

"CAUGHT OUT THERE"

by

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OPENING TEXT -

After the fiasco that was 2020, the only surprise left for humankind to anticipate was extraterrestrials showing up. Turns out they were already here.

Their preferred English term is "Notofearth" (not of Earth).

Earthlings are fascinated and annoyed by their supernatural ability to "pop in" and "pop out" as they please.

Nonetheless, humans have yet to stop the never-ending quest for sex and companionship...

SERIES OF SHOTS - COUPLES ON DATES AND PEOPLE FLIRTING IN SOCIAL ENVIRONMENTS - TO THE TUNE OF "FLOAT ON" BY THE FLOATERS

INT. BAR - NIGHT

Two male PATRONS are sitting at the bar. One checks his watch.

MALE PATRON 1

Aye man, I gotta go in like, 15 minutes. I told the kids I was goin' to the gym.

His companion motions to the bartender to bring two more drinks.

Two barstools away, two FEMALE PATRONS are having a heated discussion. One is clearly upset.

FEMALE PATRON 1

...and they gon' let her do MY project! I'M the one who brought it up at the staff meeting!

Her companion motions to the bartender to bring two more drinks.

Two barstools away, a woman sits alone. She makes eye contact with a man sitting at the other end of the bar. They connect and smile at each other. With her head and eyes, she asks if the guy wants a drink. The guy indicates yes, smiles flirtatiously, then gets up and joins her. She motions to the bartender for two drinks.

A woman (Black, early 30s, curvy) enters the bar, passing the sign displaying the Thursday night Happy Hour Specials. This is HEARTLY. She sits on a barstool and squints at a list of drink specials. She nervously glances around, then pulls out reading glasses. When she looks up, she realizes the bartender is looking directly at her.

HEARTLY
(snatches off her glasses)
Can you recommend something good?

BARTENDER
You cryin', sighin', or celebratin'?

HEARTLY
All o'that. There's a man I need to forget. Or kill.

BARTENDER
Oh shit. Aight. I got'chu.

A man (Black, early 30s) enters the bar. This is MALIK. He sits two seats down from Heartly.

BARTENDER (CONT'D)
What up main man?

MALIK
What up. Gimme a Revolver, man.

BARTENDER
Oh shit. You too?

MALIK
Damn. You got somebody else up for the six-shooter?

The BARTENDER nods toward Heartly.

HEARTLY
(looking from the bartender to Malik)
Hold up... what'chu 'bout to give me?

The BARTENDER sets up six shot glasses in front of Malik and six in front of Heartly. He pours different liquids into a cocktail shaker.

HEARTLY (CONT'D)
Wait... can I get something a little more... feminine?

BARTENDER

You said you wanna forget the dude
or kill him. That's what the
Revolver is for.

HEARTLY

(takes a deep breath)
Ok.

She looks at Malik.

MALIK

We in the same boat, I see.

HEARTLY

Bad breakup?

MALIK

If we was even IN a damn
relationship... (thinks) Nah, I
KNOW we were! Damn Leos, man. And
I ain't even into that birthday
Zodiac shit, but my boys warned me
about them damn Leos!

Heartly gasps and moves to the seat next to Malik. The
bartender fills their shot glasses.

HEARTLY

NOOOO! Oh my gosh! I'M about to
kill a Leo!! What'd yours do?

They both take a shot.

MALIK

So... she's a party promoter.
'Round-the-town socialite, social
media model, (does finger quotes)
influencer, the whole nine...

CUT TO:

FLASHBACK:

INT. NIGHTCLUB - NIGHT

Malik follows behind RHONDA (late 20s, Instagram model-type,
ambiguous race) who seems to know EVERYONE as she passes by
them. A lively hip hop groove plays as enthusiastic clubgoers
dance and socialize.

Malik watches her hug and kiss every guy she passes and speak to each of them by name. As she progresses through the club, each interaction seems to get more personal and intimate. Finally they reach the OWNER of the club.

RHONDA
HAYYYYYY BOO! You been workin' out?
You lookin' extra fine...

OWNER
A little bit. Good to see you,
Rhonda. You gon' have to let me
take you out again. Last time
was... memorable.

MALIK
AHEM.

Rhonda ignores Malik as she leans in to the owner and whispers something in his ear. The Owner laughs and hugs her, sneakily slipping a hand over her rear. Malik sees the movement and steps forward but Rhonda laughs, runs her hand across the owner's chest while moving the other hand off of her posterior, and walks away.

Malik stares the owner down before Rhonda grabs him by the hand and drags him away. Malik starts to push her away when someone hands Rhonda a mic. She addresses the crowd.

RHONDA
Hey ya'll! Thanks for coming out
tonight! We gon' get this party
started...

CUT TO:

EXT. NIGHTCLUB - LATER

Rhonda steps out of the club. Malik follows a few steps behind, furious. They walk a few steps before he finally speaks.

MALIK
What the hell was that?

RHONDA
A party?

MALIK
You know what I'm talking about.
How many times we gonna do this?
Every dude, every club.

(MORE)

MALIK (CONT'D)

Like you know every dude in the club intimately!

RHONDA

And?

MALIK

You have a man. This is mad disrespectful. And that shit with the owner? What the --

RHONDA

THIS is why I'm the best promoter in the city. Everybody knows me, and I make EVERYBODY feel special.

Rhonda notices that bystanders have gathered. She holds up a wad of cash.

RHONDA (CONT'D)

This money ain't disrespectful. And right now I'm about this money. Can I live?

MALIK

What about us?

A few bystanders have pulled out their phones and started streaming in hopes that something ridiculous will jump off. Rhonda takes advantage of the situation.

RHONDA

@RhondaBooBaby is an independent woman! She don't need nobody but her 124,333 follow--

Her phone dings. Another follower!

RHONDA (CONT'D)

Oop! 124,334 followers. You can either get on the train or you can step.

Malik takes a step back and looks at the cameras recording.

CUT TO:

INT. BAR - PRESENT

Malik shakes his head as Heartly holds up her phone. A YouTube video is already set up titled "@RhondaBooBaby Disses Random Dude."

HEARTLY

Oh shit! This was you?! I follow @RhondaBooBaby! I'll be honest, I laughed my ass off at this, but I felt bad for you. Oh my god!

Malik holds up another shot, she takes hers, and they clink glasses. They drink.

MALIK

Your turn.

HEARTLY

Well... speaking of videos... Here is the Leo I want to kill.

Heartly types on her phone then hands it to him. A video by THE HONORABLE DR. KIMET ROBINSON (THDKR) is playing. We can tell that he is at a desk in a hotel room, talking into his laptop camera. He is being serious but looks ridiculous because he is wearing a PaRappa the Rapper hat.

VIDEO:

THDKR

I see all these queens doin' sit-ups, usin' all these exercises and devices tryna get a small waistline. You are not meant to have a small waist, sisters! Your waist is meant to expand, so that YOU can carry the next generation of warriors! That's why we call you WOMB-MAN. Your womb is your connection to the divine. You need that extra flesh around your waist to protect the life inside...

Malik snickers as he stops the video and hands the phone back to Heartly.

