

SHARAE (CONT'D)
Well, that should piss plenty of
you folk off.

After a few moments, she gets up and leaves the kitchen into the house.

Her phone rings while she's away. A voicemail is left. Sharae comes back and starts to type on the laptop again when she sees her phone flashing.

She looks at her phone, but doesn't recognize the number.

SHARAE (CONT'D)
Who the hell is this?

She starts the voicemail and puts her phone on speaker so she can multitask.

NICKI (V.O.)
Hey, sexy man. It's your Boo.

SHARAE (CONT'D)
Oo, someone's Boo. Got a shorty, woot!

NICKI (V.O.)
Mm, I can't wait for next week, when I get you all to myself. Rolled all up in your bed, up on your counters, Wednesday, I'm gonna be your champagne, baby. You can just drink me in. Mm, and feeling that hard chocolate of yours?

SHARAE (CONT'D)
Not the hard chocolate.

NICKI (V.O.)
I know what you like, baby. You love the booty. I'm gonna settle down on you, nice and slow, so you can watch. Get that booty twerkin'.

SHARAE (CONT'D)
Mm mm, too much Miley.

NICKI (V.O.)
Spreadin' the love all night...
(giggling)
So me and my girls headin' out this weekend and I'm switchin' phones. This number's gonna die. I'm gettin' my girl's old phone. 203-555-1910. Send me a picture of that big ol' dick of yours so I got something to get me through. You just wait, baby.

SHARAE (CONT'D)
(laughing)
Oh, not the big ol' dick!

NICKI (V.O.)
I'm gonna massage you everywhere with that oil you got me. And I'm gonna start with that little heart shaped scar on your hip, work my way around to the front. You remember that, baby, and I'll see you soon.

SHARAE (CONT'D)
Got to call her back and tell her. Man shouldn't miss out on that.

Throughout the voicemail, Sharae listens, fans herself, acts like she's listening to a girlfriend talk about her man. When she hears the phone number, she types it into her laptop.

With the last words of the voicemail, Sharae stops enjoying it.

She stops typing. Stunned.

SHARAE (CONT'D)
Oh, no, she did not just...

She stares at the phone for a minute. Then she picks it up, shaking, and plays the voicemail again.

-- Voicemail plays again --

She trembles, listening to it, eyes and mouth widening with each passing second. Her eyes fill with tears.

SHARAE (CONT'D)
(horrified whisper)
Wednesday... oh, my God...

In shock, she lays the phone down and closes her laptop. She stares straight ahead for a moment, then looks at the phone again.

She stands and walks to the counter. She rests on it a moment before her whole body starts to quiver. She crumples to the floor, distraught. She stares at the ceiling.

SHARAE (CONT'D)
Why?! God, why? Why'd you burden me with this sonofabitch? Eli! Eli, you motherfucker! Why?! Not again, no no no no no, not again. You promised! You promised... oh, sweet, Jesus, not again. Why couldn't it just be you on the down low? Why's it gotta be another... Why can't I... oh, Lord. Eli. You promised...

She breaks down fully, sobbing incoherently at his betrayal. She pounds the floor, table, cabinet.

SHARAE (CONT'D)
God, please tell me why. Why'd he do this? Why'd he do this to me again? To our babies? Why'd you let me suffer him? Eli! How could you?!

This goes on for a few moments, the questioning, the pounding with her fist.

She opens a cupboard, finds a pot, and hurls it at the wall.

It connect squarely with the wedding picture. The picture falls, hits the floor, glass shatters. She looks at the pieces. The picture's undamaged.

She laughs, a little hysterically.

SHARAE (CONT'D)

All else in pieces and your ass is clean and someone else gotta clean up after you. Motherfucker. Why? All I want to know!

She stands and wipes her face.

She looks around for something and doesn't find it. It seems to frustrate her more. She leaves the kitchen for a moment and comes back in with a box of tissue.

She catches her reflection in the window and pays attention to it this time. She stares at it with a mixture of sadness, resignation, and disgust.

SHARAE (CONT'D)

Right there. That's why. Me.

She looks truly upset, broken, at that admission. Her phone rings again.

She looks at it. It's the doctor's office. She sniffs loudly and answers it.

SHARAE (CONT'D)

Hell-, hello? No, sorry, hi. Yes, this is she. Yeah, November 27, 1973. Uh huh. Oh yeah, my test results. Oh. Oh, I'm not pregnant.

She looks towards the ceiling in thankful prayer that she isn't pregnant, then a flicker of sorrow that she's not.

SHARAE (CONT'D)

I see. Did the test tell you anything? I...

The color drains out of her face.

SHARAE (CONT'D)

I... what? What does that mean?

She drops the phone.

It clatters on the floor. She sinks slowly to the floor, absolutely numb with no expression. It's clear she's in shock.

Faintly, the woman on the other end of the phone can be heard shouting her name.

NURSE (V.O.)

Missus Carter! Missus Carter!
Missus Carter! Hello? Missus
Carter, say something, please.
Missus Carter, we have to set you
up for your next appointment.

Sharae picks the phone up and holds it to her ear. She speaks very quietly, very far away. She stares at the picture under the table.

SHARAE

OK. That's fine. No, Thursday's my
anniversary. Friday the 11th's
fine. Yes. Thank you.

She hangs up the phone and crawls under the table to the picture.

She sees her reflection in the glass shards around it. She picks up a shard and moves it towards her wrist. It touches there lightly. She pulls it away and repeats the action, like she's trying to make a decision.

She lets loose with a mighty wail. She drops the shard and lays her face on the picture, sobbing.

SHARAE (CONT'D)

Why, Eli... Why'd you have to bring
me home the "hiv". Why?!

INT. CARTER KITCHEN - LATE AFTERNOON

Sharae stands at the stove, cooking pasta. Raw steak strips sit next to the stove, waiting to be cooked. Bell peppers and mushrooms are in a bowl in the sink.

The back door opens and Eli enters, still dressed in his shirt and tie from work. He immediately comes up behind Sharae and puts his arms around her waist.

ELI

Hi, baby. Whatcha got goin' on
here?

Sharae smiles and leans back into him. A move she's done a thousand times.

SHARAE
(sounding rehearsed)
Pasta with that sauce you like.

ELI
Mm, sounds good. Looks good, too.

SHARAE
How was work?

ELI
I'm gonna quit there and run away with you.

SHARAE
No, really. How was it?

ELI
They're considering me for a promotion?

Sharae turns down the water and looks at him.

SHARAE
Really, babe? You mean you'll get out of your little Dilbert cubicle?

ELI
Yep, and into a big Dilbert cubicle. Nah, it's all good. Regional manager has a good sound to it.

SHARAE
My man!

She gives him a kiss, then turns back to the stove. Her expression is very practiced.

SHARAE (CONT'D)
Still doing the same thing? Just... more of it?

ELI
No no, not more. Just different. Bigger clients, more exposure, probably more travel.

There's a flicker of something across Sharae's face, gone almost as soon as it arrived.

SHARAE
Anywhere interesting?

ELI
Probably not. But the rooms will be nicer.

SHARAE
Wish they'd give you clothes like Mad Men. That man's dressed fine.

ELI
That's a few more promotions. And a few decades ago. Next you'll want me in spats.

He grins and steals some peppers.

She swats at his hand and he ignores it, stealing more food.

ELI (CONT'D)
Pay will be better, more vacation time. Your basic promotion stuff. But yeah, probably a little longer hours.

SHARAE
That's not so bad.

ELI
You post today?

SHARAE
Mmhmm.

ELI
You still gettin' shit about nappy hair?

SHARAE
Lord, Eli, you'd think black women had it in for their own heads. All I said was a girl could embrace her blackness by going natural, without having to go through all the rigamarole of perms and salons and you'd think I'd just taken a shit on Rosa Park's grave.

Eli laughs and steals a piece of pasta.

ELI
What will you piss them off about next?

SHARAE

How dressing non-ghetto doesn't mean you're trying to pass. It just means you're not tryin' to look like a hood rat.

Eli laughs again and buries his head in her shoulder.

ELI

Sweet Jesus, woman. You're looking to have them come here and string you up.

SHARAE

Why do you think I don't post my address?

ELI

You should write about your grandmomma.

SHARAE

That woman. Have one white person sitting at the table and she all goes off about passing. I'm still trying to figure out if she meant us or her.

ELI

That was ten years ago!

SHARAE

I know.

Eli looks towards the living room, then back at her.

ELI

Necie home?

SHARAE

No. She's down the street finishing her homework at Tonda's. She's helping Tonda with fractions.

ELI

Tonda's mom doesn't know fractions?

SHARAE

Tonda's mom doesn't know anything except harrassin' her baby daddy and watching her reruns of Judge Mathis.

ELI
(imitating Judge Mathis)
You can't out slick the Judge.

SHARAE
(imitating Tonda's mother)
Mm, you know that's right, get him,
Gregory! That's my judge!

They both laugh.

SHARAE (CONT'D)
How she can watch those trifling
bitches, I just don't know.

ELI
She got to be around her own kind.

Sharae chuckles and stirs the pot. Eli looks at her fondly
and nuzzles in.

ELI (CONT'D)
Have I told you how happy I am that
you're not her kind?

SHARAE
Trifling bitch?

ELI
Mmhmm.

SHARAE
No trifling here. Bitch maybe, but
no trifling.

ELI
I'm a lucky man.

SHARAE
Mmhmm.

ELI
How'd I ever get so lucky?

SHARAE
Crossroads deal.

They share a laugh. Sharae breaks free and starts finishing
up making dinner.

INT. CARTER KITCHEN - MORNING

Sharae stands in the open door, a pleasant expression on her face; pleasant but plastic. She waves outside. A car horn beeps in acknowledgement.

SHARAE

Have a nice day, Eli!

She shuts the door and watches out the window. Her expression is very different; flat, apathetic, guarded.

After a moment, she leaves the kitchen, then comes back in with a laptop (not hers) in hand.

