

THE CURSE

"PILOT"

Written by

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OPENING CREDIT SEQUENCE: Eerie devotional music plays throughout ("Rama Katha" by Alice Coltrane)

"THE CURSE"

INT. HOUSE - LOW INCOME NEIGHBORHOOD - DAY

A South American man, FERNANDO (42) sits on a beaten up couch in a tiny bungalow beside his MOTHER (60's). He looks nervous as he speaks to someone off-camera.

FERNANDO
(broken-English)
When she was diagnosed last year, I had two jobs so I can pay for her. I pay for her care. But now... nothing. A day here and there. But no work. No work.

He drops his head, feeling ashamed.

ASHER (36) is seated subserviently on the carpet in front of them. He is wearing a bomber jacket, faux-faded shirt, and designer sneakers.

ASHER
I can't imagine what this has been like for you. My heart goes out to you. Both our hearts.

He looks over at WHITNEY (35), seated beside him on the carpet. She's dressed in a one-piece romper with sunglasses resting on her professionally-styled hair. She is looking at Fernando and his mother with genuine empathy.

WHITNEY
How long has it been? That you've been looking of work?

FERNANDO
Four months.

She looks at Asher, who is in disbelief.

ASHER
Jesus.

Asher then spots a PAINTING OF JESUS on the family's wall. He turns behind him.

ASHER (CONT'D)
I don't want to use me saying 'Jesus'. That wasn't sensitive of me.

He's speaking to DOUGIE (37) - a colorfully dressed man with chunky jewelry is sweating profusely in his leather coat.

Dougie is standing at a monitor next to a professional TV lighting setup. Dougie talks with a speech impediment.

DOUGIE

Not the time to discuss. Keep going.

ASHER

Right, sorry.

We now see that a TV CAMERA CREW has been filming the entire interaction. Asher re-engages. Being on camera is clearly not his natural state - he's stilted, in his head. Unlike Whitney, who is very present. She takes Fernando's hand--

WHITNEY

So, so, so, we've come today with positive news. Have you seen the new Kangoo Coffee on Alabasta Street?

Fernando shakes his head.

WHITNEY (CONT'D)

Well, we shared your story with them and the company has decided to offer you a full time position starting today. A job!

Fernando breaks down crying. He's overjoyed.

FERNANDO

Thank you. Thank you.

Asher and Whitney are taken by this outpouring of emotion.

ON DOUGIE'S MONITOR, the camera pans from a teary-eyed Fernando to his mother, who is completely stoic.

Dougie looks annoyed. He yells out--

DOUGIE

Mommy! Your son has a job!

She smiles slightly.

DOUGIE (CONT'D)

(frustrated)

Let's hold for second.

Dougie approaches the mother.

DOUGIE (CONT'D)

(faux-cheery)

Hey... so your son just got a full time job. Aren't you happy? You don't look it.

Whitney looks at Asher, uncomfortable with Dougie's tone.

Fernando, still teary eyed, tries to aid by translating to Spanish. His mom tries to express her joy but she clearly just isn't an emotive person.

DOUGIE (CONT'D)
 (to Fernando)
 Tell her it makes no sense that she's
 not happy.

Whitney eyes Asher: "Do something". Asher, timid, just sits there.

WHITNEY
 (to mom)
 It's okay, you're doing great.

DOUGIE
 (to mom)
 There's an old trick that clowns use
 in the circus. You know clowns?
 (honks his nose)
 Clown? You know?

The mom nods. Dougie holds up his water bottle--

DOUGIE (CONT'D)
 Is it okay if I put a little bit of
 water on your eyes so it looks like
 tears? We want you to look as happy
 on the outside as you are on the
 inside, mkay?

Fernando translates for his mom.

Whitney is now shooting daggers at Asher. He stands up and pulls Dougie aside. They speak quietly.

ASHER
 Hey man, I think she looks happy
 enough.

DOUGIE
 (keeping it light)
 Totally, totally. We're all having
 fun. I know what I need, mkay?

ASHER
 She's dying.

DOUGIE
 I let you do your thing, so trust me
 with mine. This is what I do. Mkay?
 We're having fun.

He walks past Asher and grabs a fresh WATER BOTTLE off the table as he re-approaches Fernando and his mom.

DOUGIE (CONT'D)
I'm going to use a fresh water
bottle, okay? You don't need my
backwash.
(laughs to self)

Fernando looks at his mother to see if she's okay with this.
She nods.

FERNANDO
(to Dougie)
It's okay.

Asher sits back beside Whitney and rubs her knee to calm her.
They are both conflicted.

DOUGIE
You look great, by the way. Really
beautiful. It's just going to be a
tiny bit.

While talking, Dougie pours a small pool of water into his
cupped palm.

DOUGIE (CONT'D)
Is it cancer?

MOM
Yes.

DOUGIE
Oh, that's a shame. Okay, close your
eyes for me, sweetheart.

The mom closes her eyes. Dougie dips his other fingers into
the water and starts flicking it onto her face.

Whitney tries to make the best of the situation.

WHITNEY
It's okay, it's just water. A little
TV magic. You're a movie star.
Estrella de cine!

Fernando and the mom are amused by this comment.

FERNANDO
Estrella de cine.

DOUGIE
There we go, just trying to focus it
around the eyes. And we're still
rolling so now, Remi let's get a shot
of her.

A young cameraman, REMI, does a close-up of the mom as Dougie
jumps out of frame.

DOUGIE (CONT'D)

And mom, you just heard the news about the job and you're happy. He can afford to pay for your treatment. Yay!

The mom does her same non-smile as before, but now her face is covered in liquid. Dougie is watching on his monitor. He is pleased.

DOUGIE (CONT'D)

Now wipe them away. Wipe away those tears! Limpiar. Tears. Happy, happy!

Asher looks ashamed, but Whitney plays into the theater of it all. She gets up with a tissue, lovingly dabbing the tears and hugging the mom's head.

WHITNEY

It's okay. Let it out. Let it out.

EXT. KANGOO COFFEE - DAY

Asher and Whitney stand behind a large pink "grand opening" ribbon, stretched across the storefront of Kangoo Coffee - a new Blue Bottle-esque coffee shop. In between the couple is a Kangoo Executive, TODD LOBO, holding a pair of SCISSORS.

