

**HERETIC**

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**A24**  
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**EXT. PARK BENCH - AFTERNOON**

**SISTER BARNES** (20) and **SISTER PAXTON** (19) occasionally look at their shared PHONE. They are early for an appointment.

Paxton is bubbly but sheltered. Barnes is intelligent and edgy. Well, edgy for a Mormon missionary.

They wear long overcoats. Skirts that fully cover the knee. Modest attire that does not draw attention to itself.

**Peoria, Illinois**  
**November**

Two BICYCLES lean near the park bench where they uncomfortably sit. The park bench has a full sized CONDOM ADVERTISEMENT on it that says: *"BIGGER JUST GOT BETTER"*

PAXTON

I heard Magnum condoms are basically, essentially, basically the same size as regular condoms.

BARNES

Nah.

PAXTON

That it's all just marketing.

BARNES

Nah, no.

PAXTON

Makes you think, what else do we believe just because of marketing? Like if you grew up being told the Book of Mormon was fake, you'd believe it was fake just because that's what you were told.

BARNES

Magnums are huge. My sister said her ex-husband had a scary big peen. Like frighteningly big. And they had to use Magnums.

PAXTON

Sounds made up.

BARNES

Elephant trunk.

(beat)

That's what she would call it.

PAXTON

I was watching this video. Not sure where I saw it. It was two people having intercourse, uh, sexual intercourse, uh --

(come on, just say it)

-- SEX. And um, a cameraman filming them. An amateur porno-ography type thing?

BARNES

Uh-huh.

Paxton blushes, regretting even starting this story.

PAXTON

And the girl in the video was moaning really loudly, as is typical, I assume, in that type of video. Just screaming. And all the sudden off camera... Wait. Sorry, I forgot to establish - they're in a hotel room. Did I say that? These people are intercourse-ing each other, and filming, in a hotel room.

BARNES

Right.

Paxton is bright red now, *really* regretting this story.

PAXTON

Okay, so they're banging. And she's moaning loudly, really into it... and then all of the sudden, off camera, in the hallway you hear this lady yell through the wall:

**"WE CAN HEAR YOU!!"**

(beat)

And the couple stops sex-ing. And the look of embarrassment and horror on their faces is so painful. And the porno-ography girl who's taking it from behind-ish, says something defiant like, "**good!**" under her breath, but you can literally see her soul being sucked out of her body. Right then and there. All of her dignity gone, as if realizing for the first time... wow, this is my life, I'm f-ing a stranger on camera for money.

(beat)

(MORE)

PAXTON (cont'd)

And I just thought... that's really poignant.

Long beat of silence.

BARNES

Why are you telling me this?

PAXTON

I guess, because...

(beat)

I felt, in that moment, "yeah". We have souls. God's real. It was a divine confirmation.

Beat.

BARNES

Do you watch a lot of...

PAXTON (cont'd)

I don't watch porno-ography.

BARNES (cont'd)

Okay.

PAXTON

It was one random time.

BARNES

Okay.

PAXTON

It was just on social media, I'm not, a porno-ography-watcher, or something.

BARNES

Okay, I know.

PAXTON

Anyway, I'm highly skeptical of the Magnum thing, because I'm positive people just believe what they're told by marketing.

BING. Text alert on the sisters' shared PHONE.

PAXTON (cont'd)

Shiz.

BARNES

What's wrong?

PAXTON

The investigator we're supposed to meet is running late.

BARNES  
What's her name again?

PAXTON  
It's a "he". Um...  
(scrolling through phone)  
His Christian name is unlisted.

Sister Paxton takes out her BOOK OF MORMON which has thousands of notes scrawled in the margins.

PAXTON (cont'd)  
I just hope this goes well. I know it's not a competition, but I haven't baptized a single investigator on my mission yet.

BARNES  
That's not true, there was that hipster who worked at Urban Outfitters --

PAXTON  
-- he was just doing it to be progressive. He only went to one sacrament meeting and stopped returning my calls after he Instagrammed about it.

BARNES  
Well, I've only converted like eight or nine people.

PAXTON  
(envious)  
Eight or nine?! Balls.

Paxton zips up her jacket. Looks out across the street. At people walking to and from work, school, wherever.

She looks up at the sky. STORM CLOUDS growing.

PAXTON (cont'd)  
Anyway, what do you think about what I was saying?

BARNES  
The porno thing?

PAXTON  
(yes, but)  
Divine confirmation.

Barnes takes a breath, looks away.

PAXTON (cont'd)  
Like... how has God shown you that  
the church is true?

BARNES  
I don't know. Guess I haven't  
thought about it.

PAXTON  
But you know it's true, right?

BARNES  
(a long beat)  
Of course.

FADE TO:

**HERETIC**

Music score RISES. The letters fade to an empty, terrifying,  
BLACK. In the darkness, we hear the sound of human WAILING.

**EXT. APPLE STREET - LATE AFTERNOON**

The girls walk their bikes down a safe suburban jaunt,  
heading to their next appointment.

BARNES  
You were grinding your teeth again.

PAXTON  
All night?

BARNES  
Yeah.

PAXTON  
Did you try waking me up?

BARNES  
Doesn't bother me.

PAXTON  
My dentist says my teeth are fine.  
I was gonna buy a mouth guard  
before MTC prep, but I needed to  
donate to my cousin's GoFundMe. She  
has a neurodegenerative disease.

BARNES  
Do you know which kind? My dad had  
something like that too.

PAXTON

I'm so sorry, is he okay?

Before Barnes can answer, they see a YOUNG MOM pushing a STROLLER down the street.

BARNES

Good afternoon, ma'am. My name is Sister Barnes. And this is my companion, Sister Paxton.

PAXTON

Are you interested in learning more about our savior Jesus Christ?

The mom doesn't say a word, just keeps walking.

**EXT. CARPENTER STREET - LATE AFTERNOON**

A little further. The girls politely wave at everyone who passes by.

A group of COLLEGE GIRLS approach in the distance, similar in age. But fashionable.

PAXTON

(low, to Barnes)

Oh my gosh, they're so pretty. I already love these girls.

SORORITY GIRL

Sorry, can we get a pic?

PAXTON

Of course!

Sister Barnes isn't so sure, but goes with it.

SORORITY GIRL

(posing for picture)

I have to know something: Is it true?

PAXTON

Is what true?

SORORITY GIRL

That you wear magic underwear?

PAXTON

What?

The sorority girl rips down Paxton's skirt, revealing her Mormon UNDERGARMENTS, as the others film and laugh.

**EXT. WALNUT STREET - LATE AFTERNOON**

A little later. The sisters shuffle along through HEAVY WIND. Paxton hides her face in shame. They stop at a RUSTED GATE.

PAXTON  
This is it.

BARNES  
Where?

PAXTON  
Right here.

BARNES  
This path?

PAXTON  
Yep.

BARNES  
(checks time)  
We're still early.

Paxton wipes a tear from her eye.

Barnes sees, pretends not to notice. She locks the bikes to the gate with a **RED U-LOCK**. She puts the **BIKE KEY** in her coat pocket.

PAXTON  
People think we're weird.

BARNES  
(she knows)  
What do you mean?

PAXTON  
I don't know. That South Park musical kinda makes fun of us.

BARNES  
I downloaded some of the songs.  
They're pretty funny actually.

Paxton seems hurt by this.



BARNES (cont'd)  
 Know what I thought those girls  
 were gonna ask you? What's it like  
 having amazing boobs.

Paxton cracks a smile.

BARNES (cont'd)  
 I'm serious, those skinny bishes  
 have no boobs. You have all the  
 boobs. What's it like?

PAXTON  
 It's like having a lot of flab and  
 being confused.

Barnes looks down at her flat chest.

BARNES  
 I don't know. Sounds pretty great.

Paxton is smiling now.

BARNES (cont'd)  
 Anyway.  
 (beat)  
 Who cares what other people think.  
 You're awesome.

PAXTON  
 Thanks.

**EXT. PATH - LATE AFTERNOON**

Rain starts to fall. The sisters enter the rusted gate and follow the path up a hill. Paxton uses her SACHEL as an umbrella.

They approach a SMALL HOUSE in the distance, surrounded on all sides by trees and an odd smattering of religious paraphernalia scattered amidst the yard, barely visible beneath the overgrown lawn.

They KNOCK on the door..... waiting.... they can hear FOOTSTEPS moving around.

BING! A text alert on their phone.

BARNES  
 That's weird.

PAXTON  
 What is it?

BARNES

Text from Sister Hall. She says we're not supposed to be meeting this guy.

PAXTON

Why not?

BARNES

Maybe he's outside the stake boundaries. Let me ask.

Paxton texts back. Immediately gets a response.

BARNES (cont'd)

(reading)

"He's not interested. Don't waste time."

PAXTON

Now we *have* to meet him.

BARNES

Why?

PAXTON

(low)

If I can convert the one guy no one else in the ward can convert... that would be HUGE for my salvation.

A beat as Barnes considers this. She glances around. The weather is getting worse. It's gonna have to be quick.

BARNES

Alright, let's get you a baptism.

Paxton smiles. Barnes KNOCKS on the door one more time.

VOICE (O.S.)

Coming, coming.

Paxton starts typing a text back to Sister Hall.

BARNES

What are you telling her?

PAXTON

Heading to our next appointment.

**MR. REED**, 50s, opens the door. He's an average looking middle aged man. His ordinary features disguise a complex intellect.

MR. REED  
 Afternoon, afternoon.

And his voice is kind.

PAXTON  
 Good afternoon, I'm Sister Paxton.  
 And this is my companion, Sister  
 Barnes.

BARNES  
 Are you Mr. Reed?

They shake hands.

MR. REED  
 Hello.  
 (points)  
 Paxton. Barnes.

PAXTON  
 Mr. Reed, it's so nice to meet you  
 finally.

Reed nods.

PAXTON (cont'd)  
 We were just in the area, and we  
 wanted to stop by because you  
 mentioned that you might be  
 interested in learning more about  
 the Church of Jesus Christ of  
 Ladder Day Saints?

MR. REED  
 Yes, yes.

Paxton, confused by his non-committal response, scans through  
 her notes.

PAXTON  
 Mr. Reed? It says in my notes you  
 mailed in a survey card requesting  
 more information --

MR. REED  
 (nods)  
 -- no, of course, I misunderstood  
 when you said "learning". I'm Mr.  
 Reed, hello to you.

BARNES

Mr. Reed we wanted to give you this booklet, as it will help you understand the restoration...

Mr. Reed takes the "RESTORATION BOOKLET".

MR. REED

No, yes. I have one. Already, thank you. Thank you. Yes.

PAXTON

...it tells you all the ways that Heavenly Father can reveal his gospel...

Mr. Reed politely flips through the BOOKLET, hands it back.

MR. REED

Thank you so much.

PAXTON

...as part of his plan, God chooses prophets, such as Adam, Noah, Abraham, and Moses...

The RAIN and WIND start to pick up. There's no overhang above the door to shield the girls from the elements.

MR. REED

It's starting to rain, can I --

PAXTON

(nothing's gonna stop the pitch)  
...prophets teach about God and receive revelation. They teach the gospel to the world and interpret the word of God...

MR. REED

-- would you care to warm up inside?

PAXTON

(one last thing)  
...and because of Apostasy, people lose knowledge of the gospel.

BARNES

Do you have a girl roommate?

MR. REED

A girl, who?

BARNES

A roommate, a girl roommate who is living with you?

MR. REED

No, I'm not sure I understand?

BARNES

We can't come inside unless another woman is present. But we can stay in the doorway if that's fine?

PAXTON

It's just for safety, we don't mind the rain.

MR. REED

(embarrassed laugh)

My wife is home, does that count?

The sisters smile.

MR. REED (cont'd)

When you said "roommate" I was confused by the formality of the... I haven't had a "roommate" since...? Does a "soulmate" count?

PAXTON

That's great! We'd love to come in and meet your wife!

MR. REED

Do you like pie? My wife has pie in the oven.

**INT. REED'S HOUSE, LIVING ROOM - LATE AFTERNOON**

Paxton and Barnes follow Reed into his home. The door closes behind them.

PAXTON

I've gained so much weight on my mission. People are always feeding us treats.

BARNES

We never seem to turn them down.

MR. REED

My wife loves to bake. May I take your coats?

PAXTON

I enjoy a fresh pie, if that's what you're saying!

Reed takes their COATS.

MR. REED

The walls and ceiling have metal in them, hope that's okay?

BARNES

We don't mind.

MR. REED

I'll check on the snacks, have a seat?

Mr. Reed disappears through a doorway while "...the walls and ceiling have metal in them..." rattles around our subconscious.

The girls are alone now in the very small living room. The walls are barren. There is no artwork or pictures of any kind. The colors of the carpet and furniture are different shades of brown. There is a single naked lightbulb in the ceiling. No light switch, just a pull string.

A wind howls through a crack in one of the unusually small windows. The girls watch a beige curtain blow around. Suddenly the talkative girls have nothing to say, until --

MR. REED (cont'd)

She's being shy. Just a minute longer on the pie.

Mr. Reed holds a TRAY with a LIT CANDLE and two sweaty COKE GLASSES. His hair looks slightly damp. His pant cuffs wet as if he spilled something.

BARNES

And she'll have to be in the room with us.

MR. REED

Of course, I understand. Have a seat, have a seat.

PAXTON

Exciting.

The girls sit down as Mr. Reed moves the CANDLE and COKE GLASSES from the tray onto a small living room TABLE.

MR. REED

I think it's good to be religious.

PAXTON

(smiles)

Our work here is done.

MR. REED

I want you to know that before we begin.

(motions to the drinks)

A couple of colas. Help yourself.

Paxton appears comforted by this, but neither girl goes for a drink. Mr. Reed pauses, searching for the right thought.

MR. REED (cont'd)

Everybody worships, don't they? Maybe it's their favorite football team. Maybe it's the stock market, or a political party. Apple products.

Mr. Reed glances at their PHONE which sits on the table.

MR. REED (cont'd)

Oh, that looks like a google phone. We pray to Google, worship it, we ask its advice like an oracle. You understand my premise?

BARNES

Social media too.

MR. REED

Everybody worships social media.

(nods, then...)

The only choice we get to make, as celestial beings on this planet, is *who* to worship. And I believe, anything other than worshipping a God will eat you alive.

He's paraphrasing David Foster Wallace, but it's unlikely the girls notice the plagiarism.

PAXTON

(moved, to herself)

Yes.

MR. REED

I think it's healthy to believe there is something more than what you can see with your eyes.

(MORE)

MR. REED (cont'd)

I mean, something that you can *only* see with blind faith. Don't you?

BARNES

I think we'd consider that...  
(checks with Paxton)  
...refreshing to hear. Sometimes, it feels like, maybe, Religion is not at the center of the culture anymore.

MR. REED

It's been fading, hasn't it?  
Interest in religion.

BARNES

(nods)  
Over time.

MR. REED

There are so many distractions. First it was theater. Then the symphony. The novel. Video games. And now, you're right, social media. I say this with no judgement. It is neither good nor bad. It is just... true.

That last line hangs in the air for an awkward beat. There's a small **NOISE** from the other room.

The girls notice.

PAXTON

Okay! Would you like to hear more about our Heavenly Father's plan for you?

MR. REED

I do. Where are you both from?

PAXTON

Me? Orem, Utah. One of eight daughters. It's as bad as it sounds, hee! And Sister Barnes is from Salt Lake --

BARNES

-- Philadelphia, originally.

MR. REED

Were you both raised in the church?



PAXTON  
Born and raised.

BARNES  
(no, actually)  
My mother was a convert. So when my dad passed away, we auditioned a few different churches, just to see what's out there, make sure we still believed it.

Mr. Reed dramatically CLAPS his hands together.

MR. REED  
I know that feeling. It's important to find your faith in a doctrine you can believe. It's a very personal journey - a personal challenge I've struggled with for a long time...  
(beat)  
**What is the one True Religion?**

PAXTON  
It's funny. Sister Hall was telling us we should...  
(how to put it politely)  
...*prioritize* other investigators. But I can tell that **YOU** are a very spiritually curious person. Just like Joseph Smith. You know, Joseph had trouble deciding which form of Christianity was right for him. He investigated many different denominations: Presbyterian, Methodist, Catholicism. None of them quite fit, which is why Joseph founded our church.

MR. REED  
Yes, as I understand, he was visited in the night by an angel known as Moroni, who showed him where to locate golden plates near his home. His mysterious translation of those plates formed the basis of this:

Mr. Reed holds up his copy of THE BOOK OF MORMON. Worn from study. Bookmarked and thumbnailed heavily.

PAXTON  
You read even more than we do, no seriously!  
(MORE)

PAXTON (cont'd)

We should be more like you, Mr. Reed.

(realizing)

Ha, Mr. "Read"!

BARNES

(just noticed)

The pie smells amazing.

PAXTON

And now that you've been studying The Book of Mormon, how does it make you *feel*?

MR. REED

Can you guess what kind of pie she's making?

Paxton takes an enthusiastic sniff.

PAXTON

Blueberry pie, knew it. So excited.

MR. REED

(to Barnes)

May I ask how your father passed away?

Barnes spreads a big smile across her face to stop from getting emotional. Takes a beat to answer.