MALIK

I can't... I can't...
(downs a shot)
And you fell for that hotep shit?

HEARTLY

You know, your use of the term "hotep" is not...

MALIK

(cutting her off)
Daaammnnn! You had a Leo hotep!

Heartly opens her mouth to argue, but Malik cuts her off again.

MALIK (CONT'D)
You had a *Leotep*!

Heartly looks at Malik as if she is going to cut him, but he can't stop laughing.

MALIK (CONT'D)
I'm sorry, I'm sorry. Go ahead.

HEARTLY
I fell for a man that I trusted to love me for who I am! Didn't have to work out, didn't have to shave, didn't have to wear makeup...

She downs a shot.

MALIK
Or weren't allowed to...

She missed his remark, and is staring off in another direction.

HEARTLY
I could be just ME. And somebody loved it.

MALIK
So, what happened?

HEARTLY
(takes a deep breath)
I came home one day...

MALIK
(cutting her off)
You let him move in, didn't you?

HEARTLY
He was between places... All he had was a suitcase and a laptop. Shut up. Anyway...

FLASHBACK:

Cut to an apartment living room, decorated with an overly exaggerated African theme. This is Heartly's apartment. Jazz music is playing. Heartly walks in her front door, just coming home from work. THDKR is standing in the middle of the room. He is wearing a washed out undershirt and basketball shorts.

HEARTLY (CONT'D)
 Guess who broke out early?

THDKR
 (nodding slowly)
 In divine time, there is no early,
 no late. Everything happens when
 it should.

HEARTLY
 You on it already, huh?
 (sniffs the air)
 And you're cooking too?

THDKR
 Have a seat.

Heartly plops down on the sofa and puts her feet up. THDKR is still standing. Heartly is looking at him as if she expects him to bring her a plate of the food she smells.

THDKR (CONT'D)
 As my first wife...

HEARTLY
 (happily)
 Yes, your wi... Hol' up. First?

THDKR
 (calmly cuts her off)
 You know I'm building my village.
 You will always be the first queen.
 And YOU will get to approve any
 others.

HEARTLY
 Others?

THDKR
 (calls to the closet)
 Queen... come on out, queen.

The closet door bangs and won't open. Someone inside can't get out. Heartly jumps up.

CLOSET GIRL
 (quietly)
 Help?

THDKR shakes his head and goes over to open the closet door. CLOSET GIRL hesitates to come out. THDKR walks over to her and gently pulls her out of the closet. She is wearing a t-shirt that reads "Hon. Dr. Kimet Robinson 2015 Tour" with

a picture of his face. Heartly is still standing, stunned, with her mouth open. This is the first time we can see that Heartly is taller than THDKR. But the woman is shorter than THDKR.

THDKR

My other queens will be able to look UP to me, and...

HEARTLY

WHAT?!

THDKR

And, like her, they should be half my age, plus seven, so...

HEARTLY

She can't even find her way out a closet! What kind of bullshi--

Heartly's rant of obscenities is heard as a series of bleeps. The scene cuts abruptly.

CUT TO:

INT. BAR - PRESENT DAY

Heartly downs another shot. Malik does the same.

MALIK

Ouch.
And now you gotta go through a divorce?

HEARTLY

Hell no, we weren't married for real! Thank God...
He ain't a real doctor either.
It's a community-earned title that..

Heartly realizes how ridiculous it all sounds and then takes another shot. Malik follows suit.

MALIK

So what's your name, sweetheart?

HEARTLY

(with attitude)
Sweetheart?

MALIK
(mockingly)
Queeeen?

Heartly is not amused.

MALIK (CONT'D)
Nice to meet you. I'm Malik.

He offers his hand, but Heartly acts disgusted.

HEARTLY
Malik? Unh uh. That's too much
Kwanzaa. Is that your real name? I
don't wanna meet no Malik, no Ra-
sheed, no Wah-seem...

MALIK
Well forget you too. Fake doctor
gotchu hatin' on REAL names?

Heartly takes the fifth shot. She appears to be disgusted
with herself. She turns to Malik and offers her hand.

HEARTLY
I'm Heartly.

MALIK
Like the motorcycle?

HEARTLY
No, like a heart. Heart-ly.

MALIK
(recoiling)
Yeah, after a Rhonda-Boo-Baby, I
damn sure don't wanna meet no Heart-
lee.

Heartly is about to respond when the bartender returns.

BARTENDER
Alright. So, before you take your
last shots, I offer you a menu to
feed all o'dat...
(hands Heartly a menu)
AND a list of our recommended
rideshare drivers.
(hands Malik a laminated
list)
I'll give y'all a minute.
(walks away)

As Malik and Heartly glance over the menu and the list, the music changes to something more upbeat. They look over their shoulders and see that a DJ is spinning vinyl. We hear Billy Ocean's "Nights (Feel Like Gettin' Down)"

They're both drunk.

HEARTLY

I love this song! When did a DJ set up?

MALIK

Oh HELL YES.

They both yell for the bartender and we see a montage of them taking selfies, dancing, and clinking beers and glasses of water, eating wings, and feeding each other fries.

CUT TO:

INT. RIDESHARE CAR - NIGHT

The RIDESHARE DRIVER shakes her head and looks at Heartly and Malik in the rearview mirror.

RIDESHARE DRIVER

How ya'll doin'?

HEARTLY

(slurred)

As long as you ain't a Leo, we all good! Wait, when's your birthday?

RIDESHARE DRIVER

July 11th.

MALIK

Oh Halleluyer!

The driver shakes her head and turns the radio up just a little. Alanis Morissette's "You Oughtta Know" is playing.

HEARTLY

Turn it up, DJ!

As the music turns up, Heartly looks at Malik as if she's challenging him to say something negative about the song. Instead, Malik joins in singing. Loudly.

HEARTLY AND MALIK

AND I'M HERE! TO REMIND YOU! OF THE
MESS YOU LEFT WHEN YOU WENT AWAY!

(MORE)

HEARTLY AND MALIK (CONT'D)
IT'S NOT FAIR! TO DENY ME! OF THE
CROSS I BEAR THAT YOU GAVE TO ME!

CUT TO:

INT. MALIK'S APARTMENT - NIGHT

Heartly is on his couch, grabbing a pillow to settle in for the night. Malik tosses her a blanket. She snuggles into it.

MALIK
You need an alarm? You goin' to
work tomorrow?

Heartly snores loudly. Malik goes to his room and closes the door.

FADE TO BLACK.

INT. MALIK'S APARTMENT - MORNING

Heartly's cell phone alarm is going off. She wakes up and realizes she is not in her own place. She slowly sits up and her hair is all messed up.

MALIK
Mornin' sunshine.

Heartly is startled, then embarrassed. She looks down and is still fully dressed. Malik is sitting at his dining room table, typing on his laptop. He appears to be wide awake and unaffected by the previous night's drinking. Heartly groans and shoots him an evil look.

He laughs as he goes to the fridge, takes out a Gatorade, and brings it to her. She takes it and groans again. He gently fluffs the pillow behind her in order to prop her up. He takes the Gatorade, opens it for her, and hands it back to her. She takes a drink.

MALIK (CONT'D)
You goin' to work today?