WHITNEY

Three, two, one!

Todd cuts the ribbon. Cameras are filming them.

Whitney leads an applause. A small crowd of 10-12 onlookers, mostly Hispanic, join in.

EXT. LOW INCOME NEIGHBORHOOD - DAY

We widen out to see that Kangoo Coffee is one of three new stores in a strip mall mostly occupied by local Hispanic mom-and-pop shops. The new additions include INCA JEANS - a high end denim shop, and BUBBLESACK - a trendy bedding and linen store. Asher and Whitney are standing shoulder-to-shoulder, facing the a local reporter, MONICA PEREZ (31, Hispanic) holding a microphone with a NY1 mic-flag.

MONICA PEREZ

You two have a reputation here in Warren County as home flippers, so what is going on here today?

Asher chuckles uncomfortably.

ASHER

Well, "home flipping" has a connotation... ah... So we specialize in conscientiously rejuvenating distressed homes in a way that has a net positive impact on communities as a whole. As opposed to "home flippers" who are just trying to just make a profit. Our approach is holistic, to combat the negative effects of gentrification. We work very closely with buyers to integrate them into the communities they're joining, um--

Whitney jumps in as Asher loses his train of thought--

WHITNEY

And that's what this is all about! Do you want to hear about... should I talk about the show?

MONICA PEREZ

Please. I see you have a camera crew of your own.

WHITNEY

Yes! We're filming the first season of a reality show that is kind of our philosophy on steroids-- like, but good steroids.

(laughs)

It's called Fliplanthorpy. And now we're not only working with buyers of our homes but also socially conscious brands that are looking to enhance the communities they join.

(realizing it sounds boring)

Plus we're husband and wife, so what could go wrong!

MONICA PEREZ

(laughs)

How long have you been married.

WHITNEY

Just a year-and-a-half.

ASHER

But we've known each other for longer than that.

WHITNEY

Yup that's usually how it works. You don't get married the day you meet!

Awkward silence. Monica moves on--

MONICA PEREZ

All these stores are sponsors though, correct? Of the show?

WHITNEY

Wow, you've done your research!

MONICA PEREZ

Does that make you question their commitment to the community?

ASHER

(refocuses)

Each one of these brands behind us, from the top down, they are committed to this helping Maris Heights thrive. Just like we did with buyers before, we've introduced senior management at all these companies to community organizers, you'll see it in the show. The brands, um, Kangoo, Inca Jean, Bubblesack have all committed to hiring staff exclusively from Maris Heights.

(beat)

You don't seem convinced.

MONICA PEREZ

No, I'm just asking questions.

(beat)

So the concept is flipping homes, plus working with brands, plus getting people jobs?

ASHER

(confident)

Correct.

MONICA PEREZ

Whoa, that's a lot to cram in!

(then)

Do you feel like there's a big market in this neighborhood for designer jeans?

WHITNEY

Actually all of Inca's denim is made without toxic dyes and is completely eco-friendly. So if there's not a big market there should be! Most fast fashion brands fail nearly every environmental audit.

Whitney glances at Monica's outfit, then immediately feels bad.

WHITNEY (CONT'D)
I'm sorry, I wasn't inferring...

MONICA PEREZ
It's okay. This isn't fast fashion,
it's Zara.

Whitney bites her tongue.

MOMENTS LATER, Monica is helping pack gear into her news van.

Whitney is eyeing her from a distance, suspicious.

WHITNEY
(to Asher)
What was that? What was she trying to
say?

ASHER
She's just doing her job. It's fine.

WHITNEY
We don't deserve a bad story.

ASHER
Well, we definitely can't afford one.
(sarcastic)
But this show is supposed to solve
all our problems right, so maybe we
don't need to worry?

Whitney rolls her eyes.

ASHER (CONT'D)
You kind of took a jab at me there,
huh?

WHITNEY
Ash, I was joking. It was for the
camera.

ASHER
Yeah I know, I know. I'm just not...
you know. I'm just not a, like, you
know...

Whitney smiles, turns his face toward her, and gives him a
little kiss. Asher pulls her close with forced confidence and
begins a heavy make-out session. She goes along with it.
After ten seconds, Asher stops with a pleased smile.

WHITNEY
(proving)
See.

Asher then looks at Whitney, still smiling, but skeptical.

INT. KANGOO COFFEE - MOMENTS LATER

Three KANGOO BARISTAS - all blonde Australian models - are dressed in the trademark pink aprons and hats with a slick Aussie-inspired logo. They are serving coffees to the long line of community members who have filed into the store, all holding small PINK VOUCHERS.

A CUSTOMER (40's) stares at the menu.

CUSTOMER

Do you have egg sandwiches? Bacon and egg?

KANGOO BARISTA

(Aussie accent)

We just have coffee and cookies today. You get a free drip coffee with your voucher. The pour-over is extra though.

CUSTOMER

Whatever is free.

Working amongst the three blonde models is Fernando, in a matching uniform.

ASHER (O.S.)

Fernando!

Fernando turns to see Asher, Whitney, and Todd approaching, followed by a camera crew.

WHITNEY

Fernando, this is Todd Lobo. He's senior management at Kangoo Coffee.

Fernando wipes his hands on his apron and shakes with Todd.

TODD LOBO

We are so thrilled to have you working with us, and to be a part of this gorgeous community. I understand you mother is ill?

FERNANDO

Yes.

TODD LOBO

Well on behalf of the Kangoo team, here is a thousand dollars.

Todd hands a check to Fernando.

FERNANDO

Thank you, sir. Thank you.

TODD LOBO
 Hopefully this will help ease the
 hardship on your family.

Fernando extends his hands to shake again, but Todd moves in for a hug.

TODD LOBO (CONT'D)
 Come here. It's an honor to have you
 here.

They embrace. Asher and Whitney are touched by this moment. Dougie, next to the cameraman, looks annoyed. Fernando goes back to working.

Todd makes his way toward the exit, as Dougie joins him.

DOUGIE
 (to Todd)
 The guy fucking cried like a
 waterfall earlier. I was hoping he'd
 do it again. Fucking Niagara Falls,
 I'm not kidding.

They share a chuckle.