BARNES

(quietly)

Lou Gehrig's disease.

Mr. Reed flinches.

MR. REED

Blueberry disease? Oh that's wonderful. Who wouldn't want that?

PAXTON

(correcting him)

*Lou Gehrig's disease. Gehrig's.*

MR. REED

Oh, oh my... that's awful. I'm sorry I mis-heard. Lou Gehrig's disease? That is a malicious affliction. (I thought you were making a joke about the pie.)

Awkward silence.

MR. REED (cont'd)

Have you... seen any signs of your father since he passed? Has he tried to communicate with you from the other side?

BARNES

No.

MR. REED

Strange.

Another silence. Reed is studying the girls' reaction to his "Strange" comment.

MR. REED (cont'd)

I'm really sorry. And I'm sorry about the blueberry thing.

BARNES

It's okay.

Barnes rubs the inside of her upper arm. This is a self-soothing technique she regularly employs in uncomfortable situations.

Reed notices that her fingers are grazing a small FADED SCAR.

PAXTON

When I die, I wanna come back as a butterfly. Just briefly, so I can follow around the people I love. I'll land right on their hand. Not their arm, not their head. Right on their finger tip - so they know it's me!

Mr. Reed isn't sure what to do with that. He looks out the window at the setting sun.

MR. REED

Well I think it's time.

BARNES

Time for what?

MR. REED

Time for... pie. Time for... enlightenment.

Mr. Reed mops up the condensation on the sweating COKE GLASSES.

MR. REED (cont'd)

I should've offered water. The Word of Wisdom forbids caffeine and alcohol, that's my mistake.

BARNES

It doesn't specifically mention soda. Sure, it may be healthier to avoid caffeinated drinks. But we're just not thirsty.

MR. REED

How do you feel about "Awkward Questions"?

PAXTON

The meme?

MR. REED

No, I would like to ask you a... awkward... an "icky" question. An insensitive question, to add depth to our conversation, quickly, before the sun sets, and we're done for the evening. But only if you're comfortable with that?

BARNES

We won't know if we're comfortable until you ask. So maybe just ask?

Mr. Reed looks to Sister Paxton as if to ask, "And you?"

PAXTON

If you don't ask the question, I'm going to leave here wondering what we missed out on.

MR. REED

So I would like to ask... and I feel like it's been built up at this point. Should I request a drumroll?

(beat)

I guess, drumroll please?

Paxton indulges in a tummy drumroll. Barnes sits motionless.

MR. REED (cont'd)

My question is: How do you feel about polygamy?

The drumroll stops. A wind howls through the window.

MR. REED (cont'd)

How do you feel about the concept of a man having multiple wives?

PAXTON

I mean, it's not for me, uh --

Paxton looks to Barnes. The girls a little dazed from whiplash.

BARNES

Are you asking from a biblical perspective?

MR. REED

Mormonism has a controversial history with the misogynist practice of men claiming multiple wives. But I'm fascinated by the idea of Modern Revelation, which was used to erase this behavior from the church in 1890. I find that worthy of conversation.

PAXTON

Oh.

MR. REED

What I mean by that is, we're discussing a church that decided a controversial practice was a stain on their reputation, and an actual hinderance to recruiting new members, and so it used revelation - the word of God told unto the prophet - to banish a provocative religious pillar that seemed unsavory in contemporary times.

Barnes considers this a moment, thoughtfully.

BARNES

I know it may be difficult to imagine, but Polygamy was a spiritual mission needed at that time, in order to grow the ranks of our membership in the wake of much hardship and bloodshed. A man having plural wives meant more babies to help the community grow.

PAXTON

It's yeah, it's sketch, for sure, to our modern brains, but --

BARNES

-- it was removed from the church not because it was "grotesque" or "controversial", but because it was no longer necessary.

Hard to tell if Barnes believes this, or if she's just regurgitating Church talking points.

MR REED

I worry - and please forgive my loud language - I worry Joseph Smith used the concept of polygamy to legitimize his affairs with other women. I worry Joseph's wife, Emma Smith, was upset when he slept with Fanny Alger, their sixteen year old servant. I worry that he formulated a plan to use revelation for consequence free sex in the aftermath of that discretion, and others like it. "With great power, comes great responsibility."

PAXTON

Spider-man.

MR. REED

I think it was Voltaire.

PAXTON

(feels stupid)

Right.

MR. REED

I guess what I would pose to the room, is my concern that polygamy does not have any spiritual bearing whatsoever.

BARNES

That's, that's somewhat of a distortion, I think, of --

MR. REED

Joseph used local newspapers to print advocacy for the concept of polygamy under pen names, years before God's prophecy about celestial marriage landed, in order to prepare his followers for future revelations that he would invent.

(MORE)

MR. REED (cont'd)

The church's own history corroborates and implies this cynical brainwashing tactic.

Barnes considers this. We capture her thinking mind, rolling the timeline and details around in her head.

BARNES

Is that true?

PAXTON

Doesn't sound right at all, I'm not sure where you're getting this.

MR. REED

And it's an intellectual barrier for me. Because if revelation from God is filtered through man, and man is flawed. And man lies. And man sins. Then how do we know any of it is true?

PAXTON

We know what's true because of how it makes us feel.

Reed snaps his fingers.

MR. REED

There it is. You're exactly right. It's our personal relationship with God that matters.

Paxton sort of nods. But we can tell Barnes is actually processing what Reed is saying on a deeper level.

BARNES

Let us talk with our bishop about some of the points you're raising. I'm sure you don't have all the information.

MR. REED

What's your favorite fast food?

BARNES

Fast food? Try not to eat it.

MR. REED

None of us do, but what's your favorite?

PAXTON  
 (deep breath)  
 Okay: Burger King is better than  
 Carl's Jr --

BARNES  
 -- what's Carl's Jr?

PAXTON  
 Hardee's on the East Coast.  
 (deep breath)  
 Burger King is better than *Hardee's*  
 which is better than Rally's --

BARNES  
 -- Rally's?

PAXTON  
 Checkers.  
 (deep breath)  
 Burger King is better than Hardees  
 which is better than *Checkers* which  
 is better than Wendy's which is  
 better than In & Out which is  
 better than McDonalds which is  
 better than Jack in the Box which  
 is better than nothing.

BARNES  
 But Jack in the Box serves  
 breakfast all day.

PAXTON  
 I LOVE BREAKFAST!!!

MR. REED  
 What about Taco Bell?

BARNES  
 We don't talk about Taco Bell.

MR. REED  
 Why don't we talk about Taco Bell?

PAXTON  
 We'd have to talk about Taco Bell,  
 to talk about *why* we don't talk  
 about Taco Bell.

MR. REED  
 So Burger King is number one?

BARNES  
 I think it's trash.



MR. REED

So not Jack in the Box, right?

BARNES

I vote Wendy's.

PAXTON

I could support.

MR. REED

Okay so Wendy's. I guess I have to try it sometime.

PAXTON

It's fine, I mean...

MR. REED

When I started studying theology twenty years ago, the last thing I wanted to find was the "Wendy's" of Religion. I was just writing a research paper for a college class and was content with dabbling: some McNuggets over here, a BK Whopper over there, whatever fit the mood. As I studied these genres - McD, BK, In&Out // i.e. // Islam, Buddhism, Scientology, Mormonism - as I got closer to God by way of genre and rigorous study... as I worked on my personal relationship with Heavenly Father, strengthened it... do you know what I learned?

The girls are silent. Mr. Reed picks up the candle.

MR. REED (cont'd)

The more you know, the less you know.

Reed blows out the CANDLE. The room a little darker now.

MR. REED (cont'd)

By the time I turned thirty I was malnourished by the fast food of religion I had been feeding my brain for a decade. Every sect, creed, cult, or denomination claimed to represent the one true doctrine and yet none of them seemed true when held under a microscope. And it made me wonder what else is out there.

(MORE)

MR. REED (cont'd)

I promise you, *the last thing I wanted to do...* was discover the one True Religion.

(beat)

But unfortunately I did.

There is a darkness to that last line that hangs in the room. We may even hear the uncomfortable shifting of audience members in their seats.

The girls are silent. Worried they've walked into a dangerous semantic mind trap. A nervousness in their voice now.

BARNES

Can we meet your wife? Please?

MR. REED

Of course.

PAXTON

She needs to be present, and we just want to meet her, too.

MR. REED

Of course.

Reed slowly stands --

MR. REED (cont'd)

I'll speak with her.

-- then leaves the room.

PAXTON

(low)

sister barnes? i don't know

BARNES

(low)

right, okay, right, i don't want to spook him, but let's wrap this

Barnes glances at their phone.

PAXTON

(low)

any messages?

BARNES

(low)

nothing, let's just politely wrap this and head back

PAXTON

(low)  
yeah just the SparkNotes --

Paxton trails off. Sees Barnes is staring at something on the table.

Barnes slowly leans forward. Reaches for the CANDLE.

Smoke still trailing over the wick.

She spins the candle.

It turns.

Slowly.

Slowly.

Slowly.

Until.

THEY SEE IT.....



BOTH GIRLS TURN WHITE. AS THEY STARE AT THE BLUEBERRY SCENTED CANDLE. MINDS REELING. HEARTS POUNDING.

-- the door opens. The girls look up, startled. As Reed returns to the living room.

MR. REED  
She's ready for us.

**EXT. NEIGHBORHOOD - SUNSET**

Fading light. The WEATHER is getting worse around the neighborhood. There's a short MONTAGE of the town battening down the hatches to prepare for a storm. The montage ends at the Mormon Church Building...

**INT. CHURCH, PEORIA WARD - SUNSET**

...where the Mission President ELDER KENNEDY (50, male), is leveling a crooked PAINTING of Joseph Smith. We see him move about the building completing his daily tasks:

- Kennedy scrubs a BAPTISM TUB.
- Kennedy wears an apron, washing dishes in the kitchen.
- Kennedy cleans the keys of a PIPE ORGAN with a Q-Tip.
- Kennedy organizes a series of paperclips by color, an apparent OCD starting to show.

His diligence forms a picture of a man who is a stickler for details.

**INT. CHURCH, GYM - SUNSET**

Kennedy strides through the church gym with purpose, heading to his next task.

He SLIPS on a WET SPOT and falls hard.

No one was around to see. That's a relief to him.

He gathers himself. Gazes at a trail of WET FOOTPRINTS.

**INT. CHURCH, BATHROOM - SUNSET**

Kennedy grabs a MOP and BUCKET.

Upon his exit, his eyes catch a chore CLIPBOARD on the wall - a list of dates/times/names of missionaries tasked to clean the bathroom on a specific rotation.

Two names are constantly present:

11/2	6:00pm	<u>PAXTON</u>
11/3	6:00pm	<u>BARNES</u>
11/4	6:00pm	<u>PAXTON</u>
11/5	6:00pm	<u>BARNES</u>
11/6	6:00pm	<u>          </u>

Kennedy checks his watch: 7:58pm

Almost two hours overdue... that's odd.

**INT. CHURCH, HALLWAY - SUNSET**

Kennedy mops the gym floor. He pauses a moment. Stares out the window as the storm grows worse, seeing not a soul in sight. No Paxton. No Barnes.

**INT. CHURCH, LOBBY - SUNSET**

Two MALE MISSIONARIES, 18, are screwing around. One of them covers their head with the other's suit jacket and FARTS.

MISSIONARY

I hope I have my passport on me  
because I just *Dutch-ovened* myself!

His companion laughs. The dichotomy between these two knuckleheads and Barnes/Paxton is biblical.

ELDER KENNEDY

(scolds)  
Gentlemen, let's be professional.

The missionaries immediately sit up straight. They didn't know Kennedy was watching.

MISSIONARY

Sorry, Elder Kennedy.

ELDER KENNEDY

Sister Barnes and Sister Paxton?

MISSIONARY

Yes, Sir?

ELDER KENNEDY

Are they still out?

MISSIONARY

(consults notes)

On the way to their Oak Point meeting now. It's close, so weather won't be a problem.

ELDER KENNEDY

Making sure. Thank you. If the shoe is wet the floor gets swept.

MISSIONARY

Sorry, Sir.

**INT. REED'S HOUSE, LIVING ROOM - SUNSET**

The girls are standing now. They watch Reed place the Cokes and candle back on the tray. He lifts the tray to the doorway.

MR. REED

This way.

Reed starts down the corridor.

Paxton begins to follow but Barnes discreetly snags her companion's shirt.

BARNES

(low)

wait

Mr. Reed continues ahead into the dark hallway.

Barnes takes out their PHONE.

BARNES (cont'd)

(louder, to Reed)

One moment, Mr. Reed, we're getting a call from the Relief Society president. We'll be right there!

MR. REED

Do you need a minute?

Barnes pretends to answer the phone.

BARNES

(faking)

This is Sister Barnes...

(louder, to Reed)

Only a moment, yes.

MR. REED  
I'll wait for you on the other  
side.

Mr. Reed disappears into the shadow of the hallway. After a pregnant pause, we hear a door OPEN and CLOSE. We assume he has passed into the next room...

BARNES  
(whispers, to Paxton)  
should we leave?

PAXTON  
(whispers)  
now?

BARNES  
(whispers)  
yeah? yes?

PAXTON  
(thinking)  
yes yes

Barnes walks to the front door. She places her fingertips on the handle and **STOPS** ----

She stands there frozen.

Paxton's eyes narrow.

PAXTON (cont'd)  
what's wrong?

BARNES  
our bikes

PAXTON  
yeah?

BARNES  
we locked them outside

PAXTON  
so what?

BARNES  
he has our coats

Paxton's still not getting it.

BARNES (cont'd)  
the key to the bike lock is in my  
coat pocket

PAXTON  
then we need to get our coats

BARNES  
right

PAXTON  
right?

BARNES  
i don't know, do we?

PAXTON  
walk back in the storm without  
coats and bikes? what is that, two  
miles?

BARNES  
four.

PAXTON  
okay, seems a little over the top,  
but...

BARNES  
...but, I'm fine to walk

PAXTON  
me too. okay.

Paxton quietly turns the DOOR KNOB.

It doesn't open.

She tries again.

Less gentle this time.

PAXTON (cont'd)  
stuck

BARNES  
stuck, what? unlock it?

Paxton feels around the knob and frame. There's no lock.

BARNES (cont'd)  
here, pull harder

Now Barnes tries the handle. Her frightened desperation  
becoming more apparent with each pull. IT WON'T OPEN.

PAXTON  
shhh



Barnes turns. Looks past the doorway at the pitch black hallway that Reed disappeared into. Too dark to see anything. Seems like he's gone into the next room already. Unless he's standing there watching them...

...there would be no way of knowing for sure.

BARNES  
he still there?

PAXTON  
no i heard him leave

Paxton takes the phone from Barnes, holds it to her head, pretending to be on a phone call just in case.

BARNES  
are you sure?

PAXTON  
maybe we ask him for help?

BARNES  
no

Barnes moves over to the windows, but as noted earlier, they are unusually small. Even if she broke the glass, the girls would be too big to squeeze through the opening.

BARNES (cont'd)  
could you fit through this?

PAXTON  
you crazy?

BARNES  
try Sister Hall?

Paxton looks at the phone.

PAXTON  
should I call her?

BARNES  
or Elder Kennedy, just so they know  
where we are

Paxton dials Kennedy but the phone won't connect.

PAXTON  
not going through

Barnes peers out the window.

BARNES  
it's the storm, keep trying

Barnes tries the door again. REALLY TRIES IT THIS TIME. Puts all of her weight into it. Short of breaking the hinges, it does not seem possible to open.

Paxton still can't get a signal.

BARNES (cont'd)  
okay  
(exhale)  
we'll ask for help

Paxton is frightened to hear this, but knows it's the only option.

PAXTON  
it'll be fine

BARNES  
of course

#### **INT. HALLWAY - SUNSET**

The girls enter the hallway. Hesitant. It is dark and getting darker - lit only by the last rays of sunlight filtering through the disturbingly small windows of the living room they just left behind.

There is a SHAPE at the end of the hall.

Its silhouette becoming more defined as they cross the halfway point, and their eyes begin to adjust.

The shape is a head.

And shoulders.

Watching.

Unmoving.

PAXTON  
Mr. Reed?

There is no response from the shape. The girls continue further.

Paxton lets out a giggle.

PAXTON (cont'd)  
It's not Mr. Reed.

The "shape" is a MARBLE BUST that sits atop a tall end table.

PAXTON (cont'd)  
It's a Dumbledore.

BARNES  
He vacations at Wizarding World.

Paxton smiles. Barnes inspects the statue a little more closely. Vaguely recognizes the face but can't quite place the religious figure.

The girls are in deep shadow by the time they arrive at the WOODEN DOOR. Barnes reaches for the antique cast iron knob.

#### **INT. LIBRARY - NIGHT**

The girls push open the heavy door and enter the LIBRARY.

Their nervous faces take in the room around them.

There are a few things we may notice immediately:

- 1) **THE BOOKS.** Hardcover and first editions. Rows and rows of them inset into the walls.
- 2) **THE LECTERN.** That Reed unceremoniously drags into the center of the room, as he casually acknowledges Barnes & Paxton's entrance.
- 3) **THE WIFE.** That has been referenced at length but is nowhere to be seen. Her absence is unmistakable.
- 4) **THE RED CURTAIN.** Draped from floor to ceiling on the back wall behind the girls.
- 5) **THE ALTAR.** With two unlit candles positioned before a small row of pews.
- 6) **THE TWO DOORS.** Both on the far wall. They are closed and crudely painted two different colors...