HEARTLY
(groans and mutters unintelligibly)

Malik walks back to his laptop.

MALIK

No worries. You can chill for a while. I work from home.

Heartly Slowly sits up and puts her feet on the floor.

HEARTLY

Bathroom?

Malik points in the direction of the bathroom. Heartly stands up and walks slowly to the bathroom.

CUT TO:

As she sits on the toilet, she notices that the bathroom is decorated with a Black superhero theme. She half-smiles in approval.

CUT TO:

Heartly looks in the mirror as we hear the flush of the toilet. She jumps back when she sees her reflection. Her hair is a mess and her mascara is smudged all around her eyes. She turns on the faucet and washes her hands quickly. She starts wadding toilet paper to use to wipe off her eye makeup.

CUT TO:

Malik continues to work on his laptop.

CUT TO:

Heartly opens his medicine cabinet. She also peeks behind his shower curtain. She looks back at the sink and notices two toothbrushes in a holder. She looks at the towel rack and sees two used full-sized towels that are different colors, indicating that they have been used by two different people.

HEARTLY (CONT'D)

Roommate. Mmph.

She walks back to the living room and grabs the Gatorade.

MALIK

Hungry?

HEARTLY

(thinks for a second)
Uh...

MALIK

I'm just bein' hospitable.

He gets up and goes to the fridge.

MALIK (CONT'D)

You DID just wake up on my couch.
I'd offer a stray dog somethin' to
eat.

Heartly acts mildly offended at his comment. Malik scans the contents of his refrigerator.

MALIK (CONT'D)

I got...eggs, blueberry muffins,
creamed chipped beef, grapes,
chicken sausage, pork bacon...
(Shuts fridge)
Grits, oatmeal...?

HEARTLY

Where's the roommate?

MALIK

My roommate?
(looks as if he wonders
what she knows)
He won't be back until tonight.

HEARTLY

You know the last time I had
actual, pork bacon?

FADE TO:

Heartly and Malik on his couch, full from breakfast, with coffee mugs in their hands. Malik grabs the remote control and turns on the TV.

HEARTLY (CONT'D)

Why would you say you had pork
bacon if you weren't willing to
cook it?

MALIK

I don't eat that stuff. That's his,
the roommate's. I don't dig the
swine.

HEARTLY

Hotep...

MALIK

(laughing)

I'ma wipe that makeup off your face
too! Better not have eff'd up my
pillow!

Malik grabs for the pillow as Heartly swats his hand away
playfully and laughs.

HEARTLY

Stop! I'm too full to fight you.

She turns her attention to the TV and starts to laugh.

HEARTLY (CONT'D)

What is this?

MALIK

Public access channel. I support
the LOCALS.

A commercial comes on. It's a cheesy, low-budget commercial
advertising a local astrologer who can act as a matchmaker
for singles, based on their zodiac signs.

The commercial begins with a go-go version of the familiar
music and refrain "What's that number one zodiac sign?" from
Luke's "It's Your Birthday" as neon-colored zodiac symbols
swirl around the screen.

MALIK (CONT'D)

SCORPIO!!

HEARTLY

Ew.

When the line comes again, "I said, what's that number one
zodiac sign?" Heartly yells out.

HEARTLY (CONT'D)

Gem-in-iiiiiii!!

MALIK

Ugh.

The commercial goes from ratchet to faux-ethereal in a matter
of seconds. Couples of all types give testimonies on how it
worked for them.

MAN FROM COUPLE 1

I knew I needed the gentleness of a
Cancer woman, and Miss Niecey
hooked it up.

WOMAN FROM COUPLE 1
(looks bored)
I mean... he'll do...

CUT TO:

WOMAN FROM COUPLE 2
I wanted a Taurus. They take care
of you.

Her female partner turns her head to glare at her.

CUT TO:

A man stares lovingly and longingly at his partner.

2ND MAN FROM COUPLE 3
(deadpan)
I didn't expect an Aries to be
so... attentive. But, Miss Niecey
knows best.

1ST MAN FROM COUPLE 3
(grabs his partners hand)
You hungry babe?

VOICEOVER
Your love is out there. Let the
stars be your guide. Call and let
Miss Niecey hook you up today!

Malik and Heartly are cracking up laughing. Heartly uses her
phone to take a picture of the screen.

HEARTLY
(sarcastically)
You support local shit, huh? Is
this how you get dates?

MALIK
Not yet, but shoot, I'd try it.

HEARTLY
No you wouldn't!

MALIK
Yes, I would. Shoot, I'd do it just
to write about it.

HEARTLY
You're a writer?

MALIK

That's... one of the things I do.

Heartly is trying not to be impressed.

HEARTLY

Hmm. You should do it.

MALIK

What do you do for work?

HEARTLY

Good ol' city gub'ment.

MALIK

Ahh. I never woulda guessed.

HEARTLY

So, are you gonna do it?

MALIK

Why you tryna get me to do this?

HEARTLY

I can't just look at a commercial like that and let it go! I need SOMEBODY I know to do it!

MALIK

So, do it yourself!

HEARTLY

No! I am NOT that desperate!

MALIK

(offended)

But I am?

Heartly realizes her mistake and softens a bit.

HEARTLY

No... not like...

MALIK

'Cause YOUR love life is going soooo well...

HEARTLY

OK, we'll both do it. It'll be the best way for us to move on. Just get some rebound dates in our systems, have some fun, and... move on.

MALIK

You're getting into it, aren't you?

HEARTLY

Come on, Scorpio! Y'all supposed to be the freaks of the industry! Is there a law that says we have to sit at home crying about our breakups? We can't date and move on?

Malik nods in agreement. This makes sense.

MALIK

I like your logic, lady.

Heartly raises her coffee mug.

HEARTLY

To moving on, having fun, no tears!

MALIK

To moving on, having fun, no tears.

They clink mugs. Heartly smirks as she picks up her phone and dials.

FADE TO:

EXT. SENIOR LIVING FACILITY - DAY

Malik is sitting on a bench outside the building. He's on his phone going through a social media feed. He sees a pic of him and Heartly from the other night. He clicks to see more of her pics and sees several of her in costumes. It appears she is into cosplay. Each costume is more elaborate than the last, and she's actually really good.

MALIK

(Out loud to himself, in disbelief)
No. Mickey-fickey. Way.

He clicks off the screen and puts his phone away, obviously amused at Heartly's cosplay life. A man, well-dressed, in his 30s, walks up. Malik looks up at him for a beat before he sits down. This is MICHAEL, Malik's brother.

MICHAEL

You coulda just gone in.

MALIK

(shakes his head and sighs)
I don't like nursing homes.
Especially since Pop lives in one
now.

MICHAEL

They don't even call this a nursing
home. It's assisted living. He's
doing good. You worry too much.

MALIK

And he don't even hate us.

MICHAEL

He's a reasonable man. Always has
been.

(stands up)

Come on.

Malik stands up and they both walk toward the front door of
the upscale senior facility.

CUT TO:

INT. POP'S SMALL APARTMENT - MOMENTS LATER

Malik and Michael are sitting in arm chairs. A nurse has
just finished adjusting Pop's nasal cannula for an oxygen
tank. She pats him on the shoulder, smiles at Malik and
Michael, and leaves. Pop watches the nurse walk away with
interest.