MOMENTS LATER, Whitney is staring at the Australian baristas looking frustrated. Asher is distracted on his phone.

WHITNEY
 (to Asher)
 Is it worth bringing this up with
 Dougie?

ASHER
 I think we should pick our battles.
 (then, quietly)
 Sorry this guy is still texting me
 about the mold.

WHITNEY
 Fernando is the only one. This
 doesn't bother you?

ASHER
 (forced annoyance)
 No, it does. It bothers me a lot.

Whitney walks off.

INT. BUBBLESACK LINEN STORE - DAY

It's a quaint farmhouse-chic showroom, with pillows, bedding, and linens draped throughout.

Dougie is slowly sinking his fist into a pillow on display.

DOUGIE

This down?

A LATINO SALESWOMAN is standing nearby. The store is otherwise empty.

LATINO SALESWOMAN

Down, yes.

Whitney enters the shop and approaches Dougie.

WHITNEY

(quiet voice)

Why are there Australian models working at Kangoo? They promised it would be all local hires. That's what we've been saying.

DOUGIE

It's an Aussie-themed coffee shop. Let's not muck with their branding. They already hired that Fernando guy.
(lowers voice)
And these guys hired...

Dougie covertly gestures to the Latino saleswoman behind them, looking at her phone, and then goes back to browsing the merchandise. Whitney pauses.

WHITNEY

I just want to be sure the show portrays us as good people. We care deeply about this community and have a lot of goodwill here.

DOUGIE

For sure, for sure... You don't want to seem like Mother Theresa, but you also don't want to be some bitch.

WHITNEY

For real.

(then)

I want the Father Manny visit filmed. It should be in the show. It's an important part of what we do.

DOUGIE

I get that, but girl, no one wants to watch the guy who bought your home visit with a local priest.

WHITNEY

He's a community--

DOUGIE
Community liaison, whatever. It's boring, shitty TV.

WHITNEY
I know, I know...

DOUGIE
Yo, leave the TV stuff to me. I'm gonna make you look good. Trust me.

WHITNEY
Asher too.

DOUGIE
Now he'll be a little tougher.

Whitney looks concerned.

DOUGIE (CONT'D)
Relax, I'm just fuckin' with ya.
(moving on)
Why would anyone need a new pillow?

He looks at Whitney and laughs. Whitney tries to laugh along but doesn't get what's funny.

EXT. LOW INCOME NEIGHBORHOOD - DAY

It's skid row. Asher stands outside the closed van as Dougie scans the area. He points down the block.

DOUGIE
Lets get a couple shots of you walking through the filth. Like you're about to clean it up.

ASHER
Like pick up some garbage?

DOUGIE
No, mentally. Or sure pick up some trash.

ASHER
By that woman?

DOUGIE
(then, noticing)
Ooo. Ooo. Actually, give that woman some money, we'll film it from here.

About 100 feet away there is a HOMELESS WOMAN (60's) sitting outside of a tent next to a cart filled with her belongings. There is a GIANT MURAL on the wall behind her, depicting several hands holding up planet Earth.

ASHER
Seems kind of tacky, no?

DOUGIE
Whitney wants this stuff, okay?

ASHER
(changing tune)
Whitney wanted this?

Asher gives in and heads down the block toward the woman.

DOUGIE
Make it look natural.
(to sound person)
Let's tail slate.

Remi pops the camera onto his shoulder. The sound woman readies gets her equipment.

Asher, now in position at the top sidewalk ten feet back from the homeless woman. He opens up his wallet to check that he has cash. Inside is a single \$100 BILL. Asher hesitates. Dougie holds up his thumb.

DOUGIE (CONT'D)
Go!

Asher looks unsure, like he wants to say something.

DOUGIE (CONT'D)
Go Asher!

Asher puts his wallet back in his pocket and starts walking down the sidewalk, acting as if he's just taking a stroll.

As he approaches the homeless woman he pretends to spot her for the first time. He reaches into his pocket, pulls out his wallet and hands the \$100.

The woman appears incredibly thankful. Asher touches her shoulder sympathetically and continues walking another 10 feet. Dougie holds his thumb up again.

DOUGIE (CONT'D)
Got it!

Asher acknowledges the thumbs up, then runs back to the homeless woman.

ASHER
(to woman)
Hey sorry to bother you but we were just filming something for a little show and they wanted me to give you some money on camera. And I only had a hundred dollar bill in my wallet.

The woman is confused.

ASHER (CONT'D)

I do want to give you money but it's a little more than I can afford right now. If you give it back to me I can run to the store to get some change so I can give you, like, twenty?

The homeless woman just stares at him silently.

ASHER (CONT'D)

Sorry about that.

She keeps staring.

ASHER (CONT'D)

Do you speak English?

HOMELESS WOMAN

Yes.

ASHER

I promise I'll be right back. There's a store down the block.

The woman starts mumbling to herself in a deep unintelligible voice as she unzips her pouch and removes the \$100 bill. The mumble then turns into several guttural burps as she hands it to him. This moment is creepy. Something isn't right.

Asher takes the \$100 bill.

ASHER (CONT'D)

Are you okay?

A music sting plays as the camera pushes in tight on the woman's face.

HOMELESS WOMAN

You're cursed. I curse you.

The music drops out.

Asher laughs in disbelief.

ASHER

Okay...?

EXT. STREET - MOMENTS LATER

Asher runs by the production van as the crew is loading in.

DOUGIE

Yooo where you going?!

ASHER
Give me a sec.

DOUGIE
Asher, we don't have time, let's
move!

Asher mimes "one sec" back as he continues toward--

INT. BODEGA - MOMENTS LATER

Asher enters a Hispanic bodega. There are THREE GUYS hanging
out in there, chatting, plus the SHOP CLERK.

They all go silent when Asher approaches the counter. He
removes the bill from his wallet.

ASHER
Hi, sorry, do you have change for a
hundred?

SHOP CLERK
No change.

The clerk gestures to a nearby ATM.

Asher grabs a pack of gum.

ASHER
I can buy this.

SHOP CLERK
We don't have change for a hundred.
Use the ATM.

Asher walks over to at the ATM. It's pretty junky. The screen
is glitching, barely legible.