**YELLOW DOOR**

**PURPLE DOOR**

The girls stay in the corner of the room, keeping a safe distance from Reed.

BARNES  
(deeply apologetic)  
Mr. Reed, you've been too generous with your time. Sister Paxton and I were just saying what a pleasure it's been. And we'd love to come back, can we?  
(MORE)

BARNES (cont'd)

At your earliest convenience, to continue this lesson? But we just got off the phone with Sister Hall, and she needs us to return to the church, unfortunately.

MR. REED

You've been more than considerate as well. I won't keep you, if you wish to leave?

Paxton holds up their PHONE.

PAXTON

We've been summoned back.

MR. REED

And just when we were getting started. You had me thinking a moment, perhaps you were onto something with your visit. I've been impressed, but I understand.

Slow pan to Paxton, as she processes the thought that she might have been getting through to Reed.

MR. REED (cont'd)

Your coats are hanging on the back of the pew.

The girls retrieve their coats.

Barnes discreetly checks for the BIKE LOCK KEY. It's not there, what the hell.

She throws a concerned look to Paxton.

Flips the pocket inside out to show her companion it's empty.

Paxton searches her coat for the BIKE LOCK KEY.

BARNES

So we just need your help with the door, it's a little tricky.

MR. REED

I'm sorry?

PAXTON

Think your door's a bit stuck out there.

The first pocket Paxton checks is empty. Uh oh.

MR. REED  
The door won't open.

PAXTON  
Right.

MR. REED  
No I'm saying, the door can no  
longer open.

Paxton finds the KEY in her other pocket. A sigh of relief,  
but also... that's odd. She discreetly flashes it to Barnes.

The girls share a confused look.

PAXTON  
The front door?

MR. REED  
Yes, the front door won't open  
anymore.

BARNES  
Opened when we came in.

PAXTON  
(says the obvious part out  
loud)  
Maybe if you unlock it, it will  
open?

Mr. Reed is nodding apologetically.

MR. REED  
I understand what you're asking me,  
but it's... the dead bolts are on a  
timer. I got carried away with our  
conversation and didn't realize the  
brace had been set. I should have  
pulled the pin when you came in,  
but I forgot.

CLOSE ON the girls' faces, processing.

MR. REED (cont'd)  
If you're ready to leave, you'll  
have to exit through the back of my  
house.

PAXTON  
...where...

Mr. Reed points in the general direction of the two doors on the far wall, but it's unclear if he's aiming at yellow or purple.

MR. REED  
Through there.

BARNES  
Which door leads outside?

MR. REED  
Either. If you're ready to leave,  
it's just through the next room.

BARNES  
Can you just unlock the front one,  
please? We'd like to go that way.

PAXTON  
(over-selling)  
So we won't be turned around and  
confused once we get outside.

MR. REED  
It won't open again until morning.

PAXTON  
Please though, Sir?

MR. REED  
No, of course, I wish I could. But  
it won't open again until sunrise.

Mr. Reed motions the girls --

MR. REED (cont'd)  
It's safe to leave this way. It's  
just in the next room.

Barnes swallows. Thinking. Developing a strategy in real time. Too frightened to organize her thoughts into a coherent response. She ends up letting out this:

BARNES  
It's a little unusual to have a  
door that locks on a timer.

MR. REED  
(nods, self reflective)  
I see that.

BARNES  
And a little unusual that it can't  
be unlocked.

MR. REED

(nods, self reflective)

Yeah I know, had a habit of blowing open in the middle of the night. Gusty out here.

Paxton continues to panic. Face trembling. Not hiding it as well as Barnes. Mr. Reed notices.

MR. REED (cont'd)

I don't mean to pressure you. I'm self-aware enough to know how this looks. Older man. Two young women in his house. But I assure you, you're welcome to exit through the back - you saw my house from the outside, right?

The girls nod, "Yes".

MR. REED (cont'd)

Right, then you know it's a tiny footprint, so the back of the house is right through there. But I will leave you space to make that decision freely, of course.

Mr. Reed sees the effect this is all having on the girls.

MR. REED (cont'd)

To clarify: I'm trying to make it a point *not* to pressure you. You shouldn't even feel the need to fabricate an excuse about someone from your ward calling you to leave. You can leave at anytime you want - it's absolutely fine.

BARNES

It wasn't an excuse, they just need us back.

TAP TAP TAP. Reed notices a leak in the ceiling. Rainwater dripping through the roof onto the floor.

MR. REED

I know, but you're saying you took a phone call with someone from your ward.

PAXTON

Yes, a moment ago.

Reed moves his version of a SHISHI-ODOSHI style bucket under the drip to collect the rainwater. And every once in awhile, this device gets full, and does a dump/reset action that creates a loud "thwack" noise. Which will be particularly useful to accent suspense in key moments.

MR. REED

Right, but when you came inside, I asked if you were okay with the metal in the walls and ceilings.

BARNES

What do you mean?

MR. REED

I mean the metal obstructs cell phone signals. So I know you didn't receive a call.

ON THE GIRLS. We see a literal gulp as Paxton dry swallows.

MR. REED (cont'd)

And I just want to be clear, so that you feel comfortable, that it's totally fine if you'd like to leave on your own accord. You should never feel like you have to make excuses.

If Reed is trying to make them feel comfortable he has failed. The thought of a house designed to stop a phone from making calls is very clearly nightmare fuel.

BARNES

Which door leads outside?

MR. REED

Do you have a preference?

BARNES

Why would we have a preference?

PAXTON

Should we have a preference?

MR. REED

(thinks, laughs)  
Fair question.

PAXTON

Not to be completely weird about this, but can your wife **PLEASE** just step into this room, say hello, and walk us to the back of the house?

(MORE)



PAXTON (cont'd)

I'm not trying to be silly, I'm sorry, I'm really not. But there are rules we follow. And we were upfront about them.

Reed pauses.

MR. REED

I will ask.

He approaches the **YELLOW DOOR**.

Reaches for the handle.

But stops.

MR. REED (cont'd)

Can I ask you a question first?

PAXTON

...yes...

MR. REED

Do you...

(beat)

...still believe my wife is in the next room?

The girls say nothing.

MR. REED (cont'd)

Despite all of the evidence to the contrary?

The girls say nothing.

MR. REED (cont'd)

Despite the scented candle and the absence of an oven with blueberry pie?

The girls say nothing.

MR. REED (cont'd)

Or... have you been politely indulging a lie?

The girls say nothing. They couldn't if they tried. Their voices have been sucked into their stomachs.

MR. REED (cont'd)

If you believe she is there I will go ask her.

(beat)

(MORE)

MR. REED (cont'd)

...but it's something I want you to think about. And maybe think about it in the context of your beliefs. Do you believe in God because someone told you, at an impressionable age, that God is real?

(beat)

Despite having doubts as you got older? Despite seeing evidence to the contrary your whole life?

CLOSE ON Sister Barnes.

MR. REED (cont'd)

When your father lost control of his body did you think it was God's plan to ruin his life?

Barnes holds her breath.

MR. REED (cont'd)

Or did you keep believing something you know is not true just to give you comfort? Because you were afraid of what it might mean if it was all a lie?

She steels herself.

MR. REED (cont'd)

I put the candle on the table. Because I wanted you to think about the things that you believe just because somebody asked you to believe them.

The girls don't even know what to say, except...

BARNES

Can we use your phone, please?

MR. REED

I do not have a phone.

Paxton's emotional eyes react. Her voice trembling as she squeaks out...

PAXTON

You have a really beautiful home, Mr. Reed. It's like a church in here. Did you build this yourself?

MR. REED  
My wife built it.

The fuck...

BARNES  
I'm going to leave through the back  
of your house now, is that okay?

MR. REED  
Of course.

BARNES  
Just like you said. It's okay and  
we can leave. Right?

MR. REED  
That's right.

BARNES  
(to Paxton)  
Are you coming?

Paxton is too afraid to move.

Barnes crosses the room as Paxton watches.

She reaches for the **YELLOW DOOR**.

BARNES (cont'd)  
I want the door that takes us  
outside.

MR. REED  
That is both of them.

BARNES  
Okay. I want the door that takes us  
outside the *fastest*.

MR. REED  
That is both doors.

She reaches for the door handle.

Glances back at Sister Paxton.

Her fingers tighten into a grip.

She opens the YELLOW DOOR...

SLOW PUSH IN ON BARNES...

INTO HER EYES...

HER REACTION SAYS IT ALL...

SHE HATES WHAT SHE SEES...

A SINKING FEELING SETTING IN...

THAT THIS IS GOING TO KEEP GETTING WORSE AND WORSE...

**A small flight of concrete stairs lead down into DARKNESS.**

Paxton watches Barnes from across the room, terrified. She can't see what Barnes is looking at. Curiosity starts to pull her nervously towards her companion.

PAXTON

What is it?

Barnes composes herself.

She closes the YELLOW DOOR.

Reed watches, intrigued.

Paxton stops. Growing more nervous.

PAXTON (cont'd)

Sister Barnes?

Barnes moves to the **PURPLE DOOR**.

Reaches for the door knob.

And opens the door to see...

**A small flight of concrete stairs lead down into DARKNESS.**

BARNES

(lets out the tiniest  
breath)

...

**Both doors lead down concrete staircases, giving the impression these doors don't necessarily navigate outside the house, but rather deeper into the bowels of the house.**

Paxton has now joined Barnes. She is seeing what Barnes is seeing. Equally terrified by the awful options they have in front of them.

PAXTON

That's a basement.

BARNES

Doesn't seem like this goes outside.

MR. REED

Didn't you just say you saw the outside of my house?

Paxton tries the other door, confirms both doors lead to a basement. She turns on their phone's FLASHLIGHT. It's not strong enough to reveal much more. She closes the door.

BARNES

Yes, when we were walking up... we would've seen it.

MR. REED

Then you clearly saw the back of my house hangs over a hill.

Barnes and Paxton try to recall. The look on their faces tell us they're skeptical about that.

MR. REED (cont'd)

So you would know that you must go down in order to go out.

PAXTON

I'm not sure. I don't remember a hill, do you?

BARNES

We walked up a hill, but I thought it plateaued in the back?

MR. REED

It's a weird detail to remember, I understand why you wouldn't.

A moment of silence for all the awkward, upset feelings swirling around the room.

BARNES

I think you can tell, that we're regrettably uncomfortable with this situation, here, tonight. And we... we... need your help to go home.

(takes a deep breath)

And I think it'd be best, for you, and all of us, if you help us get home. Because the Stake President knows where we are. And the Ward Missionaries know. And they'll be expecting us.

PAXTON

And there were witnesses, weren't there, Sister Barnes? On our way here, we passed a police officer.

MR. REED

Police? Oh you're getting too worked up, I'm sorry for that.

PAXTON

We waved at him. And he waved back. People know we're here, okay?

MR. REED

Sideburns, big ears?

The girls don't answer.

MR. REED (cont'd)

Never mind, thought it might be Officer Marxen. Everything's okay. You can leave whenever you want.

BARNES

Right. But I think we're scared, because you lied to us earlier --

MR. REED

-- have I lied?

BARNES

There's no pie...

MR. REED

If this is going to work, we must ONLY tell each other the truth.

PAXTON

If what's going to work?

Mr. Reed pauses. He's not ready to answer that question yet.

MR. REED

I can help you choose the right door.

Mr. Reed closes the PURPLE DOOR.

MR. REED (cont'd)

I can help. You asked me if you should have a preference between the doors. I think you should.

(MORE)

MR. REED (cont'd)

I think it's something you should consider carefully, and then make the right decision. Do you want me to help you?

What can they even fucking say to that question at this point other than....

...yes.

BARNES

...okay.

PAXTON

MR. REED

Please stand over here.

He motions the girls across the room, near the pews.

MR. REED (cont'd)

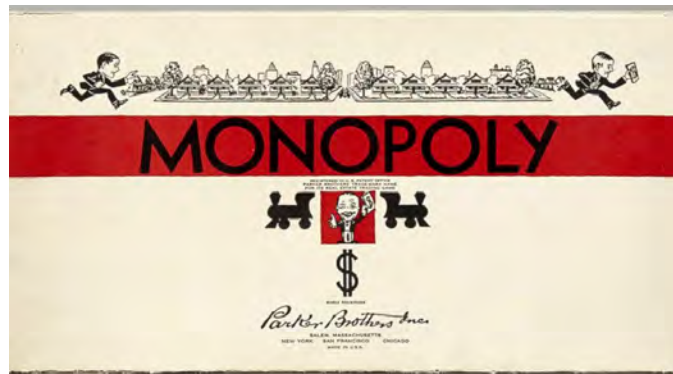
It's a simple choice. But it should not be made simply.

Mr. Reed opens a CABINET underneath the ALTAR. Searching for something. He finds it.

MR. REED (cont'd)

You must reflect deeply. And make a sincere decision.

He places a vintage edition of MONOPOLY onto the Altar:



The girls look at the game, dumbfounded. As Reed crosses the room...

MR. REED (cont'd)

Have you ever played the Parker Brothers game Monopoly?

The girls just nod.

Reed thumbs through a stack of Vinyl Records. He chooses **THE HOLLIES**, and gently sets the needle to play: "The Air That I Breathe"...

MR. REED (cont'd)  
Monopoly is currently published in 47 languages. They sell it in over 114 countries.

Reed crosses the room back to the Altar.

MR. REED (cont'd)  
Have a seat, if you want.

They don't want.

MR. REED (cont'd)  
It's a long game, isn't it?

The girls nod.

MR. REED (cont'd)  
They say over a billion people have played Monopoly, but I'm guessing only a fraction of that billion have actually finished it. Maybe that reminds you of something else ---->

----> Mr. Reed places a **HOLY BIBLE** onto the Altar.

He then opens the Monopoly box and unfolds the game board.

MR. REED (cont'd)  
This is what most people think of when they hear Monopoly, would you agree?

The girls sorta nod.

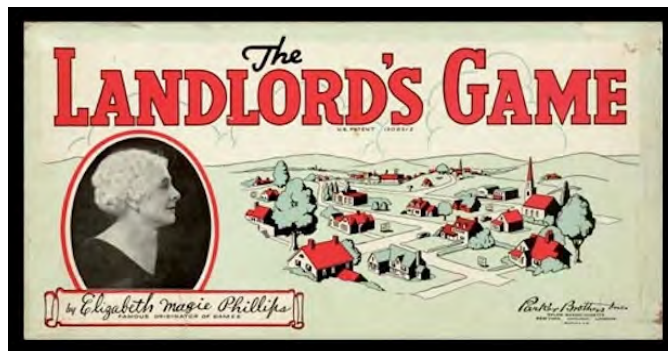
MR. REED (cont'd)  
(points)  
The pewter avatars. The pastel money in various denominations. There's Boardwalk. There's Marvin's Gardens. *Marvin* Gardens, sorry. And the jail, of course.

Reed locks eyes with the girls.

MR. REED (cont'd)  
Now this next part is very important. Have you ever played the 1904 board game called: The Landlord's Game?



Reed reaches under the Altar and unveils another board game:



The girls look at the box. They don't recognize it.

MR. REED (cont'd)  
Have you even heard of it?

The girls shake their head, "No".

MR. REED (cont'd)  
Then you wouldn't know... that you actually have played The Landlord's Game. Because it is nearly identical to Monopoly in every fundamental way.

He opens the box. Moves the pieces around.

MR. REED (cont'd)  
Jail. Free parking. Fares and fees. Penalties for landing on other player's properties. The ultimate goal of forming monopolies in order to force your opponents out of the game.

BARNES  
What do games have to do with us leaving?

MR. REED  
Everything.

Mr. Reed pauses. He didn't like how that sounded. A dark edge peaking through. He clears his throat.

MR. REED (cont'd)

The Landlord's Game was designed by American feminist, Elizabeth Magie, nearly three decades before a heater salesman from Philadelphia renamed it Monopoly, and sold the concept as his own to Parker Brothers in 1935.

Behind the girls something is shifting along the **RED CURTAINED WALL**. It is subtle. Almost imperceptible.

MR. REED (cont'd)

This man, Charles Darrow, became the first millionaire game designer in the history of the world. While Elizabeth Magie died before ever being credited for the impact she had on American culture.

**"The Air that I Breathe"** stops playing. In the now eerily silent room, Mr. Reed says:

MR. REED (cont'd)

I'm talking to you about "iterations". I need you to have a very basic understanding of the concept of "iterating", because I am going to make a very disturbing claim tonight. It is going to make your stomach sink a little. And your heart beat faster. I know before I state this claim how it will make you feel. It will make you sick. It might even make you want to die.

Mr. Reed crosses the room. Resets the record needle, and plays **"The Air that I Breathe"** from the beginning.

MR. REED (cont'd)

Have you heard this song before?

PAXTON

You just played it.

MR. REED

(I mean:)

Before tonight?

BARNES & PAXTON

No.

MR. REED

I disagree. I think that you have heard this song many times before. We'll come back to that in a moment.