POP

Don't come see me with no sad
faces. Y'all better talk about
women or something.

MICHAEL

Too soon, POP. You know "Master
Malik" here is having woman
problems.

He chuckles at Malik, who gives him the side eye of death.

POP

Sheeeeit. He just got rid of the
problem. Never trust a woman with
titties that big and a waist that
small.

(with naughty interest)

Were they real?

MALIK

Can we PLEASE talk about something else?

POP

Other than titties? I may not be long for this world! Tell me 'bout some titties!

POP and Michael laugh. Their favorite pastime is annoying Malik, who never fails to amuse them with his irritated reactions.

POP (CONT'D)

Ok. Fine, we'll talk about the next best thing. Money.

MICHAEL

Next best?

POP

Shut up. We almost got him smilin' now.

MALIK

We got the paperwork squared away. Looks like we're good with the will, the accounts, and everything we need. Your financial planner is a beast.

POP

Ain't she though? Smarter than my TWO computer genius sons. Y'all gotta promise me you'll get yourselves *smart* women.

MICHAEL

Here we go...

POP

I mean it, though. That's a lot of money you're coming into. Get a smart woman... or... whatever you gonna get... I'm too old to judge... I love you either way.

Malik and Michael look at each other and then laugh.

MICHAEL

Now that we got you settled in here, I was thinking... I can move here and set up shop.

(MORE)

MICHAEL (CONT'D)

I can buy a place nearby. I got products to sell and places to sell it.

POP

Son, do whatever's gonna make you happy. Both of you, I want you to be happy. I know you probably gettin' on your brother's damn nerves stayin' wit' him.

(laughs)

MICHAEL

I ain't thinkin' 'bout him.

MALIK

He still eatin' that pork bacon.

POP

I knew it.

FADE TO:

EXT. TEA AND SAMMICHES CAFE - DAY

Heartly is standing outside on a city street with her cell phone to her ear. We hear Malik's voice say, "It's Malik. Leave a message."

HEARTLY

I was going to text, but I want you to hear my voice for this reminder of our appointment this evening. Don't you dare back out or I will never speak to you again! Wait, you'd probably like that, so...

She rolls her eyes.

HEARTLY (CONT'D)

Anyway, we made a pact! Also, dinner! Before! Or after. Whatever.

Heartly hangs up and puts the phone away as a woman (Black, 30s, professional) walks up and hugs her. This is Heartly's best friend STACEY.

STACEY

Cuz!

Heartly turns toward Stacey, startled.

STACEY (CONT'D)

You good?

HEARTLY

Yes! Just taking care of some business.

CUT TO:

INT. TEA AND SAMMICHES CAFE - DAY

Heartly and Stacey walk into a small café that sells tea, sandwiches, soup, smoothies, and coffee. A bell on the door signals their entrance and a young man behind the counter sees them, smiles, and comes from behind the counter. This is JONATHAN (early 20S, fun and bubbly). He is Heartly's biggest fan and she knows it, and he knows that she knows it. They have an understanding of empty flirtation. He goes over to a table by the window and takes off a "Reserved" sign.

JONATHAN

What's up, Miss Heartly, Miss Stacey. I got'chall right here.

HEARTLY

Thank you, Jonathan.

STACEY

Hi, Jonathan. I'll have the usual, thanks.

HEARTLY

I need a menu, please.

JONATHAN

My woman is fickle, I love it!

He takes a menu off another table and places it in front of Heartly.

JONATHAN (CONT'D)

Holla back when you decide. In the meantime, check out the tunes! It's my new album.

STACEY

(excited for him)
Oh, check you out!

HEARTLY
 (subdued, distracted)
 That's so cool, Jonathan.
 Congratulations.

Jonathan heads back to the counter. Instead of reading the menu, Heartly absently stares out of the window. Stacey glares at her for two seconds before getting her attention.

STACEY
 One more time. Are. You. Ok?

HEARTLY
 I can't even concentrate at work anymore. My mind is just filled with designs and plans and... visions.

STACEY
 Well, good! We'll give it another year, and get started on your grand business plan.

HEARTLY
 Another year? Stacey, this is NOW!
 I'm already started. Look...

She pulls an organized notebook from her bag and hands it to Stacey.

HEARTLY (CONT'D)
 I even added earrings! Can you picture it? Blouses AND earrings?

STACEY
 (looking through it, nodding)
 This is good stuff. Great, now I'm under pressure and I can't keep up.

HEARTLY
 It's not about keeping up; it's about a partnership! Our family business, Cousins In Cahoots? We talked about this at length!

STACEY
 Girl, I was drunk!

HEARTLY
 I was serious, though! Are you saying you were just playin'?

Jonathan returns to the table.

JONATHAN
You decide, Miss Heartly?

HEARTLY
(sadly)
I'm not hungry anymore.
(hands him the menu)
Thanks.

JONATHAN
(concerned as he takes the menu)
Alright. I got somethin' for you.
Hold tight.

Jonathan rushes off.

STACEY
I was serious. But I was also
dreaming. It's starting a WHOLE
business.

HEARTLY
Our designs are good! We can't
start off expecting to fail!

Stacey looks out the window and sighs.

STACEY
I JUST got married. I JUST had a
baby.

HEARTLY
And?

STACEY
Can you imagine me trying to
explain some crazy business scheme
to Chris? My money isn't just MINE
anymore!

HEARTLY
Oh, now it's a *crazy* business
scheme?

STACEY
(sucks teeth)
Oh, not like that. But I'm not an
"I" anymore; I'm a "we."

Jonathan sets down a plate with a panini and an iced tea in front of Stacey. He sets down a green smoothie in front of Heartly.

JONATHAN

That's my special Stress Relief smoothie. On the house. Let me know what you think.

Heartly looks up at him and smiles gratefully. He gives her a nod and walks away. Heartly reaches out for her notebook and Stacey hands it back. Heartly puts it in her bag.

STACEY

I believe in you. And I will ALWAYS be here to cheer you on, to listen to you, all that. But, I'm not ready to invest time and money into a company right now. That's as honest as I can be about it.

HEARTLY

(nods slowly)
Thank you for your honesty.

STACEY

But, back to you.
Girl, you are my latest, greatest inspiration. I admire you. Not just your hustle, but your bravery. Your faith.

Heartly smiles weakly.

HEARTLY

(short sigh)
I'll keep you posted, then.

Right beside their table, a Notofearth materializes out of thin air with an audible pop sound. Stacey and Heartly are startled.

STACEY

(angrily)
Oh my God! Can you watch where you pop in?!

NOTOFEARTH PATRON

Aw, my bad, sis. I'm just meetin' my crew.

The Notofearth waves to a group of people on the other side of the room and walks toward them.

STACEY

(scoffs)
Sis? They doin' THAT now?

HEARTLY
Don't be like that; they Black too.

STACEY
(with attitude)
What Black people you know can pop
in and out like that?

HEARTLY
Them!