Asher slides his debit card in and is prompted to enter his
PIN. The keypad is not responding. Asher tries a couple more
times before turning back to the clerk. The other three guys
are silent, watching.

ASHER
The keypad doesn't work.

The BIGGEST GUY walks over and gently nudges Asher aside to
stand in front of the machine.

BIGGEST GUY
This happens a lot. What's your PIN?

ASHER
You're going to do it?

BIGGEST GUY
 You have to shake it when you press.
 It's hard. What's your PIN?

Asher looks to the group.

ASHER
 You guys are cool, right?

The SMALLEST GUY chuckles.

SMALLEST GUY
 You think we need your money?

ASHER
 No, that's not... ah...

Feeling the pressure, he proceeds to say his PIN as if it's no big deal, loud enough for everyone to hear--

ASHER (CONT'D)
 5-1-8-1.

The big guy enters the PIN with gusto, oddly shaking the machine with each push. After trying a couple of times, he turns to Asher.

BIGGEST GUY
 Yeah it's not working today.

He hands Asher his card back.

ASHER
 Okay, thank you...

INT. PRODUCTION VAN - SAME

Dougie is in the front seat waiting for Asher, Whitney is in the back with the crew. He turns to her.

DOUGIE
 We got a great shot of Asher giving a homeless woman some money.

WHITNEY
 How is that a great shot?

DOUGIE
 He looks good. Generous.

WHITNEY
 That's not the type of 'good' I'm talking about Dougie. I don't want to treat these people as props. It's crass. We need to thinking about intersectionality--

DOUGIE
Eeeee. Okay, we don't have to use
it.

EXT. SIDEWALK - SAME

Asher exits the bodega. He is scanning for other shops in the area. There are none. Dougie rolls down his window--

DOUGIE (CONT'D)
I'm not paying OT today. In the van!

INT. PRODUCTION VAN - DAY

Asher gets in and sits beside Whitney. She gives him a look of disappointment, but doesn't say anything.

MOMENTS LATER...

The van is driving. Dougie, in the front passenger seat, turns his head back to Whitney, Asher, and the rest of the crew.

DOUGIE
THAT... IS... A....

He is struggling with something in his lap. He reveals a bottle of champagne, and starts shaking it profusely.

We see an exterior view of the van: It's ominous.

REMI
Oh no, not again.

DOUGIE
... WRAP ON WEEK 9 OF FLIPLANTHROPY!

He pops open the cork. Champagne sprays everywhere. The car swerves.

Whitney took the bulk of the champagne. She's soaked, fuming.

WHITNEY
Is there any paper towel back there?

Remi grabs the paper towel and hands it to her. She starts wiping herself off while Dougie messily pours the champagne into six plastic flutes.

REMI
The only show that celebrates
finishing each week.

DOUGIE
If you ain't celebrating, what are
you doing it for?

Dougie begins passing out champagne flutes to Whitney, Asher and other crew members.

WHITNEY

I want to shoot with Father Manny.

DOUGIE

You mean you want to put the audience to sleep?

WHITNEY

(stern)

Dougie. This is non-negotiable.

DOUGIE

Alright, alright...

He offers a flute to the DRIVER, a 22-year-old production assistant.

DRIVER

I'm good.

DOUGIE

Come on, it's just one glass.

DRIVER

(nervous)

Ok.

The driver takes a small sip.

DOUGIE

Drunk driver!

Incredibly uncomfortable, the driver laughs it off as he continues driving while holding the glass below window view so it cannot be seen.

Again from the exterior, we see the car swerve again.

ASHER

(to Whitney)

Vic has been texting me about the mold. If we ask him to shoot with Father Manny he's going to try to get us to remove it. I know it.

WHITNEY

It'll be fine. Hun. We need this.

DOUGIE

I love making this show with you guys. I love it so much.

Dougie raises his glass. Everyone clinks glasses and takes a sip. Dougie, meanwhile, has already finished chugging his glass and is pouring himself another.

ASHER
(scared, playful)
Dougie!

Dougie looks back with a big smile. He downs his second glass in one swig and pours himself a third.

INT. BATHROOM - NIGHT

We see a close up of a penis peeing. It's one inch big.

Reveal - it belongs to Asher. He's in a bathroom with very floral and old decor. He looks up at a cross on the wall with Jesus nailed to it. Hanging below Jesus is a bible quote:

"Wash yourselves, make yourselves clean; Remove the evil of your deeds from My sight Cease to do evil."

Asher is reading the quote. He's distracted by faint chatter and laughter coming from another room.

INT. WHITNEY'S PARENTS HOME - NIGHT

ELIZABETH (72), the family breadwinner, and her ivy league son, KIT (28) are seated at a dinner table with Whitney. They are having quiet conversation in the DINING ROOM of a lived-in Rustic home.

Moments later, Asher exits the bathroom as Whitney's father, PAUL (75, a bald, affable man wearing oven mitts) is placing a brisket platter down on the table.

They all fall silent and turn to face Asher. It seems like they were talking about him.

PAUL
(to Asher)
Hope you've got an appetite!

INT. WHITNEY'S PARENTS HOME - NIGHT

The butcher block dining table is set up for a shabbat dinner. There is a spread that includes challah bread, candles, and potato latkes. Asher is now seated with everyone at the table as Elizabeth picks up a box of matches.

ELIZABETH
(To Asher)
The women do this one right?

ASHER
 (uncomfortable)
 Traditionally, yes. But really anyone
 can do it...

WHITNEY
 I want to do it the proper way.

ASHER
 Yeah, yeah. Sure.

Elizabeth lights the candles. Then Whitney proceeds to
 butcher the prayer while her mom hums along:

WHITNEY
 Barooch tada addinoy, Eloheynew
 Milich Ha-Olem, ash-er...
 (looks at Asher and winks
 cause the prayer word
 sounds like his name)
 ... Kiddichuno bemitz-otav... Ah...
 shel Shabbat. Oops, Vitzivanu nare...
 shel Shabbat.

Asher politely tolerates the whole performance, it is clearly
 something he deals with all the time.

ASHER
 (uncomfortable)
 Amen.

PAUL
 Aye-Men!

INT. WHITNEY'S PARENTS HOME - LATER

It's late into the meal. Kit and Elizabeth are in the midst
 of an intense conversation.