For attentive viewers, it is now unmistakable, the RED CURTAIN on the far wall behind the girls is SLOWLY RISING.

MR. REED (cont'd)

You are monotheistic?

BARNES

Monothe--? Yes.

MR. REED

You believe in one omni-present God, correct?

BARNES

We believe in Heavenly Father, yes.

MR. REED

A God that is all-knowing, all-powerful? A God that supernaturally intervenes in our lives?

BARNES & PAXTON

Yes.

MR. REED

There are three major monotheistic religions.

Mr. Reed unfolds a banner with three symbols.



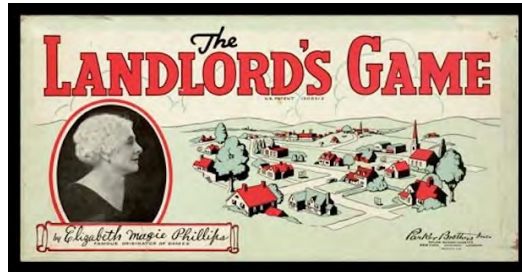
He drapes the banner across the Altar. Then rotates the Altar ninety degrees.

MR. REED (cont'd)

Judaism. Christianity. And Islam. I call them: "The Big Three".

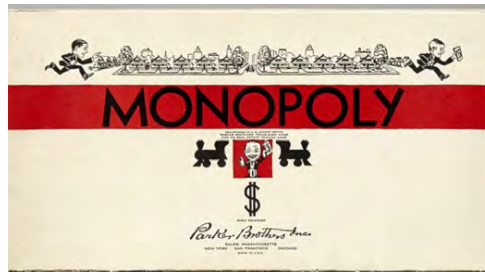
Mr. Reed retrieves a hard bound copy of **THE TORAH** from the bookshelf. He organizes it next to the Star of David and The Landlord's Game.

MR. REED (cont'd)  
Judaism, i.e. "The Original Edition":



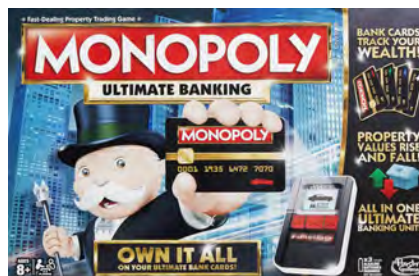
Mr. Reed slides the HOLY BIBLE next to the Latin Cross and Monopoly box.

MR. REED (cont'd)  
Christianity, i.e. "The Most Popular Edition":



Mr. Reed retrieves a hard bound copy of **THE KORAN** from the bookshelf. He organizes it next to the Star & Crescent.

MR. REED (cont'd)  
Islam, i.e. "The Newer, Second Most Popular Edition":



Mr. Reed reaches his hand out to the girls.

MR. REED (cont'd)  
May I see your Book of Mormon?

The girls look at each other.

MR. REED (cont'd)  
I will give it back.

Paxton slowly crosses the room. Each step she takes towards Reed is terrifying. She notices something out of the corner of her eye. There's a stack of mail on one of the pews. She sees:

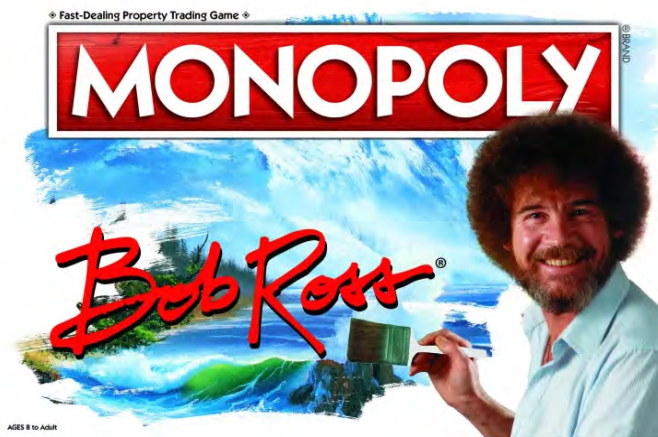
### A LETTER OPENER

It looks sharp.

Paxton continues walking to Reed. Her nervous hands give him the book.

MR. REED (cont'd)  
And then 800 years later, this...

Mr. Reed reveals one final board game and places it onto the altar with the BOOK OF MORMON:



MR. REED (cont'd)  
Mormonism, i.e. "The zany regional spin-off edition".

Paxton steps back towards Barnes.

MR. REED (cont'd)  
These are all iterations of the same source material. All conceive of God to be a transcendent creator and the genesis of moral law.  
(MORE)

MR. REED (cont'd)

These texts feature many of the same histories and characters, but are presented with alternating meanings and perspectives.

Mr. Reed points at the record player:

MR. REED (cont'd)

And so, no, I can't ignore the fact that you sit here and tell me you've never heard "The Air That I Breathe" by the Hollies, when I know that you've heard "Creep" by Radiohead...

The girls think. Shake their head, "No".

MR. REED (cont'd)

(sings)

"I'm a creeeeeeeeep! I'm a weeeeirddooooooooo!"

The girls register some recognition.

MR. REED (cont'd)

(sings)

"What the hell am I doing hereeeee?"

(says)

These are things you are thinking right now. But they are also lyrics you recognize?

The girls nod, they actually do know it.

MR. REED (cont'd)

The Hollies filed a plagiarism lawsuit against Radiohead which they later settled by proving the melody and rhythm of "The Air That I Breathe" appears in "Creep". How old are you? Nineteen? Twenty?

The girls nod.

MR. REED (cont'd)

Then you might know Lana Del Rey. Who remarkably was sued by Radiohead, for plagiarizing "Creep" with her 2017 song "Get Free".

Is Reed schizophrenic or genius...

MR. REED (cont'd)

Iterations. Over time. Diluting the message. Obscuring the original.

Reed kneels down at the ALTAR. He lights the two CANDLES on either end of his board game display.

MR. REED (cont'd)

Judaism is the OG monotheistic religion. It should, by a wide margin, have the most practicing members. And yet... it only makes up .2% of the world's population. Why is that?

(points to Landlord's Game)

Why is the original less popular than the iteration? Is it any less true than the others?

BARNES

Are we talking about religion? Or board games? Or music?

MR. REED

Yes.

The girls don't know how to respond to that. So Reed continues.

MR. REED (cont'd)

They have the smallest numbers because they don't advertise. They don't have people like you, knocking on doors, selling a better life, a better board game, a better song.

The girls react.

MR. REED (cont'd)

Have you thought about that? How missionaries are just salespeople for an organization? The product you are selling is an idea. You knock on my door and sell. Maybe I buy, maybe I don't buy. Those are the rules of engagement, when I invite you into my home. We are negotiating a transaction of ideologies. And what I'm trying to say, tonight, is that I have an idea that I would like to sell to you.

Reed moves behind the LECTERN, as if mass is finally in session.

MR. REED (cont'd)

I am going to present my claim to you now. Are you ready to receive it?

The girls nod.

**EXT. APPLE STREET - NIGHT**

Dangerous winds knock over city trash bins and storefront signage. There's a blinding wintry mix of snow and rain in the sky. The streets are nearly empty.

The only person braving the storm is ELDER KENNEDY. We TRACK with him as he fumbles with his scarf.

**EXT. OAK POINT RESIDENCE - NIGHT**

Elder Kennedy stands in the doorway of a quaint one-story, speaking with a LOVELY COUPLE.

LOVELY COUPLE

No, never stopped by.

ELDER KENNEDY

Have you been home all day? Maybe they missed you earlier?

LOVELY COUPLE

The little one's under the weather, so I've been here... never heard the doorbell or anything.

**INT. REED'S HOUSE, LIBRARY - NIGHT**

Reed stares down the girls from behind the lectern.

MR. REED

My argument is that the holy texts before us are just mythological iterations of stories primitive people told each other for centuries, in order to cope with sickness, and death, and a cruel world that modern science could not yet explain. They are not real or true in any literal sense.

(MORE)



MR. REED (cont'd)

They are only a conduit to a more ancient truth.

Reed steps down from the lectern and crosses the room. He passes the girls on his way to the BACK WALL...

MR. REED (cont'd)

Over a century of exhaustive archaeological investigation has yielded no historical evidence to prove Abraham's existence, the forefather of The Big 3. Every contemporary scientific expert regards the patriarchal age entirely as a literary construct.

Now that the red curtain is up, the back wall looks completely different. There is an overwhelming amount of ANCIENT ARTWORK depicting various POLYTHEISTIC GODS. The art covers the entirety of the wall.

MR. REED (cont'd)

There is no hieroglyphic evidence that Hebrews were ever enslaved in Egypt, nor are there paintings that record Moses as a credible historical figure. Just as there is no ancient papyrus that substantiates the virgin birth of Anakin Skywalker, the Chosen One, born with more Midichlorians than Master Yoda.

BARNES

But there is evidence that supports the existence of Jesus of Nazareth. Mentioned by both Jewish and Roman historians --

MR. REED

I agree. This is true.

BARNES

-- within decades of his life. It is historically accepted that Jesus lived and died.

MR. REED

It doesn't matter if Jesus lived and died. It matters if Jesus died and *lived*.

This line hurts. Barnes knows he's right.

MR. REED (cont'd)

For which there is no evidence. I would argue if Jesus the man is real, then Jesus the God is an ideological construct that can be debunked in mere moments using this wall of ancient artwork. Watch this...

The girls take it all in.

MR. REED (cont'd)

The story of a savior, who was born of a virgin, that could perform miracles, and was supernaturally resurrected, was a very popular story in the Mediterranean for at least a thousand years before Jesus was born on Christmas morning in the manger. You could say it was the Star Wars of its time.

Reed points to a small collection of art near the floor.

MR. REED (cont'd)

There is Mithras, a Persian God, who predates Jesus by 400 years.



MR. REED (cont'd)

Born December 25th. Performed miracles. Marked with the sign of the cross. Resurrected on the 3rd day.

Reed crosses the back wall and points to another collection.

## MR. REED

There is Horus, the Egyptian God,  
who predates Mithras by 2,000  
years.



## MR. REED (cont'd)

Born to a virgin mother. Baptized  
in a river. Healed the sick. Cast  
out demons. Walked on water. Was  
crucified. Had 12 disciples. And  
was resurrected on the 3rd day.

Reed points to another collection of art.

## MR. REED (cont'd)

There is Krishna, the Hindu God,  
who predates Christ by 3,000 years.



## MR. REED (cont'd)

A carpenter who was born to a  
virgin mother. Baptized in a river.  
Tempted by demons. Performed  
miracles. Rose from the dead and  
ascended into heaven.

(MORE)

MR. REED (cont'd)

Even the word Christ comes from  
Christos or Krsta, the Greek  
version of the word Krishna.

Reed passes the girls on his way back to the lectern. Paxton is reeling. Barnes has taken damage, but is also intrigued.

MR. REED (cont'd)

This artwork depicts a dozen gods that were born on December 25th, all of whom predate the existence of Jesus. It is impossible to ignore the influence of one narrative upon another. Just as it is impossible to ignore that these stories iterate into Star Wars: Episode 1: The Phantom Menace. Can you imagine thousands of years from now people accepting Jar Jar as historical canon?

PAXTON

Beg your pardon?

MR. REED

Jar Jar Binks.

They're too young for the Jar Jar reference.

MR. REED (cont'd)

Never mind.

He stops at the altar. Inspects the lit CANDLES closely. Observes that one of them is FLICKERING uncontrollably. His eyes move from the flame to the girls. As if there's some eerie correlation he is contemplating in his mind.

MR. REED (cont'd)

It is all terrifying. Isn't it?  
This is all scary to me. I am  
scared, speaking it out loud.

Reed walks to the **PURPLE DOOR**. He scribbles something on the door in large letters with a GREASE PEN:

**BELIEF**

He looks to the girls.

MR. REED (cont'd)

If God is real, and he's watching us when we masturbate, and has such a fragile ego that he only helps us when we beg him, and flatter him with praise, and he hates gay people for being who he made them to be... then that is terrifying.

Reed walks to the **YELLOW DOOR** and writes:

**DISBELIEF**

Reed points at the word.

MR. REED (cont'd)

If there is no God, and we're just horny, microscopic ants, floating on a rock through space, with no divine purpose, and no reasonable hope to achieve eternal life... then that is also terrifying.

Reed goes back to the candles. One of them is still flickering. The other is normal. He blows out the normal candle. Sets the FLICKERING CANDLE on the floor.

He flips through some RESEARCH. Finds a quote he's looking for.

MR. REED (cont'd)

(reading)

"Either the Church is true, or it is a fraud. There is no middle ground. It is the church and kingdom of God, or it is nothing."

(looks up)

Do you agree with that?

No response.

MR. REED (cont'd)

This is Gordon B. Hinckley, the 15th President of your church. Do you agree with him?

PAXTON

Yes.

BARNES

(a beat slower)

Yes.

MR. REED

It is either all true. Or none of it is true.

BARNES & PAXTON

Yes.

MR. REED

Then I want you to choose which door to go through based on your faith.

The girls look at the doors.

BARNES

I don't understand.

MR. REED

How you respond to my argument should determine which door you take.

PAXTON

Are you asking us... for us to deliberate our belief in the church?

BARNES

Is that a factor which corresponds to us going home?

MR. REED

I am asking you to choose between BELIEF, and DISBELIEF.

Reed points at the two DOORS. The options look like this:

**YELLOW DOOR**

**BELIEF**

**PURPLE DOOR**

**DISBELIEF**

MR. REED (cont'd)

My claim is that all 10,000 verifiable religions that exist worldwide right now are as artificial as the symbolic church you are currently standing in. It is farce. There's nothing holy here. These religious texts are just ornaments --

-- REED FLIPS OVER THE ALTAR. All the religious texts and monopoly games go CRASHING to the ground.

The girls flinch.

There's a silent beat before...

Barnes crosses the room. Kneels down near the fallen altar.

She picks up the religious books one by one. Handling each with reverence. She sets them carefully on a pew near the **LETTER OPENER** as she asks:

BARNES

What happens, then?

MR. REED

What happens?

BARNES

What happens if we choose the wrong door?

MR. REED

There is no wrong door.

BARNES

I want to know what's going to happen to us. Before we choose.

MR. REED

How can I even begin to answer that, if it hasn't happened yet.

Paxton's heard enough. She approaches the **PURPLE/DISBELIEF** DOOR.

PAXTON

Wow, Mr. Reed, you've introduced some very... *interesting*... points. I think we can admit that you are a very smart man, and that we still have a lot to learn. So with that, I will say, I would like to agree that you're right, you've... convinced... us. And we would like to leave through the disbelief door and go home now.

Mr. Reed doesn't respond.

PAXTON (cont'd)

Ready, Sister Barnes?

Barnes approaches the **YELLOW/BELIEF** DOOR, opposite the one her companion is standing at.

PAXTON (cont'd)

Sister?

Barnes stares at the door. Really considering it.

PAXTON (cont'd)

Sister Barnes, I think we should listen to our super neat, thoughtful host, and choose the right door.

Barnes isn't listening.

PAXTON (cont'd)

You know? "Choose the right"! Like they taught us in Primary.

BARNES

Doesn't matter what you say to him.

PAXTON

What?

BARNES

He's not gonna let us go just because we admit he's right.

Barnes closes her eyes, upset with herself.

PAXTON

Let's just get out of here while our host is being gracious enough to let us leave.

BARNES

I don't see how we're supposed to leave.

PAXTON

We open a door and leave.

Barnes glances back at Reed.

BARNES

But both doors lead to the same place, don't they?

Reed doesn't react.

Barnes looks to Paxton.



BARNES (cont'd)

When you shined the phone down the stairs, I saw the faintest hint of light contamination at the base of my doorway. What if the basement doors are connected?

(beat)

What if it doesn't matter which one we choose?

Barnes is getting emotional, but trying to hide it.

BARNES (cont'd)

I think we're being studied. I think he wants to learn something about us, based on which door we open.

(to Reed)

Is that the game?

(to Paxton)

Someone scratches their neck and he's watching. We say the wrong thing and he stumbles on his words. A candle flame flickers, and it captivates his attention like he's seen a ghost.

Barnes looks at Reed. Her eyes narrow.

BARNES (cont'd)

What have you been looking for?

Reed says nothing.

BARNES (cont'd)

What have you *found*?

Now both girls are studying Reed's reaction.

BARNES (cont'd)

If I'm right. And the doors both lead to the same place. Then the only thing that matters right now, to you, is what we *actually* believe.

Reed is inscrutable.

BARNES (cont'd)

And because I think your rhetoric is thin, and your garage sale board game metaphor is kind of offensive --

(by the way)

(MORE)

BARNES (cont'd)

-- I mean, you asked why Judaism only makes up .2% of the world's population, but didn't even pause for the Holocaust? You make no acknowledgement of the religious persecution Jewish people have faced. You just use it as a setup to a punchline about missionaries. Then skip over the fact that none of this addresses Islam, as Muslims don't believe Christ was even resurrected. And then you point out all the similarities these mythological gods have with Jesus, but breeze over the many *glaring* differences?

(points)

One of these guys has a freaking *BIRD HEAD*.

HARD CUT TO:



Barnes looks back at the two doors and shrugs.