She sets it up on the kitchen table and sits down. The date on it says April 7, 2014.

SHARAE (CONT'D)

You best not have password locked this, motherfucker.

She pulls up his web browser and looks at his history. Typical sites for news, weather, auto sales, sports.

SHARAE (CONT'D)

CNN, MSN, Don's Equity Auto, oh big fucking deal. Celtics suck, Red Sox suck, Patriots suck.

She lights a cigarette and scrutinizes his history.

She sees that an Email site was accessed that morning. She clicks on that one.

SHARAE (CONT'D)

Oh, look. There you are motherfucker. Since when you got Opera mail? Hotmail not good enough for your sorry ass? You tryin' to say you makin' people holler? Or that you're just a diva?

Eli hadn't logged out, so when the page comes up, he's still signed in, with his inbox on full display.

She looks in the inbox. Nothing out of the ordinary. She clicks on the folders and watches as several dozen folders open up. Each is generically named, nothing that screams adultery.

She clicks open a folder named "Travel Vouchers" and sees way more than she wants to. She stubs out the cigarette.

All the Emails are from women, all with provocative subject lines. She reads through an Email, then opens another.

A sexy picture. Then another and another.

She clicks on another folder. Then another. A slow process of discovery.

She reads a few more Emails, looks at a few more pictures. They date back for six years.

As she looks at them, she slowly shakes her head. She absolutely cannot believe it. Utter defeat.

SHARAE (CONT'D)

I know this ain't all of 'em. I know these go back all the way. All the way, Eli.

She looks up at the empty space between the photo collages and presses her hand to her chest in emotional torment. Her eyes are squeezed tight. Tears leak out. She shakes her head, mouthing silently to herself.

Her breath hitches and she taps her chest a few times.

Slowly, she opens her eyes. Clarity.

She stares at the computer screen, closes all the folders, then the browser window. She turns off the computer. When the screen goes black, she can see her reflection. She stares at it and nods slowly, like she's come to a realization.

SHARAE (CONT'D)

It's always been me.

She closes the laptop.

SHARAE (CONT'D)

Just not good enough. Can't do nothing to keep you happy. Wish you'd gone on with that first one. Can't do nothing...

She trails off and stares at the door.

She stands and carries the laptop out of the kitchen.

SHARAE (O.S.) (CONT'D)

Hey, Grant. LaSheryl there? Yeah, give her to me.

Sharae enters the kitchen again, on her cell. She sniffs loudly a couple of times, so she'll sound normal.

SHARAE (CONT'D)

(on the phone)

You know, I got to thinkin'... maybe the anniversary should be an event. Yeah, I know, I know. But how'd you like to take your niece a little early? You know, keep her away from them boys at school you don't like. I'll call them and tell them she's sick or something. Just like a day early. Nah, I just want to make sure I got everything right. What am I doin'? Girl. Man never seen nothin' like what I'm 'bout to do. You know that's right. Bought just the... hold on. Girl, let me call you back.

She sits down at the table.

SHARAE (CONT'D)

Hello? Hi, Doctor Marsh. Yeah, I got the call.

She starts to cry again.

SHARAE (CONT'D)

No, no, I'm good. Yeah, I know, Friday I got my appointment. Who? Miss Bryant? Nah, not yet. She'll be callin' me? OK, I'll talk to her before my appointment. Bye.

She hangs up and sets the phone down. She shakes her head and wipes her face with her fingers.

SHARAE (CONT'D)

Mm mm. Not doin' this right now. Got stuff to do.

She gets up and leaves the kitchen, taking the phone with her.

From the other room, we hear a scream, something hard hitting something else hard, and a shatter of glass.

INT. CARTER KITCHEN - EVENING

Eli dishes ice cream while Sharae sits at the table.

ELI

Hey, what happened to the mirror out in the living room?

SHARAE

I moved the couch to vacuum, bumped it when I was back there, then I discovered that gravity should be a law.

Eli laughs.

ELI

Sorry, babe. We gettin' a new one?

SHARAE

Nah, I'll think of something to do with that wall.

ELI

Mmhmm, bet you will. Nail fallin' out in here on our picture. Damn house is fallin' apart.

SHARAE

Mmhmm.

ELI

You're about due for a new post. Whatcha got in mind?

SHARAE

Throwing around a couple of ideas. Gotta talk to my girl, see what she's feelin'.

ELI

Gimmee an example.

SHARAE

Think I'll write about who the real man holdin' us back is. Should get lively. Hey, when are you going to find out about that promotion?

ELI

Sometime next week, they said.

SHARAE

Why's it take so long?

ELI

Measuring the number of kissed asses takes time.

They laugh and Eli brings over the bowls.

SHARAE

You save some for Necie for when she gets out of the bath?

ELI

Yep, though why she would ever want to eat any of this nasty, disgusting butter pecan ice cream is beyond me.

Clearly, he thinks the ice cream is anything but nasty or disgusting.

ELI (CONT'D)

Her clothes all laid out?

SHARAE

Yes. For tomorrow, too.

Sharae watches him with a strange expression, which shifts back to normal when he looks at her. She feigns building excitement and mystique.

SHARAE (CONT'D)

Didn't get a chance to tell you.

ELI

Tell me what, babe? Your latest post go viral already?

SHARAE

You know that's right. My Twitter feed blew the hell up today.

ELI

Where's it falling?

SHARAE

People gettin' riled up, about equal. I don't care, so long as we have the conversation. But that's not what I wanted to tell you.

ELI

Oh, what then? I do wanna hear more about your post, though. Haven't had a chance to read it yet.

SHARAE

Talked to LaSheryl today.

ELI

You talk to your sister every day.

SHARAE

Well, if you don't want to know...

Eli chuckles and leans back.

ELI

What did LaSheryl have to say? She and Grant have a fight?

SHARAE

Like that ever happens. She said there was a work schedule change, though, so I can't bring her up Wednesday. She's going to come Thursday morning to get her, though.

ELI

What happened at work?

SHARAE

Dunno. Guess some other gal called in and LaSheryl's buckin' for her own promotion. Wanting to head up that dispatch.

ELI

That's a bummer, babe. Know you were lookin' forward to hanging out with her a bit.

SHARAE

Yeah, I was, but what can you do? When the man calls...

ELI

Shit. The man owns us all.

SHARAE

So, looks like you still get me on Wednesday night.

ELI

Maybe we start a quiet party early, then.

SHARAE

Maybe.

Eli stands and puts his bowl in the sink. He kisses the top of Sharae's head.

ELI
I'm gonna check on our girl. Be
back.

SHARAE
'K, babe.

Sharae watches him go. She stands and puts their bowls in the dishwasher.

She sits back down and stares at the blank spot on the wall between the two collages. She reaches up and touches it, like something's missing.

Her emotions shift through teary-eyed, to scared, anger, to steel-jawed. She clears her throat and coughs, like she's trying to settle herself down.

She looks at the clock.

SHARAE (CONT'D)
Fifteen minutes? If they playin'
with bubbles in there... God help
me.

She stands to go check on them and nearly runs into Eli, who's walking back into the kitchen.

SHARAE (CONT'D)
Oh, Eli! Thought maybe she dragged
you under.

His front is soaked.

He laughs and moves past her to get something to drink out of the refrigerator.

Sharae stares at his backside, like she's contemplating something.

ELI
No, but almost. Sorry, got a call
from work. Looks like I won't be
seeing you Wednesday after all.

When he turns back around, she quickly lowers the intensity of her look.

SHARAE
Why not?

ELI
They're sending me out of town for
two days.

SHARAE

That mean you got the promotion?

He leans against the counter.

ELI

I think it's the last part. See how I do on this account, then make their final decision.

SHARAE

When do you leave?

ELI

Around noon tomorrow. I'll be back Thursday morning. Told them I couldn't work on my anniversary. At least, not in the office.

Sharae plasters a huge grin on her face.

SHARAE

That's my man!

CUT TO:

INT. CARTER KITCHEN - DAY

Sharae has the door open and she's leaning in the doorway. She waves excitedly towards the driveway.

SHARAE

Momma loves you, baby! You listen to your Auntie LaSheryl, OK? Be good! Momma loves you!

She stops waving and starts getting choked up.

SHARAE (CONT'D)

(whisper)

Be good, baby. Be good for your Auntie.

She sobs quietly in the door, resting her head on her arm.

Her phone rings on the table. She looks over at it. The date and time say Tuesday, April 8, 2014 1:30pm.

It's the doctor's office. She ignores the call. A voicemail is left. The voicemail count reads that was the eighth one.

She walks fully into the kitchen and closes the door. She walks by her phone and out into the living room.

Sounds of grunting, screaming, intense physical effort in the other room are heard.

SHARAE (CONT'D)
How many couches you fucked on?

The couch being moved.

SHARAE (CONT'D)
Sittin' here, night after night,
knowin'!

A chair being shoved.

SHARAE (CONT'D)
Hey, babe, can you hand me one of
those?

Pillows being unzipped and shaken out.

Cushions being slammed against walls.

SHARAE (CONT'D)
Don't want this! Or this! Have it!

Small objects being thrown against walls.

Glass breaking.

SHARAE (CONT'D)
Shop class my ass!

A lamp skitters on the floor and stops in the kitchen doorway. The lampshade is torn and off-kilter.

SHARAE (CONT'D)
Writin' them Emails right here in
our living room!

Coffee table being shoved, then tipped over.

More glass breaking.

Pounding on walls.

Ceramic pots being broken.

SHARAE (CONT'D)
Hey, babe, look! I'm gonna try for
that account! Gonna have to go out
of town to get it!

TV being tipped over and shattering.

A remote comes whizzing into the kitchen. It hits a cabinet, then the floor, popping open.

She walks back into the kitchen, looking very disheveled. Hair askew, makeup streaked, sweaty, nails broken, hands red and cut in places, some potting soil on her hands and clothes.

She grabs a cup, fills it with water from the sink, and downs it. She's filling it again when the phone rings.