KIT
 In apartment buildings I
 understand, you need a super,
 but with homes that's part of
 what you sign up for. So we
 are on the clock just in case
 one of these people can't
 find the breaker in the
 middle of the night?

ELIZABETH
 Not if you're renting. Not if
 you're renting.

ELIZABETH (CONT'D)
 You're being ridiculous.

Paul turns to Asher in an attempt to lighten the mood.

PAUL
 Miss the rental business?

ASHER

After being in the red two flips in a row? I might need to rescind my resignation to you guys.

PAUL

All will change once the show airs. Celebrity sells.

KIT

I'm only talking about giving tenants a roadmap to make minor repairs themselves. If they can't figure it out then it's totally reasonable to charge them a fee if we have to send someone out just to change a battery in a smoke detector. We have to start thinking like this. We're accountable to a major fund now.

ELIZABETH

We can't be violating the law.

Kit holds his hands up in the air miming getting arrested. He goes through the whole processes throwing his body on the table.

KIT

Don't arrest me officer. I'll give them the 9 volt battery, just let me go!

ELIZABETH

(sternly)

Kit! That's enough! We're not monsters.

Kit laughs it off and sits back down at his chair.

Elizabeth pivots to Asher and Whitney with a smile.

ELIZABETH (CONT'D)

Paul, these lat-keys are delicious.

PAUL

Don't thank me, thank the potatoes.

ELIZABETH

This is the type of recipe you pass along to your grandchildren.

(to Asher)

Don't you think?

ASHER

I guess once they're old enough to cook.

Kit slyly takes a baby carrot from his plate and puts it on Whitney's. She glares at him, holding back laughter.

INT. WHITNEY'S PARENT'S HOME - KITCHEN - NIGHT

After dinner, Asher and Paul are doing the dishes together.

PAUL

...Coffee grounds. You add it into the soil. It's like a magic trick. Have you ever had a tomato sandwich? I'll have sandwiches now that are just tomatoes and bread. That's it.

ASHER

Maybe a little mayo?

PAUL

It doesn't need it!

ASHER

Wow. I mean, I've never tasted tomatoes like that before, so it makes sense...

A white labradoodle jumps up on Paul's leg. He reaches into a vinyl pouch on his belt, pulls out a treat, and raises it to his chin.

PAUL

Now speak, and tell me you love me.
(the dog howls)
Good boy.

Paul feeds the dog the treat. Asher watches with a smile as he dries off the last dish.

PAUL (CONT'D)

(to Asher)
Can I show you them?

INT. GREENHOUSE - MOMENTS LATER

Paul and Asher enter the lush greenhouse. It is almost like a forest, Paul has quite the green thumb.

PAUL

People are a lot like tomatoes.

Paul reaches into a vine and caresses a big beefsteak tomato.

PAUL (CONT'D)

I mean you have beefsteak's...

The two walk a little deeper and Paul caresses a handful of Cherry tomatoes.

PAUL (CONT'D)
 ...and you got cherries. Very different but can cut up a cherry tomato and put it on a sandwich and it will taste great. Once it's between the bread it's all the same.

Paul picks a cherry off the vine and hands it to Asher.

PAUL (CONT'D)
 Try the cherry...

While Asher eats the cherry tomato he turns around to inspect the beefsteak tomato on the vine.

ASHER
 Mmm. Yeah, it sort of has a sweetness that I didn't taste in the other ones you--

When Asher turns back he sees that Paul's pants are unzipped and his penis is out. It's small.

ASHER (CONT'D)
 (shocked)
 I, ahhh... I think they need me inside...

Asher begins to exit. Paul, recovering, quickly zips up his pants--

PAUL
 (mad at himself)
 Asher, I'm sorry I didn't want that to seem... I was trying to show you that I understand what you're going through with my daughter.

Asher is so uncomfortable.

ASHER
 I don't know what you mean.

PAUL
 It's okay, I know. It can be embarrassing especially when so much is on the line. Lizzie and I dealt with it too but I got over it and now look at me... two kids! I get it, it's sad. But is that how you want to live? Be humiliated. Be the clown. Embrace it. It's fun... it can be fun.

ASHER

I really don't know what you're taking about.

PAUL

It's been five months, right? Since you've tried?

(then)

Whitney's thirty-five. This is an awkward talk, I know. But I know Whit, and I know she has no issue with your size. That's a blessing. Or as you call it a 'mitzvah'.

(approaches Asher)

For guys like us, I can tell you that once you're with someone, you find that person who doesn't care - you become the clown - it's the most liberating thing in the world. It's like fucking with a 10-inch-cock.

ASHER

(please let this end)

Thank you for sharing. Should we go back inside?

PAUL

Of course, of course.

(smiles)

Look at us. The cherry tomato boys.

He puts his arm around Asher and gives him a squeeze.

ASHER

Right.

EXT. WHITNEY AND ASHER'S HOME - NIGHT

The couple pulls their BMW electric car into the driveway of a newly constructed, white-barn style home. On their way into the house, Asher removes a couple plastic-enclosed dinners from a meal delivery bag.

INT. ASHER AND WHITNEY'S HOME - NIGHT

A brown labradoodle, TUCKER, greets them at the door. Their home is a combination of Restoration Hardware and West Elm. They have a giant nautical clock hanging in the living room. There is a lot of mercury glass and gothic style modern furniture. Large marquee lettering hang on the wall spelling out the word 'LOVE' with vanity bulbs.

Asher puts the meal containers in the fridge. On his way back to the living room he encounters Whitney, staring at him with a mischievous look.

ASHER

What?

WHITNEY

(flirty)

What?

She's trying to create energy between them. But it isn't there.

ASHER

What's private... between us? I mean like what's ours?

Asher picks up the remote, and sits on a love seat.

WHITNEY

Asher, what is this? Everything. I don't want to do anything that makes you uncomfortable. But... it's my life too.

Asher clutches his chest. This is hard for him.

ASHER

My parents haven't seen me shower since I was under twelve.

WHITNEY

That's normal.

Whitney, deflated, joins him on a nearby the couch.

ASHER

My point is, I don't talk about things.

(then)

It's on the DVR. Should we watch it?