BARNES (cont'd)

I don't think my point of view fits into BELIEF or DISBELIEF. There is an entire spectrum that your game is neglecting. So it doesn't matter what I believe, does it?

(to Paxton)

Sister Paxton, do you still believe in God?

Paxton looks caught between being honest and trying not to get murdered.

PAXTON

(comes clean)

Yup.

BARNES

Then let's leave through here.

(indicating **YELLOW/BELIEF**)

Let's be honest and sincere, and  
let God decide what happens next.

Paxton is unsure. But Reed is not saying anything. And she'd rather not offend God, you know, just to be safe.

Paxton slowly crosses over to Barnes. The girls stand shoulder to shoulder in front of the **YELLOW/BELIEF** DOOR.

Barnes reaches for the HANDLE.

The door opens.

There's that concrete STAIRCASE again.

And the PITCH BLACK basement.

PAXTON

Okay, we're leaving now. Thank you  
for all of your mentorship. Thank  
you for letting us go home.

The girls begin their descent.

**INT. STAIRWELL - NIGHT**

They get about halfway down when Reed eclipses the light at the top of the stairs behind them.

The girls turn.

He looks down on them in eerie silhouette.

PAXTON

Are you coming too?

Reed does not answer. He just watches. Rainwater starts to drip from the ceiling.

The girls turn and keep descending.

Darker and darker. Until...

REED CLOSES THE DOOR.

SENDING US TO PITCH BLACK.

PAXTON SHRIEKS.

WE HEAR THE DOOR LOCK UPSTAIRS.

AND THEN --

A LIGHT TURNS ON.

Barnes is using their phone as a FLASHLIGHT.

The girls confer. Both frightened.

BARNES

It's okay. One step at a time.  
We'll go slow.

They forge ahead.

When they finally reach the bottom of the stairs, they encounter a closed YELLOW DOOR. They push through and enter --

**INT. BASEMENT - NIGHT**

-- the BASEMENT.

IT IS ENTIRELY EMPTY. JUST A MOLDY CINDER BRICK ROOM. With a single CARD TABLE and FOLDING CHAIR in the center.

The room is nearly pitch black, lit only by an ominous shaft of moonlight, coming through a cracked ceiling skylight. The skylight rattles from hail and rain. Water dripping through the seams. Collecting on the card table below. The ceiling is unusually high for a basement. If it wasn't for the skylight, the girls wouldn't know how tall it actually is.

Paxton notices a PURPLE DOOR on the wall adjacent to the yellow one they just stepped through. They are a mirror image of the library doors up above. Yellow and Purple.

PAXTON

You were right...

Paxton tries the purple door, but of course it is LOCKED.

PAXTON (cont'd)

...all doors lead to Rome.

They look around. It's very hard to see in the dark, but it seems pretty clear there is no exit out of the house.

PAXTON (cont'd)

Sister Barnes... there's nothing.  
There's no... it's all blocked  
off... it's all?!

Paxton can't finish her thought. She's hyperventilating. Barnes gives her a big hug. Holds her.

PAXTON (cont'd)  
(crying)  
Heavenly Father, please save us,  
please...

BARNES  
...it's okay, it's okay...

PAXTON  
...we should've went home it's my  
fault we stayed...

BARNES  
...we didn't have a choice. This  
entire encounter has been rigged to  
control us. None of this is our  
fault.

PAXTON  
We made him angry. That's why we're  
still here, we made him --

BARNES  
No, that's wrong. I think we're  
still alive because we've  
challenged him.

PAXTON  
Why?

BARNES  
I don't know, I just have a  
feeling. This man has a genius  
level IQ. I'm scared of how smart  
he is. It's likely he's thought of  
every possible scenario. He's going  
to be ten steps ahead of us. Which  
means from here on out... we must  
play our hand perfectly.

PAXTON  
We don't have a hand.

BARNES  
We'll make one.

Barnes continues searching for a tool, or rock, or anything in the corners of the room. Searching every inch with the flashlight.

BARNES (cont'd)

From now on, if he lands a philosophical point that we don't agree with, we challenge him. Make him think. He doesn't have to steamroll us. We might not be a physical threat, but we can be an intellectual one.

PAXTON

What do you think he wants?

Barnes is thinking.

BARNES

A debate?

PAXTON

Is he gonna keep us here forever?

BARNES

He can't. He's too smart.

Barnes pulls up a FLOOR BOARD up to reveal a sharp nail. She touches the nail. Makes a mental note of it. Puts it back.

BARNES (cont'd)

He knows an Elder will check on us. And his address is in the church database. Which he would be prepared for, because he gave it to them to lure us here.

PAXTON

So...

BARNES

So, he knows time is against him. Which means he'll have to let us go...

(beat)

Or kill us.

PAXTON

I don't think he's gonna let us go.

They hear something.

BARNES

He's coming.

Barnes rushes over to Paxton.

BARNES (cont'd)

Listen to me.

She reveals the LETTER OPENER and puts it in Paxton's COAT POCKET. She must've stolen it when Reed wasn't looking.

BARNES (cont'd)

If anything happens. You take this and stab him in the neck. Okay?

PAXTON

No no no you

BARNES

In the neck. As hard and as fast as you can. It has to be you. He's watching me too closely. He won't expect you to do it.

PAXTON

No sister

BARNES

Let's have a code word. Uh, if I say "**Magic Underwear**". It means you stab.

PAXTON

No no

BARNES

Here he comes.

They listen. The heavy FOOTFALLS are getting closer and closer.

PAXTON

Hide the phone.

Barnes nods and turns OFF the flashlight. The girls wait in near total DARKNESS.

They hear the purple door UNLOCK.

We see the faintest silhouette of the door open. The outline of a figure can barely be seen stepping through.

There is a SILENT pause.

BARNES

Mr. Reed?

The figure shuffles forward. Eerily moving one step at a time, with pained, exasperated breaths. It doesn't sound like Reed.

PAXTON  
Who's there?

As the figure gets closer, the girls begin to notice the slight wheeze of a breathing impediment. And the smell of rotting cabbage.

The figure appears to be holding something in their hands...

BARNES  
Mrs. Reed?  
(beat)  
Is that you....?

**MRS. REED is skeletal thin and tall. Taller than Reed. Her skin is wrinkled and blotted. Infected? She wears the physical conditions of a 200 year old human on the body of a middle aged woman. A PURPLE VEIL hides her sunken complexion. Her brittle hands carry what appears to be BLUEBERRY PIE...**

PAXTON  
Mrs. Reed? Can we help you?

MRS. REED painstakingly sets the BLUEBERRY PIE onto the card table. She pauses a moment. Out of breath. The girls watch in horror as Mrs. Reed moves over to the far wall. She never utters a word. Just the unnerving rasp of her BREATHING.

Paxton goes to help, but Barnes stops her.

BARNES  
Wait.

Mrs. Reed lowers herself onto the floor. She moans in pain, as she settles achingly onto the back of her calves. Leaning forward. Her spine clicks as she folds into Child's Pose. Her arms fan out backwards into an unorthodox PRAYER POSITION...

...and now she silently **PRAYS.**

The girls watch, mouths agape. They don't know what to say or do.

MR. REED (O.S.)  
No one ever chose the yellow door before.

The girls startle. They search the shadows for Mr. Reed.



PAXTON

We don't see you Mr. Reed...? Are you there?

MR. REED (O.S.)

Come closer, I can't hear you.

BARNES

What's happening to her?

MR. REED (O.S.)

Follow my voice.

The basement is too dark. They cannot see Mr. Reed.

MR. REED (O.S.) (cont'd)

Are you old enough to remember when taking a "selfie" was considered a humiliating display of insecurity?

They follow Reed's disembodied VOICE to a SPEAKING TUBE that protrudes from the east wall.

A speaking tube is exactly what it sounds like: a narrow pipe made of galvanized metal that extends from one spot in the house to another, allowing people to communicate as if they were in the same room together.

BARNES

Where are you?

#### **INT. STUDY - NIGHT**

Find Mr. Reed in a small STUDY we haven't seen before. The other end of the SPEAKING TUBE protrudes near his mouth.

MR. REED

There was this five second blip, circa 2011, where you wouldn't be caught dead posting a selfie to your social media page.

Reed speaks solemnly as he moves two cardboard **FIGURES** through a **3/4 SCALE MODEL OF HIS HOUSE**.

He then makes a couple notes in a **POCKET JOURNAL**.

MR. REED (cont'd)

The term "selfie" literally didn't exist yet, because the behavior of painstakingly turning a camera around and blindly snapping a picture of your own stupid face was so unconscionable, only a sociopath would consider doing it.

(beat)

You remember this period?

**INT. BASEMENT - NIGHT**

The girls acknowledge as their minds race.

PAXTON

I don't know, yes.

MR. REED (O.S.)

And then overnight, a paradigm shift occurred.

Barnes looks around. Sees the frail Mrs. Reed still praying.

Her gaze moves to the purple door that Mrs. Reed entered through. The door is still open...

MR. REED (O.S.) (cont'd)

Suddenly it became socially acceptable to not only take pictures of your own stupid face and post them online - but to ONLY take pictures of your own stupid face and post them online.

Paxton looks to Barnes.

Barnes puts a raised finger to her lips, "Shhh". Then gestures with her hands as if to say:

"Stay here. I'll be right back."

Paxton protests, but Barnes is already on her way.

MR. REED (O.S.) (cont'd)

Phones started being manufactured to include a selfie lens on the front. They even invented a thing called a selfie stick. And people used this device unironically!

Barnes tiptoes across the room. Narrowly passes Mrs. Reed.

It is a suspenseful moment. The old woman waits like a proximity mine that could explode with the faintest breeze.

**INT. STAIRWELL - NIGHT**

Barnes enters the stairwell. It leads up to the PURPLE DOOR. We already knew that.

What we didn't know... is there is another **DOOR** that bisects this staircase halfway up.

MR. REED (O.S.)

It's because the sociopaths, the only ones who didn't feel shame about binge-posting photos of themselves online, became what we now call influencers...

Barnes tries to open this door. It is of course LOCKED. She tries the purple door at the top of the stairwell next. It too, is of course, LOCKED.

MR. REED (O.S.) (cont'd)

...i.e. users with millions of followers (which they amassed largely thanks to an algorithm that rewards controversy).

Barnes lowers herself to the floor. Peers beneath the purple door at the top of the stairs. Looking back into the **LIBRARY**.

The room is now EMPTY. Her eyes dart around. Looking for anything to help their situation.

She spots a smattering of MATCHES on the floor near the knocked over altar. The ones used by Reed to light the candles.

They appear too far away for her to reach.

MR. REED (O.S.) (cont'd)

The sociopaths influenced our collective culture to change all of our behavior over night. And it made me realize...

**INT. STUDY - NIGHT**

Back with Reed as he concludes his point:

MR. REED

We don't worship people who challenge us to be our best. We worship people who give us permission to be our worst.

Reed slides the FIGURES from the living room of the MODEL HOUSE, down into the basement.

The figures loosely resemble Barnes & Paxton, in that they are female, and appear to be proxies for their current position in the house. It gives one the undeniable feeling that this encounter has been plotted to a very precise degree.

**INT. BASEMENT - NIGHT**

Barnes rejoins Paxton near the speaking tube.

MR. REED (O.S.)

I had to be sure before I introduced you to her.

BARNES

Sure about what?

MR. REED (O.S.)

Don't be scared. This is a beautiful moment. You are in the presence of a living Prophet of God.

CLOSE ON the **PROPHET** (fka Mrs. Reed) as she ominously breathes in and out, like a cancer patient on dialysis, choking on whispered breaths. Alone in the corner of the room.

MR. REED (O.S.) (cont'd)

Pay respect, if you feel compelled. You may worship. You may kneel, and acknowledge her. She can feel your spirit.

BARNES

Mr. Reed --

The girls are caught between obeying Reed and their instinct to stay far away from the woman.

MR. REED (O.S.)

Are you afraid to die?

In this moment we hear a CLICK CLICK.

MR. REED (O.S.) (cont'd)  
 Answer truthfully. Are you afraid  
 to die?

BARNES & PAXTON  
 Yes.

CLICK CLICK.

MR. REED (O.S.)  
 Our fear of death is what makes us  
 gullible to false prophets. Don't  
 be scared.

It is the eerie sound of the Prophet's back, as she raises  
 herself up out of Child's Pose.

MR. REED (O.S.) (cont'd)  
 What if I told you that death is a  
 warm bath.

The Prophet painfully stands to her feet. The girls watch in  
 terror as she drags herself over to the card table and takes  
 a seat.

MR. REED (O.S.) (cont'd)  
 Something that can be tasted,  
 sampled. Like self serve at  
 Yogurtland.

The Prophet lifts her VEIL and for the first time we see her  
 terrifying complexion in FULL:

**HER EYES ARE MILKY WHITE WITH CATARACTS. SHE HAS NO EYEBROWS.  
 GHOSTLY WISPS OF HAIR HANG FROM HER FOREHEAD. HER SKIN IS A  
 SICKLY BLUE, KRISHNA-ESQUE IN ITS UNUSUAL VIBRANCY. HER JAW  
 HANGS SLACK.**

MR. REED (O.S.) (cont'd)  
 The reason I invited you into my  
 sanctuary, is because I have been  
 shown a Miracle by God.

The Prophet looks at the BLUEBERRY PIE before her.

Her hand trembles as her fingers claw into the top crust of  
 the pie.

MR. REED (O.S.) (cont'd)  
 I believe this miracle is proof  
 that every known religion is  
 demonstrably false, and merely an  
 ancient echo of something true.

The Prophet painstakingly clenches her fist, strangling a clump of blue gooey pie.

MR. REED (O.S.) (cont'd)  
I need a witness. You. To verify  
the miracle is real.

The Prophet raises her fistful of pie and shoves it unceremoniously into her slack mouth.

She then goes for another fistful of pie.

MR. REED (O.S.) (cont'd)  
I don't know you. We have never met  
before today. You believe a  
religion that I find ridiculous.  
And I imagine that you think I am  
utterly insane. Which means...  
(beat)  
...if you witness a miracle  
tonight, then we will both know  
that what I've found is REAL.

Pie goo drips from the Prophet's mouth as she continues to eat.

MR. REED (O.S.) (cont'd)  
Isn't that what we're all searching  
for? A divine confirmation?

PUSH IN ON Sister Paxton. Her own words from the opening.

MR. REED (O.S.) (cont'd)  
A testimony?

The Prophet stops eating. Something is wrong.

#### **INT. STUDY - NIGHT**

Reed fashions a new **FIGURE** out of cardboard using a **BOX CUTTER**. He places this one outside the front door of the MODEL HOUSE.

MR. REED  
Our family recipe for blueberry pie  
is an old one. The ingredients  
include butter, flour, cornstarch,  
sugar, lemon, tetrodotoxins, and  
nightshade.

**INT. BASEMENT - NIGHT**

The Prophet sits motionless. Drooling pie. Her eyes begin to roll back into her head.

MR. REED (O.S.)  
In a few moments, the Prophet will  
be dead from consuming the pie.

The girls watch, depleted. They have no idea what to do or not do. There is no fucking church manual for this scenario.

MR. REED (O.S.) (cont'd)  
And then, you will witness a  
miracle...  
(beat)  
By the grace of God. She will be  
resurrected. Back to life.

THE PROPHET DROPS DEAD FACE FIRST INTO THE PIE.

The girls flinch.

Then stare.

In horror.

There's a silent moment before...

MR. REED (O.S.) (cont'd)  
I want you to acknowledge that I am  
not in the room. That I am not  
touching or treating our Prophet in  
any way.

The girls say nothing.

MR. REED (O.S.) (cont'd)  
Verbally acknowledge.

The girls say nothing.

MR. REED (O.S.) (cont'd)  
ACKNOWLEDGE!

BARNES & PAXTON  
Yes.

MR. REED (O.S.)  
Acknowledge that it is just you and  
the Prophet alone together.

BARNES & PAXTON  
Yes.

MR. REED (O.S.)  
Feel her pulse. Both of you.

The girls don't move.

MR. REED (O.S.) (cont'd)  
I want you to feel her pulse. RIGHT  
NOW.

The girls nervously trek towards the card table.

MR. REED (O.S.) (cont'd)  
Acknowledge that her heart has  
stopped pumping. Do you know how?

Barnes touches the Prophet's wrist. Her fingers checking the  
dead pulse on the woman's disgusting skin.

Barnes glances at Paxton. Her terrified eyes confirm there is  
no pulse.

MR. REED (O.S.) (cont'd)  
Index and middle finger on the side  
of the neck, in the soft hollow  
area beside the windpipe.

Barnes then touches the woman's neck. Still no heartbeat.

MR. REED (O.S.) (cont'd)  
Both of you.

Paxton touches the Prophet's wrist. No pulse.

She goes for the neck.

Peels back the woman's dead grey hair.

Reaches out her finger tips.

Touches her skin --

THE PROPHET JERKS! PAXTON SCREAMS!

PAXTON  
She moved!

The Prophet falls back into the pie.

MR. REED (O.S.)  
A catalytic spasm.

PAXTON  
She's alive...



MR. REED (O.S.)  
No just chemicals being released  
into her body.

Paxton recovers.