It's Eli.

She gives the phone a vicious look, but sounds sweet as pie.

SHARAE (CONT'D)

Hello? Hey. No, no. Just workin' it out, you know. You there? OK. Yeah, getting ready to. She's good, babe. I'll tell her. See you early Thursday afternoon, babe. Love you.

She hangs up, tries to make do with her hair, and gulps down water. She looks out into the living room with a slow smile.

She plays back the voicemail from Eli's girlfriend. As it plays, she nods her head and looks very determined.

-- Voicemail plays again--

SHARAE (CONT'D)

Oh, yeah, baby. Come to momma.

INT. CARTER KITCHEN - NIGHT

Sharae runs into the kitchen. She's wearing a sexy, lacy bra and panties, with a garter belt and hose. Her hair is halfway done, so is her makeup. When she's done, she's going to be smokin' hot.

She pulls steaks out of the oven and dashes back out again.

In the kitchen, the table is set for two people. A salad is in the middle of the table, fully dressed. Cloth napkins have been folded, the good dishes are out, two wine glasses with red wine already poured are there. To complete the ambiance, there are two taper candles in crystal candlesticks, unlit.

The time on the microwave shows 7:30.

A female silhouette can be seen through the back door curtains. In the kitchen, only the light above the stove is on. Steaks are on the stove.

Slowly, the back door opens. The click of high heels is heard on the floor. Panning up, bared legs, then a mini-skirt and a nice top, covered with a light jacket. Finally, NICKI (mid 20s) is revealed.

She's clearly taken her time with her appearance tonight, expecting a very romantic evening.

She's carrying a small overnight bag and her purse with her.

NICKI

Babe? Your drum is here and ready
to bang the night away!

She sees the set table and looks delighted.

Her eyes light up and she steps fully in, closing the door quietly behind her. She sets down her bags and hangs her jacket on the door knob.

NICKI (CONT'D)

Mm, baby, you know what I like.
Look at you! All settin' it out for
a girl. Mm mm mm! Steaks and...
wine! Babe!

She pokes around the kitchen and picks a bit off the steak to try it.

NICKI (CONT'D)

Mm, and my man can cook! Tasty
meat, boo!

She opens cupboards, gauging layout. She takes a few moments over the everyday dishes. She pulls out a plate and admires it. She puts it back and looks through the rest of the cupboard.

NICKI (CONT'D)

Oo, look at these dishes! These
come from Target? Damn, these are
nice. No, these aren't Target.
Macy's maybe. So pretty.

She looks at the magnets on the front of the refrigerator. She giggles over the ones with Eli, Necie and Sharae in them.

NICKI (CONT'D)

Look at that cutie girl. She gets
her looks from her daddy. That your
sister, Eli? She don't look nothin'
like you. Ya'll have different
daddies?

She opens the refrigerator and looks to see what all is in there. It's fully stocked, what one might expect for a 3-person family.

NICKI (CONT'D)

Damn, babe, you just go shoppin'?
Look at all... mm mm mm. All kinds
of good stuff. Looks like I get to
cook you breakfast in the mornin'!
Breakfast in bed!

She sits at the table and sips the wine a couple of times.

NICKI (CONT'D)

Dessert in bed, snack in bed,
breakfast in bed... Eli, I'm gonna
work your ass out tonight.

She snuggles in the seat, looking perfectly thrilled to be there, very excited. She checks herself, adjusts her bra, then sees the candles. She lights them with a match and looks around the kitchen.

She spies the collages of the kids on the wall.

NICKI (CONT'D)

Oh, look at those babies! Oh, not
your sister, ex-wife. Uh huh. Hey,
why you have her picture still on
your frig? Damn those babies,
though. So cute!

She likes what she sees all the way around. She takes another sip of wine.

NICKI (CONT'D)

Babe! You comin' in here or do I
have to start without you? I wore
that bra you like... the one
without the... well, you know. Eli?

The sound of approaching footsteps is heard from the living room. Nicki's excitement renews and she looks expectantly towards the door.

She takes another big swig of wine. She sways a little in her chair and giggles.

NICKI (CONT'D)

Oo, guess I should've eaten
something before I came. Or not
drank as fast. But damn, baby, this
is good. You comin', babe? Babe!

She suddenly looks unwell. She steadies herself on the table and sets down the almost empty wine glass.

NICKI (CONT'D)

Woo. Damn. Some kinda... Oo.

She shakes her head to try and clear it and ends up looking seriously drunk. Her head bobs, she's having a hard time keeping it upright.

The footsteps from the living room stop. A long shadow enters the kitchen. Nicki looks up, very confused. Everything's blurry and she's nearly unconscious.

The camera pans over to the back door and sees Nicki's car in the driveway.

Thump.

Rustling and light moaning is heard behind the camera. The camera comes back to Nicki and we see that she's now tied to the table and chair with pantyhose. Bent at the waist, her head/chest on the table, her arms are tied to the legs of the table. Her legs are tied to the front legs of the chair.

The time on the microwave says 10:30.

She picks her head up, very groggy. She sees Sharae sitting in the chair across the table from her.

Sharae is dressed in her wedding gown. Her hair and makeup are done just like on her wedding day. She's beautiful.

A bottle of tequila sit on the table in front of her, one-third gone.

SHARAE

You must be Nicki. Welcome to my home.

Nicki smacks her lips and tries to sit up. She can't. She's still too drugged to really panic yet.

NICKI

What? What's goin' on? Where's Eli?

SHARAE

Oh, Eli? I would imagine he's waiting somewhere for you. I mean that was the plan, right? For my husband to meet you, fuck you for a couple of days, then come home to me and I got your ho-ass sloppy seconds.

NICKI

What? Husband? No. Eli... He's
not... Got no...

Exhausted, Nick puts her head back down again.

Sharae chuckles and drinks directly from the bottle of
tequila.

SHARAE

There ya go. Put your head down.
Get your rest.

The microwave says 11:15.

When Nicki awakes again, she's less drugged and starting to
become more aware of her situation. Her eyes are wide and she
struggles a little against her bonds.

The chair rocks, so does the table.

She's starting to panic, her breath comes close to panting.

SHARAE (CONT'D)

I watched you the whole time. From
right after you passed out until
you woke up. Trying to figure it
all out.

Sharae has another scrapbook open. It's her wedding album.
She's flipping fondly through it. She grabs the tequila
bottle before it's knocked over.

SHARAE (CONT'D)

Stop moving around. Upset shit,
knock it over and you know who'll
be cleanin' that up.

She gives a vicious kick to Nicki under the table.

Nicki cries out, but does stop rocking the table and chair.

Sharae moves her chair closer to Nicki. She takes a swig of
tequila.

She goes back to the front of the album and holds it up for
Nicki to see.

SHARAE (CONT'D)

See? Here's us on our wedding day.
I can still fit into my dress. You
believe that?

Nicki acts cautiously, unsure of what's going on. She looks at the picture, then back at Sharae.

NICKI

Where am I?

SHARAE

You are exactly where you said you'd be on Wednesday night. At my home.

NICKI

Your home? No, I'm supposed to be --

SHARAE

At Eli's. Yes, I know. Eli's and my home. See?

She shows Nicki the pictures in the album. Nicki nods slowly, fear creeping in. She thinks she's there with a psycho ex-wife.

NICKI

Looks like a lovely day.

She glances furtively towards the back door. Sharae sees this and chuckles.

SHARAE

Oh, honey. He ain't comin'. Not tonight, unless playing' his flute solo. Nope, he's somewhere (emphasized) out of town. On business. You know.

She gives Nicki a sly look.

SHARAE (CONT'D)

And I already moved your car. I don't want him knowin' you're here when he comes home. Want our anniversary to be a real surprise.

NICKI

Anniversary?

SHARAE

Yep. Twenty years. Done survived a lot of shit, Eli and me. Parents dyin', both of ours. Siblings dyin'. Babies dyin'. See him up there?

She motions towards the picture of their son. The love is obvious.

SHARAE (CONT'D)

Look at that baby. Look at my boy!
That was little baby boy Deangelo
Maurice. Wasn't he beautiful? He
got that SIDS and we lost him at
two months. But that boy... mm...
could light up the world!

Nicki nods with a very nervous smile. She looks at Sharae, fully believing she's crazy.

Her eyes flit around the kitchen, looking for a way out.

Sharae shifts her attention over to the other collage.

SHARAE (CONT'D)

And that. That's my girl. Denise
Keandra. We call her Necie. She's
my little precious angel. Stayin'
at her Auntie's tonight so me and
Eli can have the house to
ourselves. See, I was supposed to
drive her up there tonight so you
could come and fuck my husband. But
plans change. No bangin' and cowboy
booty twerkin' on that big black
dick tonight.

Sharae takes a swig from the tequila bottle.

NICKI

He isn't your husband.

Sharae gives her a 'say what' look.

NICKI (CONT'D)

No, he told me. Ya'll are divorced.

Sharae laughs and shakes her head.

SHARAE

That what you told you?

Nicki nods slowly.

SHARAE (CONT'D)

And he wouldn't ever lie to you,
would he?

Nicki says nothing.

SHARAE (CONT'D)

Oh no, honey, we aren't divorced. We're married. 'Til death do us part. We are in the midst of wedded bliss! Can't you see? We be all gettin' our heat on!

Nicki looks absolutely terrified.

SHARAE (CONT'D)

Mmhmm, yeah, that's right. I heard your message. Got that you were switchin' phones. Didn't you know that me and Eli's phones are only one digit off? Figured if you were dialin' from your girl's, you wouldn't have him in your contacts. Try to do it from memory. Dicked that up, didn't you?

Nicki nods vigorously.

SHARAE (CONT'D)

Yeah. So. You got any kids?

Nicki shakes her head.

SHARAE (CONT'D)

No? You hopin' to have some with Eli?

Nicki stays stock still.

SHARAE (CONT'D)

He makes pretty babies. You don't have any babies? Really?