WHITNEY

(nervous)

Fuck. Okay... Play it.

MOMENTS LATER, ON THE TV:

The news report is mid-way through. Monica speaks over footage of the interiors of the new shops--

MONICA STERN (V.O.)

...Prices may be out of reach for many residents of Maris Heights, it's refreshing to see companies that are making a investment in the community.

Shot of Asher from his interview, with the chyron on the couple "Whitney and Asher Gold, Hosts, Fliplanthropy"--

ASHER

The brands, um, Kangoo, Inca Jean, Bubblesack have all committed to hiring staff exclusively from Maris Heights.

We cut to Monica standing live in front of Kangoo Coffee, speaking to camera:

MONICA PEREZ

Although some in Maris Heights fear the changing demographics will lead to the displacement of lower income families, many local residents I spoke with today are feeling optimistic about socially conscious approach this reality show is taking. The first season of Fliplanthropy is set to air this fall on HGTV. I'm Monica Perez for New York One.

BACK TO LIVING ROOM.

ASHER

Whit. That was a good story. Very fair. I told you there was nothing to worry about.

She has a glimmer in her eye. Her first taste of fame.

WHITNEY

We look cute together on camera.

Whitney looks at Asher with an impish glare. He smiles then goes back to scrolling on the DVR. Whitney, seductively lifts up her shirt and bra, exposing her BARE CHEST. She is eagerly anticipating him noticing once he looks back from the screen.

After about twenty seconds, he still hasn't noticed. He's still scrolling. Her enthusiasm wanes. Eventually she just pulls her shirt back down and looks at the TV too. Then--

ASHER

Making out with me in a parking lot the day after I tell you I don't feel wanted is pretty transparent.

WHITNEY

What am I supposed to do?

ASHER

You could be honest and just ask for my sperm in a cup.

WHITNEY

Jesus Christ.

She heads upstairs to bed.

INT. REMODELED HOME - DAY

SPORES OF MOLD cover the ceiling of a small pantry-like room. Asher is leaning over a washer/dryer to inspect it, acting as if it's harder to see than it really is.

ASHER

Honestly I didn't know you'd be using this as a laundry room.

VIC (29), tech-bro vibe, is standing nearby with his arms crossed.

VIC

This is where the washer-dryer hookup was.

ASHER

(caught)

Right. A lot of people just use it for storage though.

Whitney starts chatting him up from the adjacent kitchen.

WHITNEY

I'm so excited for you to meet Father Manny tomorrow!

VIC

That's not going to be filmed is it?

WHITNEY

I know, it's so annoying. We'd prefer that too. It's just the show is following how we integrate our buyers into the neighborhood, and you're such an important part of that story.

VIC

Look, I'm fine to meet with the guy, I'd just prefer not to have it filmed if that's okay? I'm an atheist. And it's, like, a bit awkward if my friends see me in a church with a priest...

WHITNEY

Oh it's not a religious thing AT ALL. He's just going to tell you about the calendar of community events, the cultural history of the area... No religious stuff. I shouldn't even call him Father. It's just Manny, really.

Asher joins them.

ASHER

So our guys can't legally do the mold, you'll have to hire a specialist for that... but once it's taken care of how about we put in a vent for you. And I never do this after closing.

WHITNEY

(selling)
How about that!

VIC

Hmm. I guess if you did the vent *and* the mold I could bend my values enough to do the shoot. Otherwise...

Whitney eyes Asher "Do it".

ASHER

That'll be two grand. Three maybe.

WHITNEY

(overly cheery)
Last time I checked our bank account we have that.

Asher drops his head in defeat.

INT. CHURCH - DAY

As the cameras roll, Vic is incredibly uncomfortable. He's standing with FATHER MANNY, dressed in full priest garb in old, charming church. A delighted Whitney watches from off-camera.

FATHER MANNY

... we have our outreach program designed to tackle poverty in the area, and several food drives per calendar year. Our Thanksgiving one is coming up. We're always looking for volunteers!

VIC

Great, great... A lot of stuff.

Dougie, standing by the monitors, whispers to a crew member.

DOUGIE

Riveting.

Asher and Whitney watching from off-camera at the back of the church near a scattering of CHURCHGOERS seated in the pews.

Asher scans room, smiling to himself. He then notices a STRANGE OLD MAN in sunglasses looking right at him.

Asher makes a "who me?" gesture, but the man is totally unfazed. He just keeps staring.

ASHER
(to Whitney, whispering)
Is that guy looking at me?

WHITNEY
It looks like it, I can't tell.

They both keep surreptitiously checking on the Old Man. His eyes remain trained on Asher.

ASHER
I'm gonna go over there and if he follows me I'm leaving.

Dougie shoots a dirty look over at them and mouths "Shut up."

Asher apologizes and proceeds to cross the room. The Old Man's head doesn't even flinch. It remains looking in the same direction. Asher shrugs at Whitney, "I guess it was nothing." They continue watching the shoot.

Father Manny then reaches forward and clutches both of Vic's hands.

FATHER MANNY
May I ask, where do you derive your meaning from? Your purpose?

VIC
Beauty. Nature... My instincts?

FATHER MANNY
And who created those?

VIC
(thinks)
Science.

FULL SCREEN:

The opening credits sequence for Fliplanthropy plays.

WHITNEY (V.O.)
We're Whitney and Asher Gold. For nearly two years my husband and I have been buying ugly, beat up, and sometimes *nasty* houses and renovating them for a profit.
(MORE)

WHITNEY (V.O.) (CONT'D)

But we don't just flip homes, we also flip communities, bringing in new business, and making dreams come true for everyone who lives here.

Shots of Whitney and Asher renovating homes. Shots pulled from the Kangoo Coffee opening, the Aussie-model employees, plus Fernando's mother with the water-bottle tears.

WHITNEY (V.O.)

We're helping out in a way no one has done before - turning these rough places, into dream spaces. And putting smiles on everyone's faces.

The sequence ends with a final shot of Whitney and Asher standing back-to-back, arms crossed, posing for camera in front of a renovated home.

WHITNEY AND ASHER

This... is Fliplanthropy.