STACEY
Unh-unh. Can't trust it. Not til we
know who's who and what's what...
Girl, drink your drink.
(muttering and picking up
her panini)
...this weird shit...

INT. HEARTLY'S CAR - NIGHT

Malik is getting into the passenger seat of Heartly's car.
She smiles as if she is taunting him.

HEARTLY
Well, at least you smell good.

MALIK
It's not the incense you used to,
but I do aight.

HEARTLY
Ha.

She drives off.

HEARTLY (CONT'D)
Your social media is skimpy, dude.
I tried to search for some dirt and
got nothing. You even get shadowed
out in that video when homegirl
dumped you in the street.

MALIK
Is THAT what you want for my life?
My dirt out in the street?

HEARTLY
Yeah, like the rest of us!

MALIK

You got me right here. Anything you want to know, just ask.

HEARTLY

(side-eyes)

Hmph.

Malik continues to look forward, and smiles as if he knows something she doesn't. She makes a turn into a shopping center.

HEARTLY (CONT'D)

Why is this place so close by? And in a shopping center?

We see that the shopping center is definitely not upscale.

MALIK

You mad it's nearby?

HEARTLY

I was mad when I found out YOU lived so close to me.

MALIK

Right? Might have to see your nosey ass in the grocery store... All up in my cart and whatnot.

HEARTLY

Any interaction you have with me will improve your life. You better believe THAT.

Heartly parks in the lot in front of the building.

MALIK

Says the person who just drove me to Miss Niecey's Astrology Centre to get a date.

HEARTLY

The person who is helping you forget all about Big Booty Wanda?

Malik glares at her as he opens the car door.

INT. MISS NIECEY'S ASTROLOGY CENTRE - MOMENTS LATER

Heartly and Malik enter the store. A wind chime alerts anyone inside to their presence.

The pair are taken aback by the décor. Planets and stars hang from the ceiling like bad science projects. Posters line the walls charting the paths of the different signs through their lives. There's also a section marked love potions, but it is empty.

MALIK

Oh this is completely ridic--

A door opens in the back and a figure emerges, androgynous, all-spirit, and fabulous. This is MISS NIECEY (Black, nonbinary, could be in 30s, 40s or 50s--ageless, obviously).

MISS NIECEY

Malik? Heartly?

HEARTLY

(suddenly nervous)
That's us.

MISS NIECEY

Nice to meet you.

Miss Niecey walks to them and shakes their hands.

MISS NIECEY (CONT'D)

Have a seat.

Malik and Heartly sit in front of a desk. The rest of the place looks like a typical magic & potion shop from a movie, but the computer, desk, and tech accessories look like the inside of the Enterprise on Star Trek--outdated and amazing.

MISS NIECEY (CONT'D)

It says a lot about you two that you wanted to do this together. Very supportive behavior. I'll remember that in both matching processes.

Heartly and Malik look at each other and nod, seeming to agree to keep going with the process.

MALIK

So, what's up first?
Questionnaires?

MISS NIECEY

Questionnaires?

MALIK

Yeah, personality tests, or something?

MISS NIECEY

Oh no, we don't match that way.

Miss Niecey hits a button and a screen comes on that is a person sitting, appearing to be being interviewed.

MISS NIECEY (CONT'D)

First, I'm going to suggest what I think is a good place to start for each of you. And then I match you with someone of my choice.

Heartly and Malik look confused.

MISS NIECEY (CONT'D)

You look confused. It's like this. Heartly, I'm going to start you off with a Libra.
(studying Heartly, nodding slowly)
You could use some understanding without judgement right now.

Heartly looks impressed and interested. Miss Niecey has pushed the right buttons.

HEARTLY

Hm. Ok, and what if I don't like the person?

MISS NIECEY

If my first choice doesn't work for you, then I can match you with another person of the same sign, OR you can request a different sign. Now, if you'll focus your attention on that green dot there...

Malik and Heartly's eyes find the green dot in front of them and a camera flashes.

MISS NIECEY (CONT'D)

Thank you.

Malik and Heartly are startled.

MALIK

Damn, you coulda said, "Say cheese!"

HEARTLY

I wasn't ready!

Miss Niecey is punching buttons on the panel, not looking at them.

MISS NIECEY

Stay ready and you ain't gotta get ready.

(turns back to them)

This ain't a modeling agency; we match spirits. This is small potatoes.

Miss Niecey smiles as if she knows something they don't.

MALIK

(slightly concerned)

Which sign do I get?

MISS NIECEY

(quick head tilt)

You could use a win right now. A Pisces will make you feel breezy enough to get your confidence back up.

HEARTLY

You ARE good.

MISS NIECEY

Oh-kayyyy? My success rate is 62%!

MALIK

(skeptical)

Sixty-two?

MISS NIECEY

Significantly more than half.

Malik and Heartly exchange glances. Niecey slaps the table, jerking their attention back to her.

MISS NIECEY (CONT'D)

Say it with me. "Miss Niecey is NOT CRAZY."

HEARTLY AND MALIK

Miss Niecey is not crazy.

Miss Niecey smiles and continues.

MISS NIECEY

And if y'all were pulling more than 0%, you wouldn't be sitting here now, would you?

Heartly and Malik are shocked by the dragging.

MISS NIECEY (CONT'D)
Welcome to Miss Niecey's Multiverse-
Soul Singles.

As they WTF-face at the word "multiversal," the camera flashes again, and we get that pic onscreen before it fades to black and white.

EXT. DOWNTOWN FRENCH RESTAURANT - EVENING

Heartly walks up the sidewalk to the restaurant's facade, finishing her conversation on the phone.

HEARTLY
...I'm at Lavidia's French on Obama
Avenue. If you don't hear from me
in two hours, send a search team.

Heartly hangs up and walks inside.

INT. DOWNTOWN FRENCH RESTAURANT - EVENING

The restaurant is empty. She starts to back away when her date DEVIN comes from the back.

DEVIN
Heartly? It's me, Devin. Welcome,
have a seat.

HEARTLY
Umm... you know this is suspect as
hell, right? And I did let several
people know where I am, so don't...

DEVIN
Calm down, calm down. I know the
owner. This place is ours for as
long as we need it.

HEARTLY
Still sounds suspect. What are
you, some Godfather type of
gangsta? Makin' people offers they
can't refuse?

Wait staff comes from the kitchen, bringing plates of dessert. One of them is holding two menus and pulls out a chair.

WAITER

Welcome, Heartly. Tonight, we start with dessert.

HEARTLY

(walking toward the table)
Is that crème brulee ?

CUT TO:

Heartly is sipping wine while Devin is finishing a story.

DEVIN

So, yeah, he is kind of a godfather to me. And, he's a hopeless romantic, so he was totally down for this.

HEARTLY

Isn't this a bit much for a first date with a stranger?

She takes a bite of her Lobster Thermidor. She turns her nose up at it. She's not really a fan.

DEVIN

The service says that Geminis demand romance and that you have high-profile tastes. I figured I could keep up with that. I'm a romantic, myself.

Devin smiles at her confidently.

HEARTLY

Well, you should rethink this kind of thing on a first date. It's creepy as hell.

Devin is taken aback, but attempts to remain in a positive mood.