Nicki shakes her head again.

Sharae slams the bottle right near Nicki's face.

SHARAE (CONT'D)

(screaming)

He makes pretty babies, don't he?

Nicki lets out a yelp.

NICKI

(breathless)

Beautiful! Beautiful babies!

Sharae stands and walks aimlessly about the kitchen for a moment. She swings her dress around like she's dancing.

SHARAE

This was our first dance.

She stops and chuckles, thinking.

SHARAE (CONT'D)

Yeah. Pretty babies for sure. You know, I thought I was pregnant again. Doctor called.

She looks back with a secretive smile.

NICKI

An... and?

Sharae looks sad and shakes her head.

SHARAE

No. Not pregnant. You know how you know something's off. Just not quite... Well, I'm not pregnant.

She tries a brave smile.

NICKI

What are you?

SHARAE

Got the hiv.

Nicki tries to scoot tighter against the wall and fails.

NICKI

You stay away from me. I don't get nowhere near that.

Sharae takes off a bandaid and picks the scab off a knuckle. She walks up to Nicki and waves the bloodied finger in her face.

SHARAE

Oh, but you do. Every time you take his dick. Especially if it's in the ass. I bet you don't do it there yet. Oh, but you will. He'll convince you. I bet tonight he was gonna take your anal cherry. Got mine, too. He was wantin' yours.

Nicki struggles and fights as best she can. Pantyhose make for better ties than one might think. Red marks start to show on her arms and legs from friction.

NICKI

No! Stay away from me! You --

SHARAE

What, crazy bitch? Psycho? You trying to say I broke? Don't worry, Nicki Short Skirt. You shave your twat all the way down? He likes that.

Sharae flashes a smile and reaches up under the table.

Nicki's eyes go wide and she tries to headbutt Sharae.

Sharae ducks out of the way and pulls her hand back.

SHARAE (CONT'D)

You did. Good girl. Oh, stop. It's not like I went up in there, that tiny snatch of yours. You don't have to worry about me touching you with my hand. You already drank some. Right on down with that Ambien that knocked your little ass out.

Nicki looks like she might vomit. She gags several times. Her eyes water. She really doesn't want to vomit.

SHARAE (CONT'D)

He wrap his package or did you ride him bareback?

Sharae squats down next to Nicki and rests a hand on her knee. It seems to make Nicki very uncomfortable.

SHARAE (CONT'D)

You went bareback, didn't you? Liked that feel, right? I know. I know. Me, too. Never did like the feel of that rubber. Takes away from the smooth, don't get that nice pop from the head when he goes with those long strokes he likes.

Nicki stammers and starts to blubber.

NICKI

I had no idea, I swear. He never told me he was still married. Oh, God! Now... Now...

Her breath hitches and she belches to keep from throwing up.

SHARAE

Don't worry about catching it from me. I'm sure he already gave it to you.

Sharae stands and leaves the kitchen.

Nicki lets loose with a burst of cries. She trembles and looks panicked. She looks everywhere, bows against her ties, tries to moves the whole table. And fails.

NICKI

God, please. Please help me. Get me out of here. Get me out of this. Please, God. Don't let, don't let --

She breaks down fully, like a toddler. Her mouth works silently as she cries.

Sharae comes back in, carrying a box filled with personal things. She acts like she doesn't notice Nicki crying.

She takes another swig of tequila and pulls a book out of the box. It's a big, hardcover copy of Grimm's Fairy Tales.

SHARAE

See this? This is what he gave to me our first anniversary. It's the paper one. Always loved this. He said he wanted me to read it to our children.

She slams the spine edge of the book into Nicki's thigh. Nicki screams out in pain. Sharae repeats the action on Nicki's arm, back, and finally cheek.

SHARAE (CONT'D)

Since my baby's nine, she don't need much of this anymore. Since I'm not havin' any more... Girl, how old are you? You know he's old enough to be your daddy?

Crying loudly, Nicki shakes her head.

NICKI

No, I swear. To God, I swear! On Jesus, I promise I didn't know!

Sharae looks thoughtful for a moment.

SHARAE

No, I guess that's right. He does look good for his age.

(MORE)

SHARAE (CONT'D)

But damn, really? You gotta work out daddy issues? You could be his child. He a pedo? Creepin' after kids?

Nicki just cries and shakes her head, more at her situation than the question.

NICKI

Please, lady, Missus Eli, I don't know nothin'. I don't know you, I didn't know he was married. Please, please let me go. I want to see my mom again! I want to have babies! I want to see my dog! Please, I didn't know! I won't tell anybody!

SHARAE

Trifling bitch wants to see her mom? Honey, you wanted to play with the big girls, you wanted to be all into your adultness, show how big your delicate things were?

Sharae picks up the bottle of wine and takes a long drink. Then she pours the bottle of wine over Nicki. She flops in the chair and takes a drink off the tequila and looks at Nicki disdainfully.

SHARAE (CONT'D)

Triflin'. Ho. Lyin'. Cow. You know how I know you's lyin'? How I know? Because I read them Emails. All of them.

Sharae looks despondent and starts to cry again, truly hurt. She shakes her head.

SHARAE (CONT'D)

How could one woman do that to another? How could a man disrespect his woman, any woman that much?

Nicki stops crying and looks at Sharae.

SHARAE (CONT'D)

He never said he was married?

NICKI

No, never. Said ya'll was divorced. Said he had two kids, but he just had the girl now. Said the boy died when he was two months old.

Sharae smiles, then cries harder.

SHARAE

Just talked about his babies. He loves his babies. You never asked about the ring he wears?

NICKI

Said, said it was his grandmomma's. Said he wore it to keep hos away.

Sharae almost laughs, but can't quite manage it.

SHARAE

Least he didn't say I was just a baby momma.

She cries for awhile longer, then settles down. Her eyes settle on the tequila bottle again. She takes a long drink.

She leaves the kitchen for a moment.

NICKI

(panicked whisper)

Jesus, God, get me out of here. I won't miss no more church, I'll come on Wednesdays, Lord I'll become a sister sister if you just -

-

She shuts up as Sharae comes back into the kitchen. She's carrying a large, glass ashtray and her menthol cigarettes.

She sits back down, sets the ashtray down and lights up a cigarette. She doesn't enjoy smoking it.

SHARAE

Don't smoke in here when Necie's home. Not really when Eli is. But you know. He's not here. Is he?

Nicki shakes her head.

SHARAE (CONT'D)

You smoke?

Nicki shakes her head again.

NICKI

No, not them. Those little cigars.

SHARAE

Ones with the plastic tips?

NICKI

Yeah.

SHARAE

Mm, look at you, trying to claw your way out of the ghetto. You got some on you?

NICKI

Yeah, in my purse, but I don't want one.

SHARAE

You were going to smoke those in my house, weren't you?

Nicki shakes her head vehemently. Absolutely not.

NICKI

Nuh uh. Eli said no smoking in the house.

SHARAE

Uh huh. Because I would've smelled it, known the change. And I know he doesn't smoke. Trifling...

She stops and finishes her cigarette. As she's stubbing it out, she examines Nicki again.

SHARAE (CONT'D)

You're not the only one, you know.

NICKI

Wh- what do you mean?

SHARAE

There's a lot more where you come from. Lot before. Probably settin' one up on the side of you. He done it to me for twenty years. The fuck make you think he's not doing it to you or will? So stupid.

Sharae grabs the wine bottle and throws it at Nicki's head. She turns her face into the table. The bottle lands right on the top of her head. She yells out as it hits. The bottle falls to the floor and shatters.

SHARAE (CONT'D)

So fucking stupid! Stupid weave havin', fake nail wearin' tramps!

Sharae stands and starts viciously kicking Nicki's shin.

Nicki screams and cries, pleads, begs.

NICKI

Please! Stop! I won't see him no
more! I swear on Jesus' good name!
I won't see him no more!

Sharae gets up and starts pulling on Nicki's hair.

Nicki cries, her head being jerked all around.

Sharae smashes Nicki's face into the table, annoyed over her hair.

She grabs the lighter and starts burning parts of Nicki's hair, testing it.

Nicki scream, thinking she will turn the lighter on her or burn her with cigarettes.

NICKI (CONT'D)

Please don't burn me! I don't like
fire! I don't wanna burn! No! No!
Please! Don't burn me!

Sharae smirks when she sees what she likes in the flame. She tosses the lighter on the table and shoves Nicki's head away.

SHARAE

Weave.

She looks back at the scrapbook, grabs it, and flings it towards the driveway door.

She wails in agony and leans against the refrigerator. She takes deep, heaving breaths to calm herself.

NICKI

Thank you, thank you, thank you for
not burning me. Thank you. I swear,
Eli and me, we're done. No more.
Not ever.

She starts to weep.

SHARAE

OK, we need to talk. I'm gonna ask
questions. You're gonna answer me.
OK?

She looks back at Nicki hopefully.

Nicki's eyes are squeezed shut. She's still crying, but she nods.

Sharae takes another deep breath like she's relieved.

SHARAE (CONT'D)

OK. Let's do this.

She pulls the chair up next to Nicki and lights another cigarette. She touches the ember to some of Nicki's fly away hairs.

Nicki flinches like a beaten dog.

SHARAE (CONT'D)

I gotta know why. Why he does this.
Why he's with you. How he can do
this. I swear I ain't crazy. I'm
not like this. You got me?

Nicki nods desperately.

Sharae stops burning Nicki's hair and just smokes the cigarette.

SHARAE (CONT'D)

But I gotta know. Counseling was
bullshit. Lied through his fuckin'
teeth there. Maybe you tell me the
truth. Why he can't fuck just me?

Sharae looks at Nicki earnestly.

SHARAE (CONT'D)

One woman to another. Why? How can
we fight against what's going on
out there, demand respect, when we
can't give it to ourselves?

NICKI

I... I don't know.

Sharae leans in.