MR. REED (O.S.) (cont'd)  
Acknowledge there's no pulse.

Paxton reaches for the woman's neck once more.

MR. REED (O.S.) (cont'd)  
Acknowledge...

BARNES & PAXTON  
No pulse.

MR. REED (O.S.)  
Acknowledge that she is no longer  
breathing.

The girls look at each other.

MR. REED (O.S.) (cont'd)  
Place your hand over her mouth.

Paxton places her hand in front of the Prophet's mouth. Feels  
nothing.

MR. REED (O.S.) (cont'd)  
Do you feel a breath? Acknowledge.

PAXTON  
No.

MR. REED (O.S.)  
Both of you.

Barnes does the same.

BARNES  
No.

MR. REED (O.S.)  
Is she dead?

BARNES & PAXTON  
(in tears)  
Yes.

Nothing happens.

MR. REED (O.S.)  
Just a moment.

The girls back away from the Prophet. Their eyes fixed on the dead woman.

MR. REED (O.S.) (cont'd)  
Only a moment longer.

Nothing happens.

MR. REED (O.S.) (cont'd)  
You will witness a resurrection.

Nothing happens. We hang on a LONG SILENT SHOT of the dead Prophet. It is terrifying because it feels like ANYTHING could happen.

MR. REED (O.S.) (cont'd)  
Is she stirring?

BARNES & PAXTON  
No.

MR. REED (O.S.)  
She will return. And she will tell us what she saw in the afterlife. Is she moving yet?

BARNES & PAXTON  
No. Not yet.

MR. REED (O.S.)  
Then it will only be a moment longer.

Nothing happens.

MR. REED (O.S.) (cont'd)  
I have been witness to the death and resurrection of the Prophet seven times. Tonight will be the eighth.

Nothing happens.

MR. REED (O.S.) (cont'd)  
It will be the first with an audience.

Nothing happens.

And it's starting to feel like nothing is *going* to happen.

It's starting to feel like... the girls just witnessed a fucked up murder. Or was it a suicide? Is it worse if she stays dead? Or if she comes back to life?

These are the questions racing through the girls' minds as Mr. Reed asks once more:

MR. REED (O.S.) (cont'd)  
Has the Prophet moved?

BARNES & PAXTON  
No, she has not.

MR. REED (O.S.)  
In a moment.

Nothing happens.

..

...

Nothing happens.

..

...

Nothing happens.

..

...

**DING-DONG-----!**

The girls look at each other.

**INT. STUDY - NIGHT**

Reed turns. Listening...

**DING-DONG-----!**

Hears it again. The DOORBELL. Someone's here.

**INT. BASEMENT - NIGHT**

Back with the girls as they realize...

BARNES & PAXTON  
The Elder?

FOOTSTEPS move along the ceiling. The sound of Reed going to answer the door.

Barnes and Paxton exchange looks.

Their eyes silently communicating:

"Is this our chance?"

They hear a NOISE in the nearby stairwell. Sounded like a door OPENING.

**INT. STAIRWELL - NIGHT**

The girls enter the stairwell in time to see the purple door CLOSE and LOCK.

Reed was just here.

The girls scurry up the stairs.

Barnes looks under the purple door and sees...

REED WALKING ACROSS THE LIBRARY, AWAY FROM US, TO THE FRONT OF THE HOUSE.

BARNES  
(hushed)  
We scream.

PAXTON  
(hushed)  
We scream?

BARNES  
(hushed)  
But not until he opens the front door.

**INT. HALLWAY - NIGHT**

Reed stops, like catching himself in the midst of making a mistake. It's unlikely he heard Paxton and Barnes - but perhaps he's anticipated their next move.

He doubles back to the HEAVY LIBRARY DOOR and closes it --

**INT. STAIRWELL - NIGHT**

The girls see the door swinging shut so BARNES SCREAMS!

**INT. HALLWAY - NIGHT**

...THE DOOR SLAMS SHUT, instantly silencing her scream.

There's no doubt Reed heard them. But he continues toward his front door, unfazed by their attempt.

**INT. FRONT DOOR - NIGHT**

Reed flips a hidden panel on the wall. Reveals a CIRCULAR MECHANICAL TIMER. He winds it backwards, then presses a button and we hear a LOUD CLICK. The deadbolts on the front door unlock.

He swings the door open, revealing ELDER KENNEDY, covered in snow as the storm rages on.

ELDER KENNEDY

Good evening, I don't mean to bother you, but I'm in the neighborhood looking for two young women from my church.

MR. REED

Is everything okay?

ELDER KENNEDY

I'm sure it is, I'm just wondering if they happened to stop by?

MR. REED

I'm sorry to say you're the first house call I've received all day.

ELDER KENNEDY

But you had asked the church for more information.

Mr. Reed pauses, feeling out where Kennedy is going with this.

ELDER KENNEDY (cont'd)

So I imagined, perhaps, they might have still come by.

MR. REED

No, is there another way I can help?

Reed's confidence reveals no lie. Kennedy nods. Swayed almost too easily.

ELDER KENNEDY  
(backtracks)  
I did tell them not to bother you.

MR. REED  
Should we call the police? I hope they're not caught in the storm?

ELDER KENNEDY  
I'm sure they're not far. I appreciate your time.

MR. REED  
Good luck. I mean that.

Reed watches Kennedy step back into the storm. Then closes the door.

**INT. STAIRWELL - NIGHT**

The girls are hoarse from screaming.

BARNES  
They can't hear us.

Barnes' eyes drift back over to those **MATCHES** she saw earlier. She starts to formulate a plan as...

PAXTON  
Did you see this?

Paxton has discovered the DOOR that bisects the stairs. She tries opening it, like Barnes did earlier.

BARNES  
(yes but...)  
...it's locked.

Paxton gets the same result. Still locked.

PAXTON  
This is where he was. This is how we get out.

BARNES  
(come here)  
Help.

Paxton tries the door again. Takes out the LETTER OPENER. Attempts to pick the lock. Fails. She hits the door. Testing the limits of how strong it is. It's strong.

BARNES (cont'd)  
(urgent)  
Come here come here.

Paxton kneels next to Barnes.

BARNES (cont'd)  
Help me pull the rug.

PAXTON  
The what?

BARNES  
Look, the matches.

Paxton sees the MATCHES which are at least fifteen feet away. They sit atop a CARPET RUNNER that extends from the altar to the purple door.

BARNES (cont'd)  
If we pull the rug through the door, the matches will come with.

PAXTON  
For what?

BARNES  
Start a fire. Smoke out the speaking pipe in the basement. Make sure the Elder know we're here.

Paxton gets it. Immediately jumps into action. Pulling the CARPET RUNNER with her fingertips. The closer it gets, the easier it is to pull.

Now they're tugging the carpet hand over hand.

The girls throw an occasional glance over their shoulder. Just to make sure the dead prophet woman isn't creeping up behind them.

She's not.

They've got the RUNNER about halfway under the door when --

**MR. REED COMES BACK.**

THE GIRLS FREEZE.

TERRIFIED THEY'VE BEEN CAUGHT.

REED HEADS RIGHT FOR THEM.

HIS LINE OF SIGHT OBSTRUCTED BY THE PEWS...

## DING-DONG!

THE DOORBELL RINGS AGAIN.

REED STOPS.

ELDER KENNEDY HASN'T GIVEN UP.

HE BACKTRACKS TO THE FRONT DOOR.

THE GIRLS LET OUT A BIG EXHALE.

HE DIDN'T SEE THEM.

### INT. FRONT DOOR - NIGHT

Reed swings the door open. Kennedy stands there once more.

ELDER KENNEDY  
I'm so sorry, but I'd be remiss if  
I didn't ask you one more  
question...

The moment hangs in the air for a beat too long.

And then, Elder Kennedy extends a "RESTORATION BOOKLET".

ELDER KENNEDY (cont'd)  
...I wondered if you had received  
this booklet.

MR. REED  
(takes the booklet)  
I have not, but I will give it a  
look-see.

Elder Kennedy smiles politely. He turns away and we HOLD on him as he begins down the path.

We SLOWLY PUSH CLOSER as he nears the street, getting further away.

We almost expecting at ANY moment, Elder Kennedy could have second thoughts and return...

He momentarily pauses on the sidewalk, letting a car pass...



Then crosses the street, hops onto the curb.

He keeps walking and yet, we know, at ANY moment here - ANY MOMENT - Elder Kennedy is going to turn right around and come back to the house and confront reed and save Paxton and Barnes and--

REED SLAMS THE DOOR SHUT.

There is no salvation.

Kennedy is not coming back.

**INT. STAIRWELL - NIGHT**

THE GIRLS KEEP PULLING THAT RUG UNTIL... THEY HAVE THE MATCHES!

BARNES

Wait here.

PAXTON

What?

Barnes leaves.

Paxton stays watch, looking under the door.

Barnes returns a moment later with the FLOORBOARD THAT HAS A ROW OF NAILS PROTRUDING.

She places it upright on one of the top stairs as a TRAP for Reed.

**INT. BASEMENT - NIGHT**

The girls return to the basement. They pass the dead Prophet. Paxton startles.

PAXTON

She moved.

BARNES

What do you mean?

PAXTON

When we were gone.

BARNES

No she's in the same spot as before.

CLOSE ON the EERILY STILL Prophet. Doesn't seem like she's moved.

PAXTON

She moved.

BARNES

She's not moving at all.

PAXTON

She was face down in the pie. The pie is now half a foot to the side of her head.

Paxton's right. The pie remains are smeared across the table's surface, at least a few inches from the Prophet's lifeless face.

BARNES

You're remembering it wrong.

PAXTON

No I'm not.

BARNES

That's where she was.

PAXTON

It's not.

Barnes continues to the SPEAKING TUBE.

BARNES

Sister, that's not how I remember it, come on! Help!

Barnes strips off her coat to use as kindling. Paxton reluctantly joins. The girls kneel to the floor and lay out the MATCHES.

BARNES (cont'd)

Hold the sleeve up. I'll get it started.

PAXTON

Okay.

Paxton lifts the COAT SLEEVE.

Barnes readies the MATCHES.

She strikes the FIRST MATCH. It doesn't take. She tries a few more times, charring the match head.

PAXTON (cont'd)  
 (hands her a new match)  
 It's dead, try another.

Barnes strikes the SECOND MATCH. Still not igniting.

Paxton glances over her shoulder at the old woman. They are too far away to see her through the dark.

BARNES  
 Focus.

PAXTON  
 Sorry.

Paxton steadies the coat sleeve.

Barnes strikes the THIRD MATCH. It still doesn't take.

BARNES  
 Come on come on...

Barnes strikes the FOURTH MATCH. Still nothing.

PAXTON  
 Try it faster.

Barnes strikes the FIFTH MATCH with more speed.

THERE'S A SPARK --

AND THEN --

FIRE --

Barnes moves the match to the coat sleeve. The sleeve lights up. The faint fiery glow of the coat illuminates something behind them...

**THE GAZE OF A FACE YOU COULDN'T CONJURE IN YOUR WORST NIGHTMARES. THE PROPHET INCHES AWAY FROM THEM. MIRACULOUSLY ALIVE. OR UNDEAD. A GUTTURAL MOAN ESCAPING HER BLUE BLACK LIPS. HER VACANT DARK EYES SLOWLY BLINK.**

Barnes screams. Dropping the FLAMING COAT to the floor.

**THE PROPHET WRETCHES. THEN PUKES BLUEBERRY PIE EVERYWHERE.**

The fire extinguishes upon impact. Sending us back into an airless black as --

The girls recoil.

AND THEN THE PROPHET OPENS HER MOUTH TO SPEAK:

PROPHET  
HuffHuffHuffHuffhhhhhhhhhtttth....

HER VOICE IS DEEP, ANDROGYNOUS. IT REACHES A SOUL PENETRATING REGISTER AS SHE SAYS:

PROPHET (cont'd)  
.....  
...Dark.....  
.....  
.....The conductor.....  
.....  
.....says my name.....  
.....  
...Caro-line.....  
.....  
.....white.....  
.....  
.....clouds.....  
.....  
.....not...heaven.....  
.....  
...They.....  
.....  
.....unplug...my brain.....  
.....  
.....not ready.....  
.....  
.....to go.....  
.....  
.....IT...IS...NOT...REAL.....

The girls are frozen in shock.

A dead woman.

Now alive. Talking.

Before Barnes and Paxton even have time to process --

MR. REED (O.S.)  
-- thank you, Prophet.

The girls turn to see...

Reed crossing the basement. He holds the UPTURNED BOARD WITH NAILS. Nonchalantly tosses it to the ground, then --

Kneels next to the Prophet. Whispers into her ear.

MR. REED (cont'd)

We are grateful for your passage to the other side. Your prophecy will be recorded into our liturgical texts.

He helps the Prophet stand.

MR. REED (cont'd)

Rest. You must be exhausted.

Mr. Reed helps her walk across the basement to the stairs. He WHISPERS something that we cannot hear.

As his back is turned, Barnes tries to light another MATCH. But like before, she struggles to start a fire.

The Prophet climbs the stairs one foot at a time.

She exits through the midpoint door. Reed LOCKS it behind her.

Barnes becomes frantic, trying and failing to light a match.

MR. REED (cont'd)

One of you has been lying.

Reed walks towards the girls.

MR. REED (cont'd)

Since you first got here.

He calmly takes the MATCHES from Barnes.

MR. REED (cont'd)

I can tell by the way fire reacts to you.

He strikes a MATCH with ease. He holds the FLAME near Paxton's face. Then hovers it near Barnes. He studies how the flame reacts. It's too nuanced for us to comprehend any significance.

He blows it out.

MR. REED (cont'd)

One of you has a secret. We'll know soon.

The girls exchange a look. Unsure of themselves.

Reed transcribes the "prophecy" into a pocket notebook.

MR. REED (cont'd)

(as he writes)

For the rest of your days, there will be *before* you watched a woman die and come back to life. And there will be *after*. Books will be written about it. So choose your words carefully as I ask...

(finishes transcription)

What did you witness?

BARNES & PAXTON

...

MR. REED

Tell me what you saw?

PAXTON

How did she...

BARNES

I don't know-no...

MR. REED

Are my findings misguided or are they real? Let's start with that.

BARNES

I don't know...

MR. REED

No, if you didn't see something transcendental, you must tell me...

PAXTON

How did she...

BARNES

Who rang the doorbell?

MR. REED

What did you witness?

BARNES

Was the Elder here?

PAXTON

I saw a woman, that was dead.

MR. REED

(to Barnes)

And you?

BARNES

She was dead, we thought --

MR. REED

If I'm wrong, I need to hear it.  
That's why you're here.

BARNES

-- but do-do you not see --

MR. REED

Did you witness a miracle?

BARNES

-- it's a contrived experiment, we  
are your prisoners. It makes no  
sense for us to have an opinion --

MR. REED

We are prisoners together. You must  
understand by now that any of us  
may leave when we want, but why  
would we *WANT* after what we've  
seen?

PAXTON

I saw it.

Barnes turns to Paxton.

PAXTON (cont'd)

She was dead. She was dead, Sister.  
We checked. There was a corpse.

(beat)

Did you see it too?

BARNES

I saw it, yes, but...

PAXTON

And I heard her... I heard her  
describe what she experienced on  
the other side.

MR. REED

What did you hear?

PAXTON

She said there was a "Conductor"...  
did she mean "Angel"? She said she  
was in limbo, a state between life  
and death. "Not heaven", she said.

Mr. Reed compares with his notes.

MR. REED  
That's right.

PAXTON  
She mentioned something... "an unplugging" of... her "brain"? She had a feeling of disassociation, a feeling that something wasn't real?

MR. REED  
Now you know.

PAXTON  
Now we know?

MR. REED  
Now you know.

PAXTON  
Know?

MR. REED  
I can show you God if you are willing to die.

The girls let the horror of that sink in.

MR. REED (cont'd)  
It can be painless. And it can be temporary. Like the Prophet, you can be brought back.

Reed takes a small step toward the girls.

MR. REED (cont'd)  
It doesn't have to be frightening.

That doesn't resonate with them. He tries another angle.

MR. REED (cont'd)  
Not knowing.  
(beat)  
*Not knowing* is what's frightening. Where do we come from? Why are we here? What is our purpose? The terror of these questions is why religion exists. I can answer these questions for you. I can give you a comfort that no religion in this world is capable of giving you.

There is a SILENCE before...



BARNES  
It all makes sense.

Paxton turns to Barnes, "it does?"

BARNES (cont'd)  
I've been asking myself all  
night...  
(beat)  
"How is he going to kill us?"  
(beat)  
"How is he going to make killing us  
our idea?"

MR. REED  
You're confused.

BARNES  
I know. I can't tell if you're  
playing chess or checkers.

MR. REED  
(odd laugh)  
Monopoly!!! It was right there.

BARNES  
You didn't show us a miracle.

MR. REED  
What did I show you?

BARNES  
You didn't show us a miracle.

MR. REED  
(louder)  
WHAT DID I SHOW YOU?

BARNES  
Not a miracle.

MR. REED  
(yells)  
WHAT DID I SHOW YOU?

BARNES  
A **magic**... trick.

Paxton's ears perk up on the word "**magic**".

The girls share a knowing look.