DEVIN

Just trying to follow directions and give a lady what she wants.

HEARTLY

Well, you know the owner. It's kind of like... I don't know... cheating. You didn't have to put any real thought into it. It's like, textbook "What to Do to Impress Someone."

DEVIN

Are you serious?

HEARTLY

Yeah, I am. And what's up with this Darius Lovehall vibe you're giving off? Between the leather jacket and the looks you're giving me, I feel like you're about to start quoting bad poetry or something. I bet you got a motorcycle outside too. Don'tchu?

Devin looks mildly offended, but then grins confidently.

DEVIN

You're funny. And I see where you're coming from with that, but I assure you I've got at least one original idea for tonight. If you're done here, I can show you.

Heartly half smiles and stands. Devin nods to the waitstaff who open the door for them. As they step outside she sees a horse drawn carriage parked in front of the restaurant.

DEVIN (CONT'D)

Your chariot awaits, my lady.

HEARTLY

Oh. My. God.

Heartly stares in disbelief for a moment before bursting into a fit of laughter. She laughs so hard she can barely catch her breath. Devin's confident smile slowly fades as he turns to watch her nearly falling over, convulsing in hysterics.

DEVIN

What--

HEARTLY

Oh man. That...that's the corniest shit I've ever seen. Hooommmygawd. I...I can't with this.

Heartly takes her phone out, turns around, takes a selfie and posts it to her social media account with the caption, "This corny MF right here!"

Devin pinches the bridge of his nose and exhales deeply before addressing Heartly.

DEVIN

OK. That settles that. We're clearly on VERY different pages. You're obviously either not ready for someone to try and treat you well, or you're so miserable that no one will ever make you happy. Either way, we're done here.

With that, Devin hops on the horse and kicks his heels. The horse rears up and gallops off down the street. The carriage driver shrugs and takes a smoke break.

INT. NIGHTCLUB LOUNGE - NIGHT

Malik enters the lounge and looks around. He takes out his phone and pulls up a text message with a photo attached. He looks at the photo then scans the room to see an attractive dark skinned woman staring back at him. This is SANDRA. Malik walks towards her and smiles broadly, she stands and gives him a warm hug.

SANDRA

You MUST be Malik. You're WAY cuter than your picture!

MALIK

(laughs)

Thanks. I like to exceed expectations whenever possible.

Sandra smiles flirtatiously and leads him to a seat at a table near the front.

SANDRA

Thanks for agreeing to come. This is probably the last place that allows open mic in the city.

MALIK

Shoot, I love open mics! Guaranteed comedy.

SANDRA

Oh, no, this isn't a comedy one. This is more spoken word.

MALIK

(laughing)

See, that's what I mean! What is the "spoken word"?

(MORE)

MALIK (CONT'D)

If they write it down, is it the
"written word"?
I mean...

Sandra's eyes narrow at him and we cut to the MC on stage.

MC

Welcome, welcome to Open Mic. This
is our 3rd week in a row, and we do
want to keep it goin'. PLEASE keep
comin' out to support LIVE self-
expression. We gon' season and
bless this stage before the newbies
get started. Give a warm welcome
to... Lyric.

Baltimore poet LYRIC comes to the stage and performs "I'm Not
a Damn Vacation."

LYRIC

I am not a damn vacation / My hips
are not the jungle gym / and
although it gets wet down below /
it is not a water slide / no you
cannot come and hide inside of me /
so you don't have to face your own
reality / I am not a damn vacation
/ I am a damn good situation I
am the bring me home to momma type
/ I am not B.E.T., M.T.V., Or any
type of video hoe type / I'm the
real roll with you sista / the kind
that will support her mista / I am
not going to walk behind you / but
I will walk beside you / to help
you see through any tough situation
/ because with my street and book
education / I am a damn good
package / but I am not a damn
vacation
You cannot use me up and escape /
you will not get any frequent flier
miles / and I am not redeemable
upon your request / I am a long
term contract / I'm a house with a
deed / the more you invest with me
/ I appreciate in value /
I add to your assets / I bring
residual revenue / with my vision,
ambition, and drive / looking to
match and raise you / and place
stock in the fact that any seed you
plant in me will be nurtured and

(MORE)

LYRIC (CONT'D)

directed toward the Divinity / to
 add to creation and our foundation
 / because I plan on building using
 a solid equation / You, me, and God
 / so if you were just window
 shopping or needed a break from
 your current space / keep it moving
 / because your credit and vision is
 too short / to be a part of this
 mission.

The audience snaps and nods emphatically as she leaves and the MC returns to the stage.

MC

Well, damn. Open up the mic! First
 up is a man who calls himself
 Broken Arrow. Give it up for him.

The audience snaps and claps as "BROKEN ARROW" makes his way on stage. He is tall and traditionally handsome, wearing fatigues and a gold chain.

BROKEN ARROW

I. Am. Broken. I came to do this
 spoken. Word because I feel things.
 Words give me wings. Wings are
 delicious and I don't mean to be
 capricious but your critiques of me
 are a bit salacious and I don't
 feel like being part of your
 vicious. Lies. Like flies. Buzzing,
 surrounding a stinking pile of --

Malik looks pained and is clearly fighting laughter. Sandra, meanwhile, is totally into it and dying to see where this is going.

BROKEN ARROW (CONT'D)

-- pies. Thought I was gonna say
 it, didn't you? But that'd be nasty
 like a flu. Or a coup, that we
 should have against the gov'ment.
 Meant to do that but we spent. Our
 time on frivolous things. Like
 chicken wings. That. Are. Broken.

He walks off to some confused but sympathetic snaps. Sandra stands up to applaud. She is the only one to do so.

SANDRA

(calling out to him)
 You did real good, Day-Day.

Malik looks at her like she is crazy.

MC

Alright, let's get some more woman
energy in here. Rosay, you are up.

ROSAY sashays her way up to the stage.

ROSAY

Thank you. This is called, "You
Thought."

She breathes deeply, stares ahead intensely, and begins.

ROSAY (CONT'D)

YOU THOUGHT YOU WAS GON' GET AWAY
WITH IT.
COMIN' IN HERE WIT'CHA NEW CHICK.
I'MA RHYME MY NEXT LINE WIT 'YOU
AIN'T SHIT'...

We see a man attempting to discreetly escape the scene, but she sees him.

ROSAY (CONT'D)

OH, DID I STRIKE A NERVE? NOW YOU
GOTTA LEAVE, HUH?

Rosay takes off her shoe and throws it boomerang-style across the room, hitting its target square in the back of the head. The club patrons collectively "OOOH!" as he stumbles forward.

CHEATING GUY'S DATE

(steps forward angrily)
Hey!!

CHEATING GUY

(turns and yells toward the stage)
Why you gotta do this now?!

ROSAY

Why YOU gotta do this now?

She knocks the mic over and hustles off the stage.

SANDRA

Oh my.

The din of the club increases as Malik pulls out his phone and turns in his seat to start recording.

The Cheating Guy pleads to her with his arms out in front of him as she approaches. He's anticipating another flying object.

CHEATING GUY

PEACE! Peace, ROSAY, come on! Shit!