SHARAE

OK, so one woman to another. Sister
to sister. Why? Why he can't fuck
just me?

After a moment, Nicki realizes that Sharae is silent. She slowly opens her eyes, then is startled by how close she is.

NICKI

I... I don't know.

SHARAE

You got a magic pussy? Something yours do that mine don't?

Nicki shakes her head.

SHARAE (CONT'D)

You squeeze it in rhythm to a song or some shit? Pop ping pong balls out? It sing or somethin'? It suck while he's thrusting?

NICKI

No, it don't do nothin' special.

SHARAE

Just a plain pussy. Huh.

NICKI

Yeah. Plain pussy. Nothin' special, no magic.

SHARAE

It's tight, though, right? That's what it is. Hasn't pushed two babies out. Isn't stretched and all forty flappy hangin'. That happens you know. Lips get all weird later.

Nicki is simultaneously disgusted and horrified.

SHARAE (CONT'D)

So tight snatch, that's it. But I mean, shit, they got those sheaths now and whatever. Could've tightened mine back up. They even got surgery for that now. Vaginal rejuvenation, they call it. Tonda's mom was telling me about it.

NICKI

How she know?

SHARAE

Heard it on that Judge Mathis of hers. You watch him? She's a fool for him. Said there was this gal up there, had it done for her man, said he left her anyway. Suing him for breach of contract. You believe that shit? She got her drawers all up and redone and he left anyway.

She laughs unironically, dryly.

Nicki stays silent.

SHARAE (CONT'D)
You believe that shit?

NICKI
Yeah, people's crazy.

SHARAE
You know that's right. So if a man leaves over his garage bein' too big for his car, then what. What makes him... You play with yourself for him?

NICKI
N-- yes. Yes, I do.

SHARAE
You let him get all up in there, watching up close?

NICKI
Yea... yeah...

SHARAE
He likes that. See you spin your bean. Likes to watch titties bounce, too. Likes 'em...

She trails off, staring at Nicki's chest.

Nicki looks to where she is, or tries to.

SHARAE (CONT'D)
(whispering)
They small, huh? Ride high?

She reaches under the table and feels Nicki up. Nicki starts to cry again.

SHARAE (CONT'D)
Girl, please. Just checkin' them out. I know you and your girls do that. I bet I can look through your phone and find shit like that on there.

Sharae sits back up and looks inside the wedding dress at her own chest sadly.

SHARAE (CONT'D)
Mine all saggy. Nursed two babies on them.

(MORE)

SHARAE (CONT'D)

But they weren't that way when we were first married. So what do you do?

She waits for Nicki to stop crying.

Slowly, Nicki sniffs and coughs and snorts her way to no longer crying.

NICKI

I didn't know him when you were first married. I was... like not even in school.

SHARAE

No, but before our first anniversary he was pumping his python into someone else. No, that's not even right is it?

Nicki nods, then shakes her head, unsure of if she's supposed to answer.

SHARAE (CONT'D)

That's sorta all he does, isn't it? Come to think about it... He just sorta uses you to masturbate on.

She laughs and shakes her head.

SHARAE (CONT'D)

Damn. That's right, isn't -- Shit, you wouldn't know. You're too young. They all just jerkin' off in you. Shit, he can do that with just me. So... I'm just trying to gain some understanding here. What am I not doing? Woman to woman. Why's he gotta go to you?

NICKI

I... I --

SHARAE

What do you do to him that makes him come?

NICKI

I... I don't... I just...

SHARAE

You said in your message... that you... oh, wait, I have it.

Sharae pulls out her cell phone and plays back the voicemail.

-- Voicemail plays --

Nicki stares in shock.

NICKI (V.O.)

Hey, sexy man. It's your boo. Mm, I can't wait for next week, when I get you all to myself. Rolled all up in your bed, up on your counters, Wednesday, I'm gonna be your champagne, baby. You can just drink me in. Mm, and feeling that hard chocolate of yours? I know what you like, baby. You love the booty. I'm gonna settle down on you, nice and slow, so you can watch. Get that booty twerkin'.

SHARAE

(talking over the playback)

That is you, right?

Nicki nods slowly.

Sharae stops the voicemail after the twerk comment.

SHARAE (CONT'D)

There. That's it. Booty twerkin'. Now, girl, I know what twerkin' is, but... How you do it with him? He like that?

Nicki doesn't answer. Sharae leans down and picks up a shard of the broken wine bottle and sets it on the table.

Nicki watches closely, terrified.

NICKI

Oh, God. Jesus, don't cut me. Please.

SHARAE

How you twerk with him?

Nicki answers quickly, convinced that how fast she answers will keep Sharae from cutting her.

NICKI

I ride him, you know, my back to him and so he can --

SHARAE

So he can watch your jelly... Oh,
OK. Now I get it.

NICKI

Sometimes we do it like we in a
strip club. He be sittin' there and
I back up into him --

She stops suddenly, not believing that she'd just spilled
information like that.

SHARAE

You a stripper?

NICKI

No, but I took one of them pole
dancin' classes. You know, one of
them fitness classes.

Sharae stares off into the burning candle.

SHARAE

Tight pussy. High tits. Twerkin'
junk.

Nicki has a dawning sense and panics when Sharae starts
moving her hand through the flame.

NICKI

Please. Don't burn me. I don't
wanna be burned. Please, Jesus,
help me.

SHARAE

So pretty.

She takes one of the candles out of the candlestick and lets
a little wax drop in her hand. She looks at Nicki and sees
her obvious distress.

SHARAE (CONT'D)

What, you think I'm gonna fuck you
with this? Not quite Eli, is it?

She makes a circle with her other hand, imitating Eli's
girth.

NICKI

Oh, momma, please! Don't put it in
me! Don't burn me! Don't --

Sharae drips some wax on Nicki's cheek.

It's not horribly painful, but it is uncomfortable and makes Nicki cringe.

SHARAE

What else? What else you do?

She puts the candle back and looks passively at Nicki. There's pain in her eyes. She really does want to understand.

NICKI

Why you want to know what I do to your husband? I just do him. That's all.

Sharae leans over and picks the wax off Nicki's cheek. She drops it into the ashtray and lights another cigarette. She takes one drag, then leaves it to burn in the ashtray.

SHARAE

I just do him. I just do him. I do. Me. That's all I do. What I want to know is what you do that's different. I want to know why he can't just keep his dick in my bed. Why's he gotta go wet yours with it.

NICKI

I don't do nothin' special.

SHARAE

You blow him?

NICKI

Yeah. Yes. I suck him off. Swallow, everything.

SHARAE

Balls deep?

Nicki nods.

NICKI

Yeah. He likes to hold my head when I do.

Sharae looks at the counter. She gets up and grabs a banana off the counter.

Nicki starts weeping again.

SHARAE

Show me.

NICKI

No. No, please. Please don't make me. I, I, I just... I just --

SHARAE

I gotta know why you suck better than I do. You Hoover it? Like really suck-suck?

She nudges the banana against Nicki's lips. Realizing her mistake, she peels it, then puts the fruit back.

SHARAE (CONT'D)

Sorry. I forgot. Bareback. C'mon, baby girl. Open up. You know you were gonna do this tonight anyway.

Nicki shakes her head, tries to pull away. She sputters.

SHARAE (CONT'D)

There ya go. Wet it up a bit.

NICKI

No, please...

When Nicki talks, Sharae pushes in the banana a little.

SHARAE

No teeth. You know they don't like that. Show me. I know you showed your girls with worse.

Slowly, Nicki's mouth opens up. Sharae pushes the banana in all the way, watching closely.

Nicki is able to take as much of it as Sharae wants to put in.

Sharae stops before her fingers would go into Nicki's mouth.

SHARAE (CONT'D)

Damn girl. Look at you go.

She pulls the banana out and sits back in her chair.

Nicki takes a deep breath of air and looks thoroughly humiliated.

SHARAE (CONT'D)

He fuckin' disrespects me because I got a gag reflex.

She looks at Nicki in wide-eyed disbelief, almost laughing. Her expression sharply shifts to rage.

She takes another long drink of the tequila, almost finishing the bottle. She stands and starts beating on Nicki with her fists.

Nicki screams.

NICKI

Ow, oh, God! Ow! Stop! Stop! Ow, you're hurting me! Don't hit me! No! Not there! Ow! Oh, God, help me! Please! Jesus, son, please! Help me! Stop!

She grabs the candlestick and lays into Nicki with that next. Her body obscures Nicki's from the camera as she beats her. The candle falls to the floor.

Nicki's screams take on a higher pitch.

NICKI (CONT'D)

Nooooo! Owwww! Momma! Momma! Momma, please!

The camera zooms out of the kitchen door window to the driveway. Nicki's car is indeed gone. We hear Nicki's screams and cries and the sounds of beatings continue.

Clothing is heard to be moved, pulled away, torn apart.

Her screams intensify, reaching new levels, piercing.

NICKI (CONT'D)

Oh, my, God! What -- Nooooo! Ah! It hurts! You're hurting me! It -- Get it out! No! Stop! Stop! Stop it! Please! Ah!

Sudden silence.

The camera pulls back to reveal Nicki passed out on the table. She's bloodied and bruised all about her face, arms, and legs. Her clothes are ripped, her hair mangled. There's blood streaming down her legs. She's not dead, just unconscious.

The candlestick lays on its side on the table. There's a red sheen in some of the deeper carved areas. The banana is gone, just the peel left.

Sharae sits across the table from Nicki. There's blood spattered on her wedding dress. Her hands are shredded from the beating she's delivered.

She looks as spent as the empty tequila bottle.

The time on the microwave reads 2:30.

She leans her head back and stares at the ceiling.

SHARAE

Eli, look what you do. You got this
poor girl into some shit.

She hears a car drive by. Her phone rings. She gets up to
answer it.

It's Eli.