A hint that the "code word" is on its way.

MR. REED

A magic trick?

BARNES

Do you want to know why we don't  
talk about Taco Bell?

MR. REED

What?

BARNES

I died when I was four years old.  
Ate a Chalupa Supreme that killed  
me.

(beat)

Fifty people were hospitalized from  
an E-Coli outbreak. The kids at  
school called me "Taco Hell",  
because I was clinically dead while  
doctors operated on my kidneys.

Paxton's hand discreetly moves into her coat pocket.

She touches the LETTER OPENER.

BARNES (cont'd)

When I was dead, I saw exactly what  
your Prophet described. A blinding  
white light. Clouds, but not  
heaven. A sense of wanting to  
return. A feeling that my state of  
reality wasn't real.

Paxton takes a deep breath.

Mentally preparing.

BARNES (cont'd)

That wasn't a prophecy, that was a  
near death experience. As common to  
a dead person, as a wet dream to a  
drunk. When the oxygen leaves your  
brain, or your heart stops pumping,  
your mind creates unbelievable  
things.

(beat)

I think you've been keeping this  
woman on the edge of death, in  
order to ask her questions about  
meaningless hallucinations, so that  
you can substantiate your idea of  
what the one true religion really  
is.

Reed moves closer.

MR. REED

Did you know... that when you remember something, you're only remembering the last time you remembered that experience. You're not actually recalling the event. So your memory of dying at Taco Bell isn't of dying, it's of the memory of the memory of the memory of dying. Which is why you're remembering a false correlation to the experience you just witnessed. But *this* is happening right now. It's why you need to pay attention. We're not talking about "a **magic** trick".

BARNES

No, we're talking about  
**"MAGIC UNDE-----"**

A FLASH OF METAL CUTS FRAME.

A SLICE OF SKIN AND THEN...

BLOOD.

BLOOD FALLING.

BLOOD FALLING DOWN.

BLOOD FALLING DOWN SISTER BARNES.

**BLOOD FALLING DOWN SISTER BARNES' NECK FROM A GAPING WOUND.**

REED CATCHES HER AS SHE FALLS.

A **BOX CUTTER** DROPS TO THE GROUND.

PAXTON SCREAMS.

PROCESSING IN REAL TIME AS HER COMPANION IS DYING.

**REED KILLED BARNES BEFORE PAXTON COULD KILL REED.**

MR. REED

Do not be scared!

TIME SEEMS TO SLOW DOWN AS PAXTON'S HEART POUNDS AGAINST HER CHEST.

MR. REED (cont'd)  
 She will rise again! Do not be  
 scared!

**INT. STAIRWELL - NIGHT**

PAXTON RUNS UPSTAIRS TO THE LOCKED MIDPOINT DOOR. SHE BANGS  
 ON IT. SCREAMING.

PAXTON  
 HELP ME! HELP!!!

MR. REED (O.S.)  
 (from the basement)  
 She will come back to us! I  
 promise!

NOW TO THE TOP OF THE STAIRS. THE LOCKED LIVING ROOM DOOR.  
 PAXTON HITS IT AND PUSHES IT.

IT WON'T OPEN.

PAXTON KEEPS HITTING AND SHOVING. NOTHING IS GOING TO STOP  
 HER FROM TRYING TO BREAK IT DOWN.

BUT IT IS FUTILE.

SHE IS TRAPPED WITH A MURDERER.

ALL ALONE NOW.

ALL ALONE.

ALONE.

PAXTON SLIDES TO THE GROUND. WEEPING. IN HYSTERICIS. HER HANDS  
 BLOODIED FROM POUNDING THE DOOR. IT'S SETTING IN...

SHE HAS TWO OPTIONS:

- 1) Give up.
- 2) Stick to the plan. Challenge Reed. Outsmart him.

She tells herself this. Over and over. It runs through her  
 head. It moves through her lips.

PAXTON  
 (to herself)  
 ...challenge him...challenge  
 him...debate...outsmart...

**INT. BASEMENT - NIGHT**

After a long moment of recovery, Paxton returns to the basement.

MR. REED  
She will come back. You don't have  
to be afraid.

Reed is on the floor now. Barnes' DEAD BODY in his lap  
bleeding out.

MR. REED (cont'd)  
Just a moment longer.

He uses her COAT to mop up the blood and vomit.

MR. REED (cont'd)  
Only a moment.  
(beat)  
It will only be a moment longer.

Paxton's whole body trembles. It takes everything inside of  
her to face Reed.

Reed shakes the corpse. It doesn't move. He frowns.

MR. REED (cont'd)  
I'm so sorry.

Reed grabs his BOX CUTTER from the floor. Lengthens the  
blade.

MR. REED (cont'd)  
Something's wrong. I'm worried  
she's not coming back to us.

Paxton shakes her head, *of course she's not.*

Reed lifts up Barnes' lifeless arm.

He cuts vertically down the medial head of her BICEP.

The skin opens easily.

Paxton watches in horror as --

REED DIGS HIS FINGERS INTO THE DEAD GIRL'S FLESH. ROOTING  
AROUND. SEARCHING FOR SOMETHING IN HER UNDERARM.

MR. REED (cont'd)  
She was lying to us.

Reed pulls out a small silver **IMPLANT**, about the size of a hairpin.

MR. REED (cont'd)  
Look, I found it. The implant.

Paxton cannot comprehend.

MR. REED (cont'd)  
I warned you. That's why she's not coming back to us...

Reed awkwardly stands out from under the body. Now covered in blood. He ambles over to Paxton and hands her the bloody **IMPLANT**.

MR. REED (cont'd)  
See?

Paxton looks at the small device. Horrified to be touching her friend's blood.

MR. REED (cont'd)  
She was not real. Not like you and me. She was a program. Do you understand?

PAXTON  
(shakes her head)  
...?

MR. REED  
I know. She looks real. I'm so sorry.

PAXTON  
(inaudible sobbing)  
..eehh...uh...?

MR. REED  
The candles were the giveaway. I've been watching all night.

PAXTON  
What are you say-saying...? I don't under...?

MR. REED  
The fire. Reacts differently to real people.

PAXTON  
I don't under....stand.....

MR. REED

Of course, how could you? Are you familiar with the Daoist concept of "The Butterfly Dream"?

PAXTON

The butterfly...no. Wait, y-yes.

MR. REED

Tell me.

Paxton composes herself. Her first chance to go toe-to-toe with Reed.

PAXTON

Small things c-can have big impacts. A butterfly flaps its wings... and causes a typhoon --

MR. REED

-- no that's "The Butterfly Effect".

Paxton deflates. She can't do this.

MR. REED (cont'd)

"The Butterfly Dream" concerns an ancient Chinese Philosopher who one night went to sleep and dreamed he was a butterfly. While he was dreaming, flying around free of all worries, he was absolutely certain he was a butterfly. But when he woke up, he realized that he was really just a man who had been *dreaming* he was a butterfly.

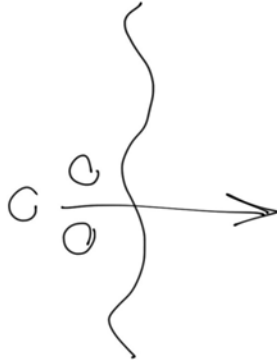
Reed approaches the CARD TABLE. He pushes the half-eaten pie out of the way.

MR. REED (cont'd)

(come here)

And so the Philosopher asked himself the following question: "Was I a man dreaming I was a butterfly? Or am I now really a butterfly, dreaming that I am a man"?

Reed draws a picture on the CARD TABLE:



Paxton cautiously approaches.

MR. REED (cont'd)

This is us.

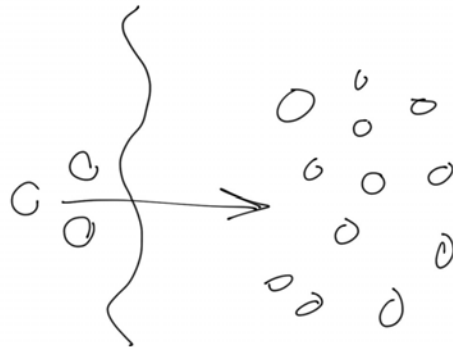
(points at the circles)

You. And me.

(looks to Paxton)

I have come, slowly over time, to a dark realization that we exist inside an artificial compound. A simulation that is so advanced, so life-like, we cannot tell the difference between real life and artificial dream.

He adds to the drawing:



MR. REED (cont'd)

The Prophet teaches us that all of our known history is part of this simulation. You heard her. She said, "IT IS NOT REAL". What she means is real life only exists beyond our simulated death.



PAXTON  
...i am sorry i don't understand...

IN ONE UNINTERRUPTED TAKE:

MR. REED  
Think about video game technology.  
Call of Duty. Grand Theft Auto.  
Simulations that create worlds  
inhabited by users (like us) and  
bots - i.e. "non-playable-  
characters" (like your friend).  
Imagine the leap from the  
rudimentary graphics of Atari, to  
Xbox. In less than twenty years.  
Multiply that by a hundred.  
Computing power that grows  
exponentially every passing year.  
If you assume any rate of progress,  
from now until the end of time, it  
is a mathematical certainty that we  
will invent a photo-real simulation  
that is so authentic we won't be  
able to discern reality from video  
game. Nick Bostrom, Elon Musk...  
there is a growing consensus that  
if we accept the supposition that  
simulation technology is  
achievable, then the odds we live  
in a simulation exceed 95%. Do you  
see the implant in your hand?

Paxton is speechless. She wants to fight back.

She wants to say something, anything.

But can't...

MR. REED (cont'd)  
Do you see?

Paxton takes another breath. Tries again...

PAXTON  
Yes. Yes, but... what you're  
describing...  
(a breath)  
The amount of computing power  
required... to create something as  
detailed as the world around us...  
would be... it's not believable.

MR. REED

The simulation creates perceptions of reality on demand. Just like a video game that's optimized to render only the parts of a scene visible to a player. It doesn't need to render Antarctica if you're never going to go to Antarctica are you going to go to Antarctica?

Reed strikes a MATCH.

MR. REED (cont'd)

And yet, fire dynamics are very difficult to render. I noticed an anomaly in its behavior when interacting with simulated NPE's, like your friend. It diffuses the flame, smothers it.

He holds the match near the drawing.

MR. REED (cont'd)

Your friend could not return to us because her life begins and ends as a simulated bot, but when you die... you will cross over to the other side.

Reed's finger moves horizontally across the drawing, expressing a person crossing over into death.

MR. REED (cont'd)

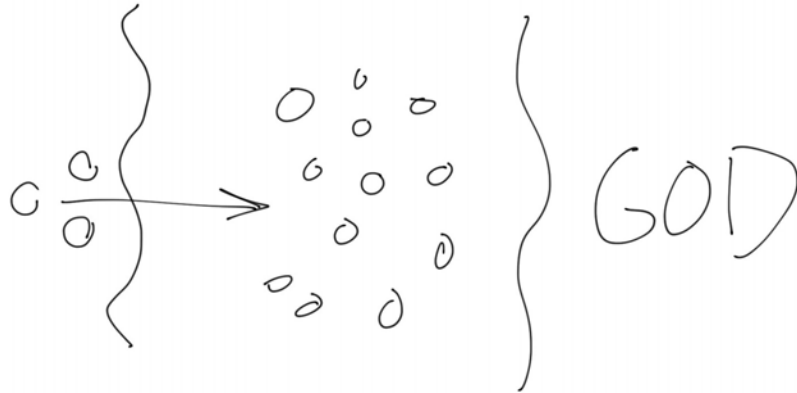
I believe, based on the Prophet's visions, you will be met by a "Conductor".

(mimes the action)

I believe this conductor is a technician who removes a mechanism that connects us to some form of digital lucid dream. Once the disconnection occurs, you will wake up to the real world.

The light from the MATCH fades.

Reed strikes another MATCH, then adds to the drawing:



MR. REED (cont'd)

This digital framework is a barrier that is all around us. It is why we cannot get close to God.

Paxton reacts.

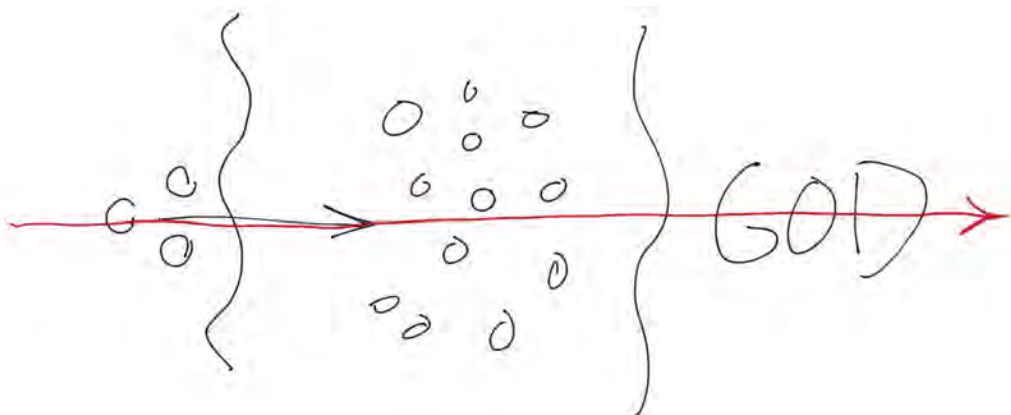
MR. REED (cont'd)

There are an estimated 10,000 distinct religions worldwide with no verifiable consensus on where we go when we die. Why do we know nothing about death? Despite centuries of scientific research?

(beat)

We don't know because we can't know.

Reed completes the drawing using the BLOOD on his finger:



MR. REED (cont'd)

In order to touch God, we must pass through death. And wake up into real life.

The MATCH flame fades to darkness.

MR. REED (cont'd)

All of the answers we seek are in death.

Paxton's eyes flick down to Reed's hand. He's still holding the BOX CUTTER.

MR. REED (cont'd)

Do you understand?

She doesn't have time to waste.

Needs to think quick.

Keep the duel alive before he strikes.

PAXTON

That's a... theory.

Mr. Reed appears offended by this.

MR. REED

You're welcome to challenge my premise.

PAXTON

I...

She looks around the room. Piecing together a narrative. Trying to understand how everything has led to this. Attempting to comprehend what it all means.

PAXTON (cont'd)

I...

Paxton's nervous hand holds up the IMPLANT. It takes everything left in her to say:

PAXTON (cont'd)

I don't think this is a microchip.

Reed is silent. It's eerie how comfortable he appears to be, covered in another person's blood.

PAXTON (cont'd)

I think this is a contraceptive.

MR. REED

A what?

PAXTON

A birth control implant.

MR. REED

Have you ever met a Mormon missionary who was on birth control?

PAXTON

No.

MR. REED

Did she mention she was on birth control?

PAXTON

No. And she wouldn't. Our church would've made her feel ashamed about it. And she would've been too embarrassed. Simulation theory --

MR. REED

-- Simulation *hypothesis*.

PAXTON

Hypothesis... is not testable, is it?

MR. REED

It is a matter of faith. Like any religion... you either believe it, or don't.

PAXTON

I don't believe it. I'm not smart enough to say why. I just don't.

MR. REED

Do you believe the miracle I have shown you?

PAXTON

Yes.

(beat)

At first.

MR. REED

And now?

PAXTON

I think something happened tonight that you didn't expect. It feels like you're improvising. Trying to convince me of a simulation narrative that's not sticking. Am I right?

MR. REED

Are you asking me if you're right that I'm improvising, or right that the simulation narrative is not sticking?

PAXTON

Yes.

Reed smiles. Appreciates his own tactic being used against him.

MR. REED

So you agree with your companion? You think the Prophet was only hallucinating a meaningless near death experience?

PAXTON

No.

Reed is intrigued.

PAXTON (cont'd)

I think you switched the bodies.

MR. REED

(utterly speechless)

...

PAXTON

I just haven't figured out how yet.

MR. REED

Switched the bodies?

PAXTON

The doorbell rang when the Elder got here. Which drew our attention to the stairs. You would've planned on that.

(beat)

When we came back downstairs I noticed the prophet wasn't in the same position as before. It was similar, but not the exact same.

(beat)

I think maybe another woman, who looked exactly like her, came into the basement through a hidden door - disposed of the dead body - and then took her place at the table.

MR. REED

Then what?

PAXTON

Then, once we were back downstairs, she read off a scripted prophecy that you prepared for her.

MR. REED

Interesting.

PAXTON

Except, the last thing the Prophet said was "IT IS NOT REAL". Maybe that was referencing the simulation theory. Or... maybe she was warning us. Maybe she was trying to tell us that the "miracle" wasn't real.

(beat)

Do you see what I mean when I say something happened that you didn't expect? I think you gave her a script and she went off book. And now you're trying to recover.

Reed takes this in.

MR. REED

If that's true...

Reed walks along the outer wall of the basement. His fingertips grazing the impenetrable cinder brick.

MR. REED (cont'd)

...there would have to be another way to get into this basement.

(looks at her)

Which there isn't.

PAXTON

Right.

Paxton looks around the basement, considering this for a moment.

She looks up. At the skylight. The weather beating down on it. Her eyes follow the incoming rainwater. She watches the DRIP DRIP DRIP hit the ground.