Right before she gets to him, he disappears with an audible pop sound. The club patrons collectively "DAAAMMMNNN!" Malik, mid-"DAMN" looks up from his phone in awe. Rosay stands with her mouth open.

CHEATING GUY'S DATE

Did he just pop out?
 (turns to random clubgoer)
 Did he just pop out?
 (turns to Rosay)
 Did he just pop out?

The MC recovers the mic and shakes his head.

MC

(quietly)
 I hate open mic nights.
 (into mic) Come on, y'all, simmer
 down. It's over.

MALIK

(turns to Sandra,
 laughing)
 I can't believe dude popped out!

Sandra pays him no attention, as she is now feeling the other women's anger at the guy who "popped out" instead of facing the music. She is on an activist mission.

SANDRA

(stands up and starts chanting)
 I'M NOT A DAMN VACATION! I'M NOT A
 DAMN VACATION!

MC

--ah hell. Every week wit'chu,
 Sandra?

Other women in the club start chanting "I'm not a damn vacation!" Most of the men look like they aren't sure what to do.

Malik realizes his chance to escape undetected, and hurries his way out.

FADE TO BLACK.

INT. TEA AND SAMMICHES CAFE - NIGHT

Heartly and Malik are talking over their empty plates, and, obviously, discussing their date fails.

MALIK

At this point, I think I should just go straight for sexual compatibility. I'm puttin' in a request for a Virgo.

HEARTLY

Well, lemme get an Aries, then. I can't take another hopeless romantic.

MALIK

You don't appreciate SHIT!

HEARTLY

I do appreciate SHIT, but that was too much! That was desperation and despair. YOU don't appreciate shit! You talkin' sexual compatibility -- if you had played your cards right, you coulda had a good time with ol' girl... eventually.

MALIK

Too easy.

HEARTLY

Oh, please. So why the Virgo, then?

MALIK

I can get some challenge, some mental stimulation... Then, once the games are done, we can buss it out and keep it movin'.

HEARTLY

Keep it movin', huh?

MALIK

Yeah, and you want an Aries. They can be aggressive as hell, and you can't get rid of them so easily.

HEARTLY

Hey... if he plays *his* cards right, he can be the maintenance man.

Malik makes a face to indicate he is shocked, disgusted, and intrigued. Jonathan, who is serving them, returns to the table.

JONATHAN

Y'all good?

MALIK

Yeah, man, we good, thanks.

JONATHAN

Brother, excuse me, but I HAVE to ask you a question...

HEARTLY

(expecting Jonathan to start some mess)

Jonathan... please be polite to my FRIEND.

JONATHAN

I just gotta ask... Look, I'm a game geek and you look JUST like Master Malik. If you don't know who he is, I will shut up now.

MALIK

(surprised and impressed)

Wow! You must know your stuff.

(offers his hand)

Nice to meet you, man. What's your name?

JONATHAN

(extremely excited)

I knew it! I knew that was you!

Wow, you live here?

Malik nods while Heartly looks confused.

JONATHAN (CONT'D)

Oh my god.

(remembers Malik's hand)

Sorry, I'm Jonathan. I run the Game Onyx website! You a legend! But I know you know that. Wow.

HEARTLY

(confused)

Whaaaat...

Jonathan lifts up his sleeve to show a tattoo.

JONATHAN
Look, Miss Heartly!

HEARTLY
I don't... know... what...

Jonathan bounces excitedly back and forth.

JONATHAN
Miss Heartly, Master Malik is the lead programmer and designer for League of Super Legendary Heroes, the most popular Massive Multiplayer Online game ever to exist! He designed the characters, levels, and wrote the script for the biggest video game ever! This tattoo is of my favorite faction in the game, the Rogue Dragonslayers!

MALIK
Oh, wow! That means a lot to me, man.

JONATHAN
(starts clearing their dishes)
Ay, anything you need, you let me know. You wanna come through and make sure you have a table, just call and let me know.

MALIK
Thanks, I appreciate that.

Jonathan walks away. Heartly stares at Malik, clearly confused but really interested in knowing what she doesn't know about Malik. He looks at his watch.

MALIK (CONT'D)
Welp. I gotta run.
(amused that he knows something she doesn't)
See you when I see you!

He drops some bills on the table and smiles mischievously while her mouth hangs open. He leaves the cafe quickly.

INT. COFFEE SHOP - DAY

Heartly checks her phone and looks at a previous text from Miss Niecey. "You two are scheduled to meet at Coffee and a Biscuit on Friday at noon. His name is Mark."

When she looks up, a tall, broad, handsome guy in his late 30s is standing next to her small table, holding two cups. This is MARK, her date.

MARK

Addicted to the phone, I see.

Heartly looks up and gives him the 'n-word, please' look.

MARK (CONT'D)

You Heartly? I'm Mark.

HEARTLY

Oh. You was 'bout to get cussed out, MARK. I was checking to make sure I had the day and time right. You're late.

MARK

Nah, I got us some tea.

Mark sets a pair of cups down as he sits at the table.

HEARTLY

(attempted politeness)

I'm a coffee person, actually, but thank you.

MARK

Nah, coffee is bad for you. Drink some tea. It's a new kind they have.

He picks it up and holds it out to her.

MARK (CONT'D)

Besides, you don't want coffee this late. Tea is better for you after noon.

Heartly takes the tea from him and sits it back on the table.

HEARTLY

If you had just waited and asked, I would have told you that I didn't like tea, and I could be sitting here having my afternoon coffee right now.

MARK

You don't even want to try it?

HEARTLY

It is not coffee. I do not want it. Plus, and please don't take this the wrong way, but I can't trust a drink that a stranger randomly brings to me.

MARK

(severely offended)

Wait, whatchu think, I'ma poison you?

HEARTLY

You would just take a drink from a stranger?

Mark shakes his head, frustrated.

Heartly attempts to regain her composure. She's clearly irritated but tries to pull it back.

HEARTLY (CONT'D)

Well, the point of this meeting was to see if we wanted to move forward with a date, right?

MARK

I guess...but you shuttin' me down already!

HEARTLY

You're really this bent out of shape over a drink that I didn't ask for?

MARK

(cutting her off,
agitated)

OK, whatever. Let's just move on. Where you wanna go for a date?

Heartly is taken aback at his reaction. Two people at a table nearby stand up and hug. They begin speaking in Black American sign language. PERSON 1 is female, PERSON 2 is male.

PERSON 1

We're back where we started.

PERSON 2

I know. This will always be our spot.

PERSON 1

About these powers?

PERSON 2

They're yours now. They're more powerful than most.

PERSON 1

I love you. Forever and always.

PERSON 2

I love you too. I'll miss you.

PERSON 2 pops out. PERSON 1 breaks into sobs and rushes off tearfully.

MARK

Dammit, man! I hate that creepy shit! What are they even doing here?

Heartly thinks he's crazy.

HEARTLY

OK. You're clearly upset. I'm gonna go.

She makes a beeline for the door.

MARK

(calling after her)

Yo, that's not crazy to you?
(to the rest of the coffee shop)
That alien shit ain't crazy to y'all?!

Heartly rushes out of the place and down the street.