SHARAE (CONT'D)

Hey, babe. How's the trip? Yeah?
Shitty bed, huh? No, I'm just
tired. Glad you called though. When
are you coming home? Oh, yeah?
Earlier than you thought? That's
great. Oh, client never showed,
huh? I wonder why. Maybe they got
the address wrong or something.
Yeah, I'll see you in the morning
then. Love you, too.

Sharae hangs up. She smiles as Nicki starts to stir.

SHARAE (CONT'D)

Daddy's comin' home early.

INT. CARTER KITCHEN - MORNING

New light does not make Nicki look any better. Her face is
swollen and her arms and legs are swelling around the
pantyhose.

Food is still on the table, nothing has been put away,
everything looks just as horrific as it did the night before.

Sharae isn't in the kitchen.

Nicki opens her eyes slowly. It's clear she's in pain and has
a hard time moving, even in her bonds. She moans and tries to
close her legs. It takes a moment for her to remember her
current situation. When she does, fear/panic set in. She
keeps herself from screaming by biting her lip. She sits very
still.

Near hysteria, she tries to talk herself into calm. She knows
she has to get out and get out now.

NICKI

Ok, girl, you can get out of this.
 What... where... Eli. House. OK.
 Came to his house last night. Crazy
 lady here. Wife. His wife! Eli, you
 motherfucker! Your... house, kid,
 wife. But I never asked him for
 anything, right? Not like we'd
 talked about gettin' married. Just
 having fun. Nothing more than
 hittin' it. Where is... Purse...
 Damn. Can't... oh. By the door.
 Where is she?

She looks around the room. Fear returns when she sees the
 candlestick.

NICKI (CONT'D)

Oh, God, oh, God, oh... No no no no
 no. Stop it, Nicki. Stop it, girl.
 Time to get the fuck outta here!
 Need to... Where is she?

She flicks repeated looks towards the door.

NICKI (CONT'D)

Where are you?

She does a few test scoots and rocks. It doesn't get her far.
 Every time she does and it makes too much noise, she freezes.
 Then tries again, trying to be quieter.

NICKI (CONT'D)

Shit, come on! Come on before she
 comes! Come on!

She realizes it will either make too much noise or she isn't
 going anywhere.

NICKI (CONT'D)

How do I know where she's at?

She starts to panic again and cry, but only briefly. She
 strains against the hose.

NICKI (CONT'D)

Please, please, please, God! Lord,
 come help me now!

She looks to her purse again.

NICKI (CONT'D)

Damn, come on!

She tries to move her arms and legs instead of moving the whole table/chair, to try and loosen the ties.

NICKI (CONT'D)
Panty hose. Who the hell...
Can't... Ow!

She's sawing into her skin and in pain, tries not to cry. She looks around and sees the time on the microwave. It's 8:30.

She wriggles in her seat more, becoming acutely aware that she has to pee. She looks like she gets an idea.

NICKI (CONT'D)
Hello? Hey! Hey, lady! Eli's wife!
Hello? Are you here? You awake?

She waits and listens closely.

NICKI (CONT'D)
Lady! Hello? Eli's wife? Hey!

She starts to bang the table loudly and make as much noise as she can.

NICKI (CONT'D)
Hey! Hey! Lady! I gotta pee! Come
on, lady, I gotta go! Hey!

She listens again.

Nothing.

Nicki's injuries have taken their toll. She lays her head back down, exhausted and out of ideas. She closes her eyes.

When she opens them again, she can still see the microwave. The time says 10:00.

She looks around the kitchen, slowly. When she tries to move, it's obvious she's sore, having a hard time.

The kitchen has still not been cleaned.

Sharae stands in the doorway, still in her wedding dress. She holds two phones -- hers and Nicki's -- and stares at the kitchen.

SHARAE
I can't believe I spent so much
time in this house. You see those
dishes? You like 'em?

Nicki tries to be complementary and attempts a smile.

NICKI
Yeah. They're pretty.

SHARAE
I hate 'em.

Sharae looks enraged, possessed. She tosses the phones on the counter and flings open cabinets.

She starts grabbing dishes and flinging them around the kitchen. She's not aiming them, just chucking them around. Some of them hit Nicki, most hit other things in the kitchen.

Sharae screams as she does it.

SHARAE (CONT'D)
Why? Why'd I buy these ugly ass dishes? Go in this ugly ass house? With that ugly ass man? Why? For what?

Nicki cries again, begging.

NICKI
Please... stop! No more! Stop!

Out of dishes, Sharae stands in the middle of the kitchen, breathing hard. She adjusts herself, attempts to fix her hair, takes another bottle of tequila out of a cabinet and sits at the table.

SHARAE
Let me catch my breath. Woo.

She shakes her head and gets orange juice out of the refrigerator. She takes a long drink of tequila, then pours the bottle in with the orange juice.

SHARAE (CONT'D)
Tell me how you met Eli. I know most of the people he works with. You with one of them? One of their kids?

NICKI
No. No. I don't know no one he works with.

SHARAE
So where?

NICKI
Website.

SHARAE
Website. Sure. Which one?

NICKI
Faith Mixer.

SHARAE
Mixer like a drink? Or like
interracial?

NICKI
No, mixer like them old time
dancers or what they do at college
with fraternities.

SHARAE
Faith Mixer? Huh.

NICKI
For... church goin' folk.

SHARAE
Church goin'. Anything about him
seem church based? When's the last
time you been, girl?

NICKI
This last Sunday.

SHARAE
Where you go?

NICKI
Trinity Baptist.

SHARAE
Oo, girl. They're evangelical,
aren't they?

NICKI
Yeah. Way evangelical.

SHARAE
That's Brother Demitrius, isn't it?

NICKI
Yeah. Big Brother D, he says.

SHARAE
You go to his 11:00 sittin'?

NICKI
His runs at 9:00. Brother Roman's
runs at 11:00.

Sharae looks at her with an appraising eye, like she just passed some test.

SHARAE

Mmhmm.

NICKI

I swear. I don't like Brother Roman because he's always runnin' long with his fiery talk.

SHARAE

They know about this? You talk to Big Brother D about what you're doing?

Nicki shakes her head slowly.

NICKI

No. Was just datin' someone. Didn't know Eli was married. Didn't know any of this.

SHARAE

Right. Right. Right. I hear ya. I do. You think this is Christian behavior?

NICKI

No.

SHARAE

You think he's right in the eyes of God? You think Eli's right in the eyes of God?

NICKI

No.

SHARAE

Think you're right in the eyes of God? You make your peace?

Nicki has a slow dawning realization; that she may not make it out of the kitchen alive.

She urinates. It runs off the chair and onto the floor. Relieving herself makes her cry again.

Sharae looks at the newly forming pool impassively, then looks back at Nicki.

SHARAE (CONT'D)

You think I got the devil in me?
Doin' all this?

NICKI

I don't... I... I don't know.

SHARAE

Devil comes to live in you after
God's been taken away. People like
Eli... take your faith. They take
it and twist it til it's like
shackles on your wrists, your feet,
your neck. It binds you and blinds
you until you can't see and you
don't wanna see. Then that devil
comes in, lies in your bed, sticks
his dick in you, makes you scream
for the Lord.

Nicki nods frantically.

NICKI

Please... I peed myself. Can I get
a... You got a... God, I just peed!

SHARAE

You go out on dates? Dates with
that devil?

NICKI

Yeah. We went out on dates.

SHARAE

Where'd you go?

NICKI

Restaurants. Clubs. We went
dancin'. Sometimes other stuff.
Sometimes just walkin' around.

SHARAE

Where'd ya'll knock boots?

NICKI

The car. Sometimes my place, but I
got roommates, so he never stayed
over. Always said he had to be up
early.

SHARAE

He wasn't lyin'.

The women fall into silence. Sharae doesn't look at Nicki for a long time. Finally, she does.

SHARAE (CONT'D)

You want somethin' to drink?

NICKI

Yeah, I do. Yeah, I do.

Sharae nods and gets her a glass of water. She puts just a little bit of what's left of powdered pills, but doesn't let Nicki see that's what she's doing.

She grabs a dish towel and throws it under the chair to soak up the urine.

She puts a straw in the glass and puts the straw to Nicki's lips.

Nicki watches her closely and flinches every time Sharae moves or breathes, expecting another assault.

Tenatively, she sips from the straw. First unsure, then greedily.

Nicki's eyes roll back and she goes unconscious again.

Sharae leaves the glass there, walks over and grabs a sharp knife out of a wood block. She looks at it for awhile, catches her reflection, then Nicki's, then hers again. She turns around and walks to Nicki slowly.

Sharae cuts the ties at Nicki's wrists. She sits Nicki up and pulls new hose from her sleeve. She re-ties Nicki's wrists to the back legs of the chair.

She holds the knife, plays with it a little, and watches Nicki the whole time.

She returns the knife to the wood block and leaves the kitchen.

The sound of a car approaching is heard. It turns into the driveway and comes to stop. A car door opens, closes.

Eli comes to the kitchen door and opens it, not seeing inside yet.

ELI

Sharae babe, guess what? Trip was cut --

He stops as he sees the mess of broken dishes on the floor.

ELI (CONT'D)
What in the name of --

He looks up and sees Nicki tied to the chair.

ELI (CONT'D)
Jesus Christ!

He sprints to the table, dropping his bag and not closing the door.

He kneels down next to Nicki and tries to get her to wake up.

ELI (CONT'D)
Come on, baby, wake up. Oh, Jesus, look at you. What the fuck... You came over here? That's why... Oh, Jesus. Wake up, baby. Who did this to you? God, look at you!

He frets, trying to get her to wake up, petting her face, her arms, her chest, pulling her hair back, trying to wipe her face.

ELI (CONT'D)
Oh, my pretty girl. Come on, honey. Wake up. Your man's here. I'll fix it, baby. Just wake up. Let's get you untied, huh? Who would do this, why, babe, God, why? Why?

He looks up and behind him, just in time to see Sharae swing a candlestick at his face with all her might. He crumples into Nicki's lap.

SHARAE
Don't be asking God for nothing.
He's pissed at you.