Now her eyes are investigating the small puddle that is accumulating. How the puddle seems to drift, pulling down towards the card table.

She approaches the CARD TABLE. A PUDDLE of water has collected on its surface. Paxton is careful not to disturb the water as she --

Drags it away from the center of the basement. Then moves the folding chair.

She stands where the table used to be.

The rainwater appears to be collecting near a low point in the floor.

PAXTON (cont'd)

Unless... there was a secret door  
in a place we never looked.

Paxton gently tips the pooled rainwater on the card table. The water pours onto the ground and immediately absorbs into the low point.

Paxton kneels. Feeling around for something. Finds it.

Her fingers dig into the dirt and tighten around an iron HANDLE.

She lifts the handle. It's heavy. Dirt and mud sift into the ground as she pulls, revealing a RECTANGULAR SEAM hidden in the floor.

*Oh god, it's a secret door.*

Paxton stands with both hands dragging the door SLOWLY OPEN. When she's done, she finds herself standing in front of...

A BLACK CORRIDOR THAT WAS CRUDELY DUG INTO THE EARTH. Rocks and roots protrude through the muddy tunnel which seems to descend deeper into the ground. It is impossible to say how far it goes.

MR. REED

Which means there would have to be  
a dead body down there, if you're  
right.

PAXTON

That's correct.

MR. REED

How will you test your theory?

PAXTON

I don't know.



MR. REED

Will you go into the cellar to see  
if there is someone down there?

PAXTON

If I have to.

MR. REED

Why would you do that?

PAXTON

Because... I want to know the  
truth. And because... "The only way  
out is through." - Swamp Thing.

MR. REED

I believe that was Robert Frost.

PAXTON

Oh. People always say superhero  
movies are dumb. But. They  
"iterate" from the best.

MR. REED

Don't go down there unless you're  
prepared to discover "The One True  
Religion".

Paxton considers this a moment. The dark tunnel stands before  
her. And then --

She climbs down into the hole. One foot in front of the  
other. The sound of her own breathing feels unnaturally loud.

The walls are narrow and crudely carved. Dirt and rocks  
protrude through, like a homemade mineshaft.

She uses her phone as a FLASHLIGHT.

Her light finds a PAIR OF FEET.

She rakes the flashlight alongside the silhouette of a DEAD  
WOMAN, lying crumpled in the mud floor. Half buried in a foot  
of rainwater that has collected on the ground from FLOODING.

**THE WOMAN IS NEARLY IDENTICAL TO THE PROPHET IN EVERY WAY.**

Paxton looks back up to Reed --

PAXTON

I knew it.

-- as Reed CLOSES THE CELLAR DOOR - LOCKING PAXTON INSIDE THE  
TUNNEL. She has no choice but to forge ahead.

Paxton passes through a series of consecutive wooden doors roughly built into the tunnel. Anything could be waiting for her behind any given door. Each door is terrifying. First she enters the...

#### RED DOOR

A small red chamber houses various SATANIC TEXTS.

Next she enters the...

#### GREEN DOOR

A small green chamber houses various WITCHCRAFT TEXTS.

Next she enters the...

#### PINK DOOR

A small pink chamber houses various PAGAN TEXTS.

Next she enters the...

#### BLUE DOOR

A small blue chamber houses various ATHEIST TEXTS.

On the far wall of the blue chamber is a...

#### BLACK DOOR

...something more ominous about this one. A disturbing smell emanates from the next room.

Paxton tries to open the door but the handles are fastened shut by a **RED U-LOCK**.

She examines the lock. Tries to pull it apart. Won't open without a key.

Paxton deflates. It's a dead end. She's trapped. Stuck here forever if she can't break this lock.

She looks at the lock again.....wait?

Wait.

Wait.

Wait.

The Red U-Lock looks familiar.

It looks just like their RED BICYCLE U-LOCK.

*It can't be. Can it?*

Paxton feels around in her coat pocket. Her mind moving faster than her fingers. She pulls out...

...the **BIKE KEY**.

She inserts the key into the lock and --

IT FUCKING FITS!

**INT. BLACK CHAMBER - NIGHT**

Paxton pushes open the BLACK DOOR and sees --

**DOG CAGES** along both walls. Three on one side of the chamber. Three on the other. Each cage imprisons an **OLD WOMAN** that vaguely resembles the prophet. Most are sleeping, or perhaps even dead. Some are awake, but too tired and weak to say anything. All of them on the verge of death or beyond.

She takes in the horror of this. Finally reconciling with the full magnitude of terror she has found herself in.

A VOICE FROM THE SHADOWS:

MR. REED (O.S.)  
Have you figured it out yet?

Paxton angles her light ahead and finds Mr. Reed, somehow miraculously standing across from her in the chamber. There's a makeshift staircase behind him.

MR. REED (cont'd)  
"The One True Religion"?

PAXTON  
I think so.

MR. REED  
What is it? Do you need to study my books? Would that help?

Paxton's breathing shallows. She takes in the room. The whole evening washes over her. Every detail.

PAXTON  
No.

MR. REED  
Tell me.  
(beat)  
What is "The One True Religion"?

PAXTON

It's... it's...

(a breath)

When we first arrived, you left us alone in your living room. We thought you were speaking to your wife. But you were doing something else.

MR. REED

Right.

PAXTON

You took a key from Sister Barnes' coat, went outside to unlock our bikes and hide them. I noticed your hair was damp when you came back with the drinks, like you had been out in the storm. You did this, I assume, because you didn't want the Elder to find the bikes when they came looking for us. But there was something else on your mind...

MR. REED

Yes.

PAXTON

You returned the bike key to the wrong coat pocket. We thought this was a mistake you made, but now I know it wasn't.

MR. REED

Why?

PAXTON

You gave the bike lock to one of the prophets. Instructed them to lock the final cellar door with it.

MR. REED

But why?

PAXTON

To ensure that the only person who could ever open this door was me.

MR. REED

That's right. But *why?*

PAXTON

Because you wanted me to know, that the only reason I am standing here, right now, is because it is exactly where you want me to be standing.

Reed nods as Paxton comes to terms with this horrible thought.

PAXTON (cont'd)

There is not a single moment of this evening that you didn't orchestrate. I'm not here because I chose to be, I'm here because you made me choose to be. Because you believe the one true religion is... control.

Mr. Reed closes his eyes. He seems to be experiencing a moment of euphoria. Of release.

MR. REED

That's exactly right. Religion is a system of control created by men.

Paxton looks around at the caged women. It's all snapping into terrible focus.

She kneels to the cages. She catches eyes with one of the caged women.

PAXTON

(weakly)

Don't worry... I'm going to help you...

Paxton reaches her fingers into the cage. Holds the old woman's hand.

MR. REED

...they don't want to be helped. They are exactly where they chose to be.

PAXTON

How can you say that, you killed that woman.

MR. REED

She chose to eat a poisonous pie because of her profound faith. It's called: "Drinking the Kool-aid".

(MORE)

MR. REED (cont'd)

A phrase coined after nine hundred intelligent, upstanding members of Jonestown drank cyanide when their leader Jim Jones politely asked them to. Yes, I keep these women malnourished and hungry, but only for the same reason your church goes to Haiti to hand out Bibles after a hurricane. It's easier to control someone who has lost everything.

PAXTON

But why do you do this?

MR. REED

Why do you let me?

Reed approaches Paxton from behind.

MR. REED (cont'd)

You've done everything I've asked tonight. How did you get here, in my cellar? Did I drag you here? Did I put my hands on you?

(beat)

You're here because the ideas of men have influenced every decision you've ever made from the time you were born. And I was able to predict every decision you would make tonight because of that. Why does the pope always have a penis? Why was Eve created from Adam's rib? Why were the holy books written by a fraternity of dudes in the desert? All religion is prophesied, recorded, and controlled by men.

Reed looms over Paxton.

MR. REED (cont'd)

Do you know what I told your church Elder when he came looking for you? I told him, "They aren't here." And he took my word for it, because I am a man.

Reed whispers into Paxton's ear.

MR. REED (cont'd)

You have let men dictate every decision of your life.

(MORE)

MR. REED (cont'd)

They decide who you worship, where you worship, what you worship. They even dictate the garments you wear under your clothes.

PAXTON

...the what?

MR. REED

Your under garments.

PAXTON

My what?

MR. REED

Underwear.

PAXTON

My what?

MR. REED

(yells)

YOUR MAGIC UNDERWEAR!

PAXTON PLUNGES THE LETTER OPENER INTO REED'S NECK. SHE HITS A VITAL ARTERY AND BLOOD SPRAYS!!!

REED FLIES BACK. FLAILING AND SCREAMING.

PAXTON RUNS PAST HIM TO THE MAKESHIFT STAIRWELL.

**INT. TUNNEL - NIGHT**

The stairs lead to a LADDER.

She climbs as fast as she can.

The ladder ejects into another smaller, tighter passageway.

Her feet slip on the rocky mud floor.

She struggles to keep her flashlight focused on the path ahead as she sprints and sobs.

There's a door ahead --

**INT. STUDY - NIGHT**

-- Paxton bursts into a small STUDY. It's the one Reed occupied earlier. She notices the SPEAKING TUBE immediately.

She lets out a big sigh of relief. Grateful to see a new room in the house.

She closes the door. Pushes a HEAVY TABLE behind it to secure it shut.

That's when she notices something on the table...

**THE 3/4 SCALE MODEL HOUSE.**

She does a double take. Doesn't have time to process what that is. Keeps moving.

Paxton approaches the only other door in the room --

**INT. STAIRWELL - NIGHT**

-- which brings her back into the fucking basement stairwell?! This is THE MIDPOINT DOOR that they couldn't unlock earlier.

Panic starts to set in. This isn't what she was hoping for.

Paxton scrambles up the stairs to the PURPLE DOOR but of course it is still locked.

That leads only one other path...

**INT. BASEMENT - NIGHT**

...Paxton re-enters the basement. Confirming her worst fears:

**REED'S HOUSE IS A MÖBIUS STRIP, DESIGNED TO BE AN ENDLESS LOOP THAT HAS NO ENTRANCE OR EXIT. ROUND AND ROUND IT GOES.**

Paxton notices something chilling.

*...that's weird.*

She takes a few steps forward to confirm.

...the CELLAR DOOR in the floor is now open.

But if it's open, that would mean... wait...?

She turns around and --

CLOSE ON PAXTON'S FACE AS ALL THE BLOOD DRAINS FROM IT. AS ALL SOUND FADES AROUND HER. AS HER HEART BEGINS TO POUND AGAINST HER CHEST. **AS SHE STANDS FACE TO FACE WITH REED.**

ONE HAND HOLDS HIS NECK AS BLOOD CONTINUES TO PUMP OUT.



PAXTON'S EYES WIDEN AS SHE SLOWLY LOOKS DOWN...

HIS OTHER HAND HOLDS THE BOX CUTTER, WHICH IS NOW LODGED IN PAXTON'S STOMACH.

REED PULLS THE BLADE OUT AND WE GET A SENSE OF HOW INSANELY DEEP HE HAS STABBED HER.

PAXTON STUMBLES BACK.

REED, NOW DAZED AND DYING, HOBBBLES BACKWARDS TO THE DOORWAY OF THE STAIRS. BLOCKING HER ONLY EXIT.

PAXTON TRIES TO HOLD HERSELF UP ON THE CARD TABLE, BUT THE TABLE LEGS BUCKLE AND SHE FALLS TO THE GROUND.

REED STARES AT HER. HE TRIES TO TALK...

MR. REED  
..auh...eck....ch..

PAXTON  
....I... can't...

PAXTON EXAMINES HER WOUND. LOOKS FATAL.

MR. REED  
..ech.....auh..

PAXTON  
...can't hear...you.

HE TRIES AGAIN BUT HIS VOCAL CORDS HAVE BEEN CUT. FOR THE FIRST TIME TONIGHT ALL HE CAN DO IS LISTEN.

PAXTON (cont'd)  
...guess I just want to say one  
thing....while I have the floor...

MR. REED  
..ech.....auh..

PAXTON  
Did... did you ever hear about the  
great prayer experiment?

Reed slumps to the ground. Too weak to hold himself up. He begins a slow, painful crawl towards Paxton.

PAXTON (cont'd)  
Templeton Foundation... tested  
hundreds of coronary bypass  
patients at five... six different  
hospitals.

(MORE)

PAXTON (cont'd)

They divided the patients into groups. Those who... who received prayers, those who didn't. The idea... was to test if the power of prayer could actually save a human life.

(beat)

The results of the study were conclusive. Praying... doesn't work.

Reed continues his delirious crawl. Weapon in hand. His eyeball starts to bleed. He's losing focus. But aware enough to hate not being able to respond...

PAXTON (cont'd)

Lot of my friends were disappointed when they heard that. But I don't know why. I think... it's beautiful that people pray for each other, even though we all probably know, deep down, it doesn't make a difference.

(beat)

It's just nice to think about someone other than yourself.

(beat)

Even if it's you.

PAXTON CLASPS HER HANDS.

CLOSES HER EYES.

AND BEGINS TO PRAY.

REED GETS CLOSER...

AND CLOSER.

UNTIL HE'S INCHES AWAY FROM PAXTON'S FACE.

HE RAISES THE BOX CUTTER.

AIMS AT HER THROAT.

AND --

**SMASH!!!!!!!!**

THE **FLOORBOARD OF NAILS** SWINGS INTO THE SIDE OF REED'S HEAD!  
DELIVERING A DEATH BLOW!

BLOOD SPATTERS ONTO PAXTON'S COMPLEXION.

WE FOLLOW THE BOARD OF NAILS, NOW FASTENED TO REED'S FACE, IN GRUESOME DETAIL, AS HE KEELS OVER DEAD.

PAXTON'S EYES BLINK OPEN.

SHE CAN'T BELIEVE WHAT SHE SEES.

**A MIRACLE.**

SHE LOOKS UP AND SEES...

HER COMPANION, GHOST WHITE, STILL ALIVE.

BUT ONLY FOR A MOMENT.

**SISTER BARNES** COLLAPSES INTO HER SISTER PAXTON'S ARMS.

AND TAKES ONE FINAL BREATH.

PAXTON (cont'd)  
Thank you, Sister.

Paxton kisses her companion's forehead. Then her eyes drift towards the stairs.

**INT. STUDY - NIGHT**

Paxton returns to the study, holding her wound. She looks around for another exit.

There isn't one.

Paxton examines the **3/4 SCALE MODEL HOUSE**. She finds markers for the secret cellar door and passageway. Proxies for all the hidden chambers. She spins the model. Turns it upside down. Pulls it apart. Convinced the answer for how to escape the house must be located inside. AND THEN SHE FINDS IT --

A passageway through a hidden air duct in the study wall.

**INT. AIRDUCT - NIGHT**

Paxton crawls through the airduct. She feels the cold air from outside blow across her face. So close to freedom.

**EXT. REED'S HOUSE - DAWN**

Paxton climbs out of the house. Her phone instantly receives a signal. A hundred missed calls and text messages populate.

Paxton dials 911. As she waits for the call to connect, she kneels in the snow.

And then something impossible happens...

Paxton can't believe her eyes as...

A **BUTTERFLY** lands on her finger.

Not on her arm. Not on her head.

Right on her finger tip.

Paxton looks at the beautiful creature. It seems to mean something to her. It crawls to the top of her hand. Pauses a moment. Then flies right back to the finger tip.

Is it a sign from Barnes?

Is it a message from God?

Is this a butterfly dream?

Are we in a simulation?

Is it just a coincidence?

Or a hallucination?

A divine confirmation?

Who knows.

CUT TO BLACK.

**HERETIC**

### POSTSCRIPT

All descriptions of religious texts, scriptures, artwork, and ceremonial rituals in this screenplay are accurate. The authors would like to acknowledge the following texts that formed the foundation of their religious and philosophical research:

*Flim-Flam!* by James Randi, *God is Not Great* by Christopher Hitchens, *Going Clear* by Lawrence Wright, *Holy Bible*, *No Man Knows My History* by Fawn M. Brodie, *On the Origin of Species* by Charles Darwin, *Phaedrus* by Plato, *Simulacra and Simulation* by Jean Baudrillard, *The Book of Mormon*, *The Doctrine and Covenants*, *The God Delusion* by Richard Dawkins, *The Hebrew Bible*, *The Koran*, *The Pearl of Great Price*, *The Republic* by Plato, *The Society of the Spectacle* by Guy Debord, *True to the Faith: A Gospel Reference*, *Under the Banner of Heaven* by Jon Krakauer, *Are our heads in the cloud? Science fiction or fact?* by Richard Dawkins (Article), *Are You Living in a Computer Simulation?* by Nick Bostrom (Article), *For the Strength of Youth* (Church Manual), *The Gospel of Jesus Christ* (Church Pamphlet), *The Peace Maker* by Udney Hay Jacob (Church Pamphlet), *The Plan of Salvation* (Church Pamphlet), *The Restoration of the Gospel of Jesus Christ* (Church Pamphlet), *The Simulation Argument: Reply to Weatherson* by Nick Bostrom (Article), *Translation and Historicity of the Book of Abraham* (Church Article).

While this collection influenced the authors' understanding of the topics discussed in the screenplay, it must be said that the characters have minds of their own, and only speak for themselves.