INT. DOUGIE'S EDIT SUITE - CONTINUOUS

The video we just saw is playing on one of three computer monitors in Dougie's "edit suite," which looks more like a lived-in studio apartment. Whitney and Asher are seated on a daybed. It's cramped in there. Whitney moves a BED PILLOW out of the way - it's very tattered and old.

At the nearby desk is an editor, SVEN, an early-20's intern. Dougie is standing over Sven's shoulder. He turns to the couple and smiles.

DOUGIE

(thick lisp)

Not bad, right?

ASHER

It is a nice bed.

DOUGIE

(really enunciating)

I said not baaaad.

WHITNEY

Dougie we cannot have those shots of the Australian employees in the opening.

DOUGIE

Right, of course, Sven--
(gesturing to write it down)

Just show the Mexicans.

(MORE)

DOUGIE (CONT'D)

Actually, maybe we can swap it with some of the b-roll from Friday. Can you pull that up?

(then)

Why aren't the graphics done?

SVEN

It's exam week.

DOUGIE

This is your school. It's opportunities like this that lead to a career, not education.

SVEN

I know.

DOUGIE

Here. Pull up my pilot I sent you.

SVEN

Do you want me pull up the pilot or the b-roll?

DOUGIE

Fuck. Pilot first. I want you to copy the visual effects in this.

(turns to Asher and Whitney)

It's a shame this never made it to air, I'm telling you...

Sven pulls up a video file of a reality TV pilot called BURNING FOR LOVE. A handsome male HOST talks to camera in an elegant TV STUDIO--

HOST

Most people say that real beauty is on the inside. But do they actually believe it? This show puts that claim to the test as 20 single women vie for the heart of one man who's face will be concealed the entire time.

Shots of rows of elegantly gowned women, then CU of a man with a hood and sunglasses on.

HOST (CONT'D)

I can tell you right now, he will fall in love. And one of these women will fall for him too.

Adoring "awww's" from studio audience.

HOST (CONT'D)

Only once the couple are legally wed in an official ceremony will she see his face for the first time... and realize he is a survivor of a horrific apartment fire.

REVEAL, the man's hood is lifted and his face is basically melted. It's gruesome. Cheesy halloween scream SFX play underneath.

IN EDIT SUITE: Dougie turns to a horrified Whitney with a big smile.

DOUGIE

Good right?

She turns to Asher, who is finding it funny. Asher then realizes he shouldn't be enjoying this. His smile goes away. But the damage is done. As the video continues, she keeps eyeing him -- as offended by Asher's reaction to the show as she is to the show itself. Dougie points out the graphical elements in it to Sven--

HOST

Will she stand by her belief that beauty is on the inside? Or will his looks be too much to handle.

DOUGIE (CONT'D)

You see that transition? We used a lot of those swooshes.

HOST (CONT'D)

Find out this season on... Burning for Love.

A GRAPHIC SWOOSH engulfs the shot and turns into a burning show title.

DOUGIE

How the letters turn into the title like that? I was thinking we could do something where a For Sale sign morphs--

WHITNEY

Did you make this??

DOUGIE

Hilarious, right?

WHITNEY

We don't want to be associated with something like this.

DOUGIE

Relax, it never aired.

WHITNEY

But this is your taste?

She turns to Asher who reluctantly jumps in.

ASHER

Yeah, we don't want to offend anyone. I mean, this is like pranks on burn victims.

DOUGIE

It's not... If you watch the show you'll see it's heartfelt. I mean, we actually doing this guy a favor. He doesn't get 20 women lusting after him in his regular life, trust me. We had him wear that hood behind the scenes too. We told him it was for secrecy but really it was because his face was fucking disgusting.

Whitney and Asher are speechless. Dougie tries to downplay, going back to the graphics with Sven. Whitney and Asher make eyes to one another - silently negotiating how to handle. Dougie feels the tension in the room and turns back to the couple.

DOUGIE (CONT'D)

Here's the beauty about *our* show. It's feel good, it's hopeful. There's nothing to criticize about it. With *Burning for Love*, in the back of my head, sure, maybe I knew we were having a little too much fun. But with this, there's nothing to hate. It's immune.

ASHER

We just have a brand, that's all, a reputation.

DOUGIE

So you want to make this on your own? Should I call up HGTV?

ASHER

That's not what we're saying.

DOUGIE

(threatening)

Then what are you saying? I'm confused.

Asher and Whitney are stunned. Asher can't even make eye contact with him.

DOUGIE (CONT'D)
Don't look at the floor, look at me.

Asher looks at him like a weak bitch.

DOUGIE (CONT'D)
That's better.

SVEN
Got the b-roll up.

Whitney discretely signals to Asher he should back down.

DOUGIE
(back to normal)
Great, oh take a look at this shot.
It's not as bad as you think...

ON THE MONITOR, long lens footage plays of Asher talking to the homeless woman. We hear the audio of the homeless woman making wrenching sounds. And then Asher's audio from his lav mic:

Homeless Woman: "You're cursed. I cursed you."

Asher laughs in disbelief: "Okay..."

BACK TO EDIT SUITE, they're all watching--

WHITNEY
What did she just say?

ASHER
(laughing)
She said she cursed me.

WHITNEY
Why would she do that?

ASHER
I only had a hundred dollar bill so after we got the shot I asked for it back so I could get some change.

WHITNEY
How much did you end up giving her?

ASHER
Well, nothing. Dougie said we had to leave.

WHITNEY
Why didn't you just give her the hundred?

ASHER
I... I don't... it's a lot.

WHITNEY
(pleading)
We're making a show about helping
people! What are you thinking??

DOUGIE
She's right, that's fucked up.

The tension in the room is sky high.

WHITNEY
Now we have some curse hovering over
us.

ASHER
Oh Jesus Christ, come on. There's no
curse. She's crazy.

WHITNEY
Just cause she's homeless?

DOUGIE
She's a gypsy. They're all over that
area.

ASHER
No, she was Hispanic.

DOUGIE
Same thing.

ASHER
I don't think it's the same thing.

WHITNEY
It doesn't matter... even if you
don't believe in curses you believe
in Karma, right? We've talked about
this?!

ASHER
(neutered)
Yes. I believe in it.

WHITNEY
You have to go back there and give
her the money.

ASHER
Okay I will.

WHITNEY
Right now.