Camera pans back to reveal microwave time of 12:30.

We see Eli again, tied to Nicki's lap, facing the kitchen. He's been manipulated so his legs are under the chair and tied to it. His arms are tied around Nicki and the back of the chair.

Nicki's awake, staring at Sharae sitting across from her. There are several scrapbooks and a box of matches sitting on the table.

Nicki has duct tape over her mouth so she can't scream.

Eli starts to wake, very disoriented.

ELI
What the hell... Hey... Hey!

He realizes he's sitting uncomfortably and tied to the chair.
He starts to struggle.

ELI (CONT'D)
What's that smell? Piss? What in
God's --

Nicki whimpers and makes noise behind the tape.

Eli looks at her leg.

ELI (CONT'D)
Babe? Nicki? What the fuck? Why...
what's... Oh, my head. Sucker
punched. Ow, oh, God. Babe, you OK?

He kisses her thigh for comfort. The action makes Sharae cry
silently. He inhales deeply.

ELI (CONT'D)
Oh, shit, babe. That was you who
pissed? Oh, I'm so sorry. We'll get
you out, cleaned up...

He tries to turn his head, but can't.

Nicki cries heavily, searching the ceiling, then the back of
his head for answers.

ELI (CONT'D)
Shhh, it's OK, babe. We'll get out
of this. Then I'll kill the
motherfucker doing this and I
swear, I will take you away. Shh,
it's OK. Calm down.

He kisses her thigh several more times.

ELI (CONT'D)
I was wondering where you were. Why
you didn't come to the hotel. I
waited for you. Called you like a
thousand times. Gotta admit, baby
girl, I got pissed. But, oh, I'm so
sorry. I wish I'd... I was waitin'
to smell your pussy, but not
like... Fuck!

He gets angry and struggles mightily, to no avail. Hose burns
his wrists and his movement hurts Nicki's wounds.

She whimpers.

ELI (CONT'D)

Oh, honey, I'm sorry. OK, I'll stop. Who the hell does this? OK, it'll be OK. It'll all be fine. Just have to...

SHARAE

You're not getting out of those, Eli.

Eli freezes.

ELI

Sh... Sh... Sharae?

SHARAE

Hi, babe.

ELI

(nervous)

H-h-hi, babe. You're here, too? You tied up? Jesus.

Nicki's furtively shaking her head, bawling again, screaming behind the tape, trying to communicate with Eli in any way she can.

ELI (CONT'D)

You see them? Who'd target us like this? Who is it?

SHARAE

It's me, babe. It's always been me.

Eli looks rabbit-scared, tries to back pedal.

ELI

Of course it's always been you. I thought... it was you who --

SHARAE

Don't even bother, fool.

She swoops down next to his ear.

SHARAE (CONT'D)

I know it all. Everything. All your dirty laundry and your dirty dick.

She sits back in her chair and starts playing with matches, which makes Nicki scream again.

From how his head is, Eli can't quite see her.

ELI

What? What the fuck you talkin' about? What is this? This some kind of joke? This supposed to be funny?

Sharae chuckles and walks to the counter.

ELI (CONT'D)

What... What are you in? That your wedding dress? Jesus! What the hell happened to it?

She plays Nicki's voicemail to Eli.

-- Voicemail plays --

Eli swallows hard. He understands he's not talking his way out of this. He's busted.

Nicki looks to the ceiling, prayer in her eyes, tears streaming.

ELI (CONT'D)

Babe... Sharae... Kitten... Babe, I...

SHARAE

You... what? You're sorry? You wanna talk? You wanna work it out? Babe, we done worked it out. All out. Ain't nothing left to work.

She opens the laptop on the counter, so he can see it.

She opens folders, then Emails slowly, methodically, so he can see what she's doing.

SHARAE (CONT'D)

You see... When you check Email, it's not enough to just click the little red x. You. Have. To. Log. Out. Otherwise, anyone can come up and see what you've been doing.

She starts reading parts of several different Emails.

SHARAE (CONT'D)

Oh, baby, I can't wait to feel me inside you.

Pause. She lights up a cigarette.

ELI
Those are just Emails, Sharae.

SHARAE
You mean the world to me. I wanna
feel me up inside you. I wanna push
that ass up. Back that ass up and
work it like only you can.

Eli chuckles nervously.

ELI
Honey, c'mon... It's just Emails.
Means nothing. Nothing happened!

SHARAE
Wanna get sweaty with you. Wanna
call out your name. You sure you
wanna do this, because it'll be OK
if you don't, but I just want to be
with you so bad. Jasmine. Nicki.
Nichole. Dawn. Monica. Lisa.
Rhonae. Robin. Unique.

Beat.

SHARAE (CONT'D)
Tell me you didn't bang some ghetto
booty that actually went by the
name Unique.

ELI
Babe, you don't --

SHARAE
I don't what? Believe your ass
anymore?

She sits down in the chair next to him and leans down to look
at him.

SHARAE (CONT'D)
(very quiet, pleading)
Tell me, Eli. Why? You promised me.
You promised.

They share a quiet, tear-filled moment. He whispers
apologetically, her voice is wrought.

ELI
I don't know. I don't... It
wasn't... You're right, you're
right, you're right. I shouldn't
have. I don't know.
(MORE)

ELI (CONT'D)

I wasn't thinking. Please, honey.
Please. Forgive me.

SHARAE

Why'd you marry me if you were just
gonna go off and do this? Why?

ELI

I didn't mean to.

SHARAE

Didn't you understand what those
vows meant? Weren't those clear to
you? You think I went off and
stepped out on you?

ELI

I did, I did, but I guess I didn't
really know. Not really, not deep.
Sharae, no, honey, I know you
didn't. This is all me. All me. I --

SHARAE

Don't tell me you love me. People
who love don't do this. Why, Eli?
Why'd you marry me?

Eli starts to cry harder, sputtering.

ELI

I... I don't... I love... I just
wanted... I wanted... I thought...

SHARAE

You wanted what? What'd you want,
baby?

ELI

I wanted babies. I wanted a family.

SHARAE

I gave you babies.

She stands and tears the collages off the wall, causing Nicki
to scream in surprise and fear. She jerks her legs, which
causes Eli's head to bounce.

SHARAE (CONT'D)

These babies! I gave them to you!
DeAngelo! Denise! I gave them! To
you!

She shoves the collages in Eli's face. He shuts his eyes and
tries to shake his head.

She tears the pictures out of them and shoves them in his face individually.

SHARAE (CONT'D)

I gave them to you! Our babies!
Ours! I gave you babies! Why was
that not enough? Why? DeAngelo! I
gave you a son! Your big man!
Denise! Your baby girl! Your
princess!

Sharae collapses against the table, sobbing.

Eli and Nicki are crying, too.

ELI

I... I don't... know... I...

Sharae suddenly stands and grabs the matches. Nicki starts to scream again.

Sharae grabs a picture and lights a match. She sets the match to the picture.

ELI (CONT'D)

No! No! Don't burn my boy! Not my
boy!

Sharae lets the flaming picture fall on Eli's back. It burns through his shirt.

ELI (CONT'D)

No! Sharae!

He screams in pain.

She does the same with the rest of the photos.

ELI (CONT'D)

Ah, ow! Sharae! Necie! DeAngelo!
You're burnin' me! Sharae!

One by one. All eight of them from both collages.

ELI (CONT'D)

Not our boy! That's all we got of
him! No! And Necie! Why? Sharae,
why? Don't!

SHARAE

I'm releasing you from his sight.
Little angel doesn't need to look
down on his daddy anymore.

She grabs their wedding scrapbook on the table and flips through it. Her laugh is high-pitched, demented.

Nicki's hysterical enough that she's almost passed out again.

SHARAE (CONT'D)

You remember when we made this? We sat down, snuggled together, picked out pictures, all that? Well...

She lights a new match and drops it on the scrapbook. It catches fire and burns.

Eli sobs, not wanting his history to go up in flames.

ELI

No, babe, no. Don't do that. Don't burn... that's our life. Our history. Don't burn that down. We got so much... That's our life.

She drops the burning scrapbook on the floor near Eli.

SHARAE

That was our life. Ain't nothin' the same anymore. Nothin'. Never gonna be like what it was in those pictures. Never. You know why? Cuz I won't live to see it.

ELI

What? Sharae, babe, no, come on. We can talk through this. Work it out. Let's talk. Come on. We always talked before.

SHARAE

And where'd it get us? You with your mouth covering some other bitch's snatch.

ELI

Nicki ain't a part of this. She ain't a part of us. Let her go, you and me, we sit and talk.

SHARAE

You know, they say there's treatment. Counseling. New therapies. Drug regimens.

ELI

What? What are you talking about? Sharae, what treatment?

SHARAE

(at the top of her lungs)
You gave me the hiv! H. I. V! You
motherfucker!

Enraged, she kicks him repeatedly.

He yelps, struggles, screams. But there's nowhere for him to go, nothing he can do except absorb her rage.

ELI

What hiv? No, babe, no virus. No!

SHARAE

I got it! I got it all in me! Doc called, said my test said I wasn't pregnant.

She moves to another voicemail and plays it.

NURSE (V.O.)

Missus Carter. Missus Bryant said she's been trying to get a hold of you but had to leave a message. She's our H.I.V. And AIDS specialist. She'd like to set you up with some counseling, talk to you about programs, treatment options, and community services. Please take her call. We want to support you as much as you need.

The voicemail ends and Sharae turns off her phone.

SHARAE

I didn't have a baby, but I had the virus! You sonofabitch!

She kicks him a few more times, and pounds on his back.

He winces and yells out in pain.

ELI

Sharae! Stop! God, please! Ow! Stop! I never... babe, I always wrapped...

SHARAE

Don't you lie to me! No more! No more lying! She already said she rode you bareback! Skin to skin and now you gave it to me!

ELI
 Sharae --

SHARAE
 Shut. Up.

Eli falls silent, in obvious pain. Nicki looks at Sharae with wide eyes, petrified at her rage.

SHARAE (CONT'D)
 Shut up. Shut up! Shut UP!

Furious, Sharae grabs the duct tape off the counter and tapes Eli's mouth closed.

SHARAE (CONT'D)
 No. More. Lying!

Eli sounds like he's trying to say something behind the tape.

SHARAE (CONT'D)
 Uh uh. No way. No more. Not listening to you no more. Lying whore.

Her cell phone rings. It's LaSheryl. She answers her phone.

SHARAE (CONT'D)
 (normal sounding)
 Hey, girl. No, no, just doing some work in the kitchen. How's my baby doing? Yeah? She good? She being good for you? That's what I want to hear. Let me talk to her.

She walks out of the kitchen into the living room, but her voice can still be heard faintly.

Eli still sounds like he's trying to talk from behind the tape. Nicki does, too. She doesn't struggle, but he does. After a moment, he stops, breathing hard.

SHARAE (O.S.) (CONT'D)
 Hey, baby girl. You know I love you, right? I miss you. I'm gonna miss you. You listen to your Auntie, teach her how to play that game. Your daddy loves you, too. OK, let me talk to your Aunt LaSheryl. Sher? You take care of my baby. No, I'm good. Love you.

The house is silent except for Nicki's whimpering.

After a few moments, Sharae starts singing a soulful, gospel version of "River Runs Deep" in the other room.

(Well, the river runs deep and the water is cold as ice
 The river runs deep and the water is cold as ice
 I go down there every chance I get
 It's where my baby she met her death
 And the river runs deep and the water's cold as ice
 Ain't no woman gonna make a fool out of me
 Ain't no woman gonna make a fool out of me
 Running 'round, that's what they said
 She's at the bottom of the river dead
 And the river runs deep and the water's cold as ice
 No cheating woman gonna get a good man down
 No cheating woman gonna get a good man down
 Running 'round like a silly fool
 You're gonna end up at the bottom of the pool
 And the river runs deep and the water's cold as ice)

Eli look towards the ceiling in silent prayer.

The house is silent again.

Sharae walks back in, calmer.

SHARAE (CONT'D)

Baby who met her death in that
 song? That's me. I'm already dead,
 baby. Maybe that's why you've been
 running around like a silly fool.
 No one here to stop you.

She walks over to the sink and dumps the cell phone into the garbage disposal. She turns on the faucet, then the disposal. The cell phone spins and is chewed up.

SHARAE (CONT'D)

Damn am I tired of getting news by
 phone.

She drops Nicki's phone in there to chew it up as well.

SHARAE (CONT'D)

I checked your phone. Nicki, right?

Nicki nods weakly.

SHARAE (CONT'D)

I checked your phone, Nicki. Wasn't
 anything on it. Must be that new
 phone you were talking about.

Nicki nods weakly again and looks almost grateful that Sharae didn't find anything incriminating on the phone.

Eli silently pleads with her.

Sharae looks back at the phones and shakes her head.

SHARAE (CONT'D)

She didn't need to know what a snake you are, Eli. How you betrayed her mother. How you betrayed her. How you betrayed her brother. How can you do that to your family? Where's your strength, Eli?

Eli shakes his head, pleading as best he can.

She walks over and rips the tape off of Nicki's mouth, then pulls out a pair of panties that had been stuffed in there. She drops them on Eli's face.

Nicki takes deep, gulping breaths of air.

NICKI

Sharae... please...

SHARAE

Don't you Sharae me. Mm mm. We haven't been introduced. I don't know you.

NICKI

I'm Nicki. Nicki Price, Mrs. Carter. I swear on the life of my momma and grandmomma that I didn't know...

She breaks down crying again.

SHARAE

Girl, either you stop or this tape's going back on.

Nicki tries to stop as much as she's able.

Sharae turns off the garbage disposal and pulls out what's left of the phone. She tosses it on the floor.

She picks up a meat tenderizing hammer and beats the shit out of the laptop until there is no way it can ever be repaired. Over and over she pounds on the keyboard, then the screen.

She puts the tape back on Nicki's mouth and throws the hammer into the sink, then the demolished laptop on the floor. She looks at the sink, contemplating the hammer.

That freaks Nicki out. Eli starts to struggle in earnest to get out of his ties, but it doesn't work.

Without a word, Sharae gets out a pot, fills it with water, and puts it on the stove to boil. She opens a bag of pasta and pours it into the water.

She sits down, looking genuinely sad and tired. Not just from the last 24 hours, but from life. Beaten down. She looks at the cigarette left to burn in the ashtray with its full-length ash.

SHARAE (CONT'D)

You never seen me like this. No one has. I kept it all inside. All my rage. All against you. My life. He tell you what we lost in twenty years? His parents. My parents. My twin sister. Our boy. A job. More than one job. His gettin' sick. His gettin' hurt. My gettin' hurt. Him trippin' with that first one. Almost losing this house. Damn, we been through some *shit*.

She shakes her head sadly.

She looks at the stove, waiting for water to boil.

SHARAE (CONT'D)

Damn. Fucked that up. Put in the pasta before the water was boilin'.

Eli looks like he just realized something. There's immediate reaction of trying to get away. He's like a mouse in a box with the walls closing in; trying to scramble madly.

The water starts to boil. Without emotion, Sharae stands and stirs the pot. It's the same scene from a few days before, when she and Eli were standing at the stove.

She wipes up some spill-over with a dish towel and leaves the towel on the stove.

Eli bucks against the ties. Nicki starts doing the same.

Sharae stirs and stirs and stirs.

The stirs get slower and slower and slower.

She takes the pot off the heat (but doesn't turn off the burner) and sets it on the table. She looks at Nicki and Eli over the top of the pot.

They've become very still, like if they don't move, she might forget they're there.

A look comes over Sharae's face. She sweeps her arm towards them, flinging the boiling hot water and pasta onto them.

They scream as flesh is burned and steam rises.

SHARAE (CONT'D)

I ain't never cooking for you
again! Ever!

She gets up, knocking her chair over. She stalks out of the kitchen, but pauses in the doorway just before she goes out of view.

Nicki and Eli are moaning, sobbing.

SHARAE (CONT'D)

I got so much more to say. So much
more to ask. But I know you can't
tell me anything. Nothing will make
me understand. You ask me why? Why,
Eli? It's me. It's always me.

She leaves line of sight.

Eli and Nicki fully break down.

Sharae comes back in after a few moments.

She sits down on the floor next to Eli. Gently, she takes the tape off of him.

ELI

Sharae...

SHARAE

Oh, babe. I love you. I love you so
much. You just don't know. Remember
our vows? Remember those?

Eli nods, crying.

SHARAE (CONT'D)

Today's our twentieth anniversary.
I had it all planned. We were going
to have dinner. Drink some wine. Go
take a bath. Spend all weekend
cuddling and spooning and making
love.

She sighs deeply.

SHARAE (CONT'D)

Oh, Eli... This wasn't how it was supposed to go.

ELI

I know, I know, I know...

SHARAE

I was going to do kind of one of those renewal of vows. That's why I was wearing the dress. You were going to dress up all nice, in your tuxedo and we were gonna renew our vows. Our commitment.

ELI

You always plan the best, babe.

SHARAE

We had that poem. You remember our vows, Eli? Say them with me. You remember?

ELI

I remember.

SHARAE

Say them with me. You ready?

Eli nods.

ELI

You are the only breast in which I will find heaven.

SHARAE

Right, and then I said, and it shall bring you comfort whenever you're tried. OK, you go.

ELI

With your heart does mine beat.

SHARAE

With your heart does mine sing, be it joyful or a lullaby.

ELI

No matter what tomorrow brings, I will honor you in all states.

SHARAE

For on that path, we walk together
through darkness and into the
light.

ELI

Oh my queen, proud and glorious,
exalted among women, I will cry for
you until the end of my life.

SHARAE

Oh my king, proud and glorious,
treasured among men, I will wipe
your tears until the end of my
life.

They share an honest moment of reminiscence.

BANG

A gun goes off.

Sharae moves her hand to her lap. She's holding a handgun.

Eli's dead, shot in the chest from the side. He's still.

A stream of blood jets out from the entrance would and hits
Sharae's chest. Blood and flesh coat the wall on Eli's other
side. Blood and parts of his body hit Nicki's legs.

Blood bubbles up out of Eli's mouth and pools on Nicki's lap.

Nicki screams, straining. She fights to get him off of her.
Her legs buck under him. His lifeless body bounces, causing
more blood to come out of his mouth.

She screams hard enough to make her voice start to crack.

Sharae lifts the gun again and pushes the barrel up under
Nicki's chin before Nicki realizes what's going on. Sharae
keeps her focus and loving expression on Eli. Her bringing
the barrel up under Nicki's chin seems like an afterthought,
with no more consideration than turning off a light switch.

Sharae squeezes the trigger.

Nicki's hoarseness from screaming is cut off by a shot under
her chin, up into her brain.

Her eyes go wide and her head slumps forward instantly. Blood
bubbles out of her mouth, mixed with parts of her tongue,
cheek, jawbone, and teeth. Blood streams down on top of Eli's
head and down the back of it.

Sharae pets Eli's face lovingly. She's truly grieving to the depths of her soul. It rattles around in her eyes, blurred by tears, her lips puckered in mid-blubber.

She looks around the kitchen at the tatters of her life.

The broken wine bottle.

The sink where the cell phone bought it.

The busted laptop.

The burned pictures.

The scorched scrapbook.

It breaks her heart (her POV; camera looking out into the kitchen). She gives a loud, sniffling sob.

Another gunshot is heard.

Sharae falls over, on to her side, dead. A jagged wound in her throat dumps blood on the floor. It pools out behind her, under her hair, with bits of brain matter and bone.

Camera pans back to show the whole kitchen. Slowly, it racks in on the stove.

The dish towel on the stove ignites from the burner that had been left on.

FADE OUT