ASHER
Okay!

WHITNEY

And make sure the curse is lifted,
for fuck's sake.

She stares at him with contempt. He stares back, trying to match her, but failing.

WHITNEY (CONT'D)

GO!

Dougie revels in the discomfort.

DOUGIE

Better go, pal.

EXT. SIDEWALK - EVENING

Asher pulls up in his BMW and parks on the block where they filmed him with the homeless woman.

He gets out and approaches the spot with the giant mural of planet Earth on the wall. He pauses, confused. There is no sign of her. Her tent and shopping cart are nowhere to be seen. It's as if she was never there.

He scans the area and spots a couple other tents further down the way.

EXT. TENT AREA - EVENING

Asher approaches one of the tents. It's zipped shut, and filthy. He tries to knock on it, but his fist just pushes into the fabric without making a sound.

ASHER

Hello?

Asher wipes off his fist on his pants.

A HOMELESS MOTHER unzips her tent and looks up at Asher. Next to her is a 3-year-old BOY. Asher leans forward.

ASHER (CONT'D)

Hi, do you know where the woman is
who had her tent set up over there?

He locks eyes with the child, then looks back at the mom, uncomfortable.

ASHER (CONT'D)

Never mind. Sorry.

He walks away.

EXT. SIDEWALK - EVENING

Asher approaches his truck. He scans the block one more time, then opens the door to get in, then pauses, in thought. After a beat, he slams the door shut and walks back.

INT. TENT - NIGHT

A hand unzips a tent door revealing Asher holding a \$100 bill.

ASHER

Here.

He hands the bill to the homeless mother who is overcome with joy. She is holding her child.

HOMELESS MOTHER

God bless you.

INT. DOUGIE'S EDIT SUITE - NIGHT

Sven is now gone. Whitney is sitting at the desk in front of microphone inside a portable soundproofing shield, while Dougie is seated at the computer capturing the audio.

WHITNEY

(reading)

... Even though the kitchen was going to need a major overhaul, I knew we had to keep some of the lighting fixtures. Art deco is back in a serious way. And these are-- And these were-- Ahhhhhhh.

DOUGIE

Just do it again, it's fine.

WHITNEY

I'm sorry. It's hard for me right now. The energy in here is all off.

Dougie pauses.

DOUGIE

That was weird, huh? Asher?

Whitney doesn't respond, she is deep in thought. Dougie seizes the opportunity--

DOUGIE (CONT'D)

He doesn't have what you have you know. It's almost like he has no core.

(backtracking)

(MORE)

DOUGIE (CONT'D)

Sorry I don't want to overstep. That was rude. I guess I'm just trying to say that on camera you have such a presence that it can overshadow him sometimes.

WHITNEY

I don't know about that.

DOUGIE

People are gonna dream about being with you.

Dougie stares at her with a flirtatious grin. Then...

DOUGIE (CONT'D)

Hey, you don't have to worry about me. I'm gay.

This is news to Whitney.

WHITNEY

Oh, I didn't know...

DOUGIE

Don't get me wrong, you're both fucking great. I love the dynamic. But if I'm being perfectly honest, when I met you two at that open house I was like, She's the star.

Whitney is unsure of how to take this "compliment". Or the whole conversation. Then, Asher cracks open the door and slips his head in.

ASHER

(whispering)
Okay to come in?

DOUGIE

There's my boy.

Whitney takes off her headphones and exits the booth.

WHITNEY

What did she say? Did you give her the money?

ASHER

Yeah, yeah.

WHITNEY

And what did she say?

ASHER

She was happy.

WHITNEY

Did she say the curse was lifted?

ASHER

(laughs)

Yes, the "curse" is lifted.

WHITNEY

I want to know exactly what she said.
What did you do?

ASHER

I gave her the money, and then I
said, "Is the curse gone?" And she
said.... "Yes, it's gone." Then she
said, "God bless you."

Whitney breathes a huge sigh of relief.

WHITNEY

Thank God.
(recovering)
Okay. Okay, okay.

Whitney sits back down at the table and gets herself
situated. She does a couple deep cleansing breaths.

WHITNEY (CONT'D)

Ready?

(Dougie nods, then,
reading)

Even though the kitchen was going to
need a major overhaul, I knew we had
to keep some of the lighting
fixtures. Art deco is back in a
serious way. And these puppies were
right on trend...

As Whitney reads, the production audio fades out and the
eerie, devotional music from the opening begins to play.

The camera slowly zooms in on Asher as he watches Whitney
work. He's wracked with guilt.

EXT. DOUGIE'S APARTMENT BUILDING - NIGHT

The music continues as Asher and Whitney leave and get into
their car and drive off.

EXT. RURAL ROAD - NIGHT

We see an extended driving sequence that ends with them
pulling up to a traffic light on a vacant stretch of road.

Suddenly, they hear a horn honking. It's the car beside them. No else is around. The STRANGER in the adjacent car is motioning for Asher to roll his window down.

Asher rolls down his window. The Stranger has a stilted demeanor and no teeth. He speaks almost as if he's an actor reciting lines, oddly articulate for no teeth--

STRANGER

I'm sorry to bother you, but my phone is dead, and I have been driving around forever trying to find a gas station.

ASHER

No problem, I'll just look it up on mine. You want to pull over to the shoulder?

STRANGER

Don't worry, no one's coming.

Asher looks in his rear view mirror, nervous. Meanwhile Whitney takes Asher's phone and looks up the closest gas station.

WHITNEY

There's a BP two miles down this road that's open.

STRANGER

Wow, you are such lifesavers.
(long pause, then)
I had a good feeling about you two.

The light turns green and the Stranger drives off.

WHITNEY

Oh my god. That was so weird!

ASHER

Holy shit.

They laugh. Before they can drive off, the light turns red again.

ASHER (CONT'D)

What the hell!
(then)
This light is shorter than my penis.

Whitney's mouth drops. Asher has never made a joke like this before. He looks vulnerable.

She smiles and punches his shoulder. He relaxes. It's a nice moment.

ASHER (CONT'D)
Maybe we have sex tonight?

Whitney smiles, eager. They're going to fuck.

The ominous music crescendos as the light turns green. They drive off.

CUT TO BLACK.