INT. MALIK'S APARTMENT -- DAY

Malik has packed a picnic basket and is figuring out how to carry it, plus a blanket and two camping chairs. Michael is on the sofa watching a show called "Bam Kapow" on TV. We can see and hear the TV screen in the background with the cast singing the show's theme song.

MALIK

Bruh, I'ma need some help to get this to the car.

MICHAEL

Bruh. You ain't even invite me! Get your own snacks to the car.

MALIK

I ain't invitin' you on my date!

MICHAEL

It's a wine festival! All I gotta do is get out the car. I bet I can meet a lonely, tipsy free spirit and get some in the parking lot while you tryna talk your date into first base.

MALIK

Oh, you roll like THAT now?

MICHAEL

(getting up from the sofa)
Man, go ahead on your date. I got work to do anyway. Meeting with city government on Monday. May get this contract and stick around. *Then*, I'll check out the fine women in this city.

MALIK

Good plan. Now grab a chair.

They head out the door.

INT. HEARTLY'S APARTMENT -- SAME DAY

Heartly turns on the TV. A news panel is discussing Notofearths. The ANCHOR is an Anderson Cooper knock-off. The NOTOFEARTH REPRESENTATIVE is a tall, dark skinned, handsome, well-built, intelligent-looking man wearing glasses and an expensive suit.

ANCHOR

"Notofearth" is the term we've come to use for those not from our planet, but there is still very little we know about them--other than the lives they lead on Earth.

(MORE)

ANCHOR (CONT'D)

Every day, more and more of these alien beings are revealing themselves... by simply popping in and out of existence.

The camera closes in on the anchor.

ANCHOR (CONT'D)

Why are they here? Do they mean us harm? Where are they from? What information or technology can they share with us? In today's segment, we'll hear from experts and from the most vocal Notofearth representative.

The camera pulls back to show all three members of the panel. The Notofearth Representative is clearly taller than--and "above"--the rest of the panel.

FIRST PANELIST

We cannot trust people who are not even people...who would come to OUR planet and not even offer the technology to teleport in and out like they do.

NOTOFEARTH REP

Many of us are here on research missions, some of us are on vacation to experience life as a human--

SECOND PANELIST

A human experience, but no one wants to talk --I'm gonna talk about it-- but no one wants to talk about the fact that ALL of these aliens popping in and out of the place all the time are Black.

NOTOFEARTH REP

We prefer the term Notofearth, thank you.

ANCHOR

What evidence do you have that all Notofearths are Black?

SECOND PANELIST

Have you ever seen any other type of person just pop out of existence?

(MORE)

SECOND PANELIST (CONT'D)

Anyone who has ever reported a person or people popping out or in...they're all African American.

NOTOFEARTH REP

Oh, and you just know they're AMERICAN, too, huh?

SECOND PANELIST

(cutting him off)

SO IT'S TRUE! THEY ARE ALL BLACK!!

NOTOFEARTH REP

Define "Black."

FIRST PANELIST

This kind of arrogance, this deliberate avoidance of important questions...is what leads to distrust of these (sarcastically) Notofearths. We're anticipating another climate-related disaster, but these people--or whatever-- VACATION here. They can travel between planets but they won't offer us any help? They won't offer to take us Out There with them?

NOTOFEARTH REP

You just said we can't be trusted, so why would you listen to us, or come with us (finger quotes) "Out There" as you say?

FIRST PANELIST

You're not helping the case by not answering some very important questions.

NOTOFEARTH REP

What case? Your case? My case is fine.

SECOND PANELIST

WHERE ARE YOU FROM?

ANCHOR

Do you all invite people to go with you to where you come from?

NOTOFEARTH REP

Yes.

SECOND PANELIST
But only BLACK people, right?

NOTOFEARTH REP
Oh, so it's not about sharing
TECHNOLOGY anymore, huh?
(laughs)

SECOND PANELIST
That is RACIST!

NOTOFEARTH REP
Maaannn...

NOTOFEARTH REP shakes his head and pops out. His mic falls into the chair.

FIRST PANELIST
This is why nobody likes them. That
popping out when they don't want to
engage...

Heartly shuts off the TV.

HEARTLY
Taneefa.

A Black woman's voice answers through a digital assistant.

TONEEFA THE ROBOT
Yes ma'am?

HEARTLY
Play my "Getaway" Playlist.

She walks over to the window as we hear "Zoom" by the Commodores. She stares out and up longingly into a beautiful blue sky.

FADE TO:

EXT. - WINE FESTIVAL AT A PARK - SAME DAY

A shot of a beautiful blue sky establishes the peaceful, fun vibe of the Wine Festival. Malik is walking beside his date, DONNA, who is carrying one chair while he carries the other chair, the blanket, and the picnic basket. The music blends into a reggae/go-go (regg'go) cover of "Zoom" as we see and hear RAS LIDJ & DEEP BAND playing on stage.

As they enter, Donna is more than happy to point out the various sights and sounds.

DONNA

Ok, so, over there we've got the stage. Looks like it's a go-go band, so all them heads'll be making there way over there.

She looks to the left, and a short distance away is where people are gathering to taste the wines.

DONNA (CONT'D)

Alright, that must be the wine tasting tent. Now, since you're new at this, I'm gonna warn you. Pace yourself. Don't get loaded your first time through or else you'll be "that guy."

Malik rolls his eyes.

MALIK

It's wine.

DONNA

Suit yourself.
(pointing with her chin)
Hmm, over there is where most of your singles start to mingle and hook up. That's always hilarious to watch.

Malik shifts the gear he's carrying.

MALIK

Ok, ok, and where's the spot where we're setting all this stuff down?

Donna looks around quickly, assessing the area.

DONNA

Let's see, our best vantage point for easy access to wine and a view of all the ridiculousness is gonna be...

She scans again, then points to a small hill above them.

DONNA (CONT'D)

There!

Malik makes his way over and sets the chairs and basket down.

MALIK

All right! Let's drink!

DONNA

You're awfully eager to get some alcohol in your system, aren't you?

MALIK

Yes. Yes I am.

They laugh.

MALIK (CONT'D)

Seriously, though, you hold down the fort, I'll bring us back some wine.

Donna shakes her head negatively.

DONNA

That's not how this works. We can leave our stuff here and go. The point of the festival is to sample things. You wouldn't be able to bring me back all the things I want to try.

Malik shrugs and they start toward the wine tent.

CUT TO:

EXT. WINE TENT - MOMENTS LATER

Malik and Donna joke with each other as they sip glass after glass of different wines. Malik is getting lit; Donna is keeping it cool.

MALIK

HOW HAVE I NEVER BEEN TO A WINE TASTING THINGY BEFORE? THIS IS THE BEST EXPERIENCE OF MY LIFE. SO MUCH TASTY BEVERAGES!

DONNA

Ok, you're a little on the loud side. You're at a 10, I need you to come down to like a 4.

Malik looks at her blankly, then tries to compose himself.

MALIK

(whispering loudly)
OK MY BAD SORRY. NOT TRYING TO EMBARRASS YOU OR NOTHIN'.

DONNA

Mmhmm. Come on Drinky. Let's go sit
for a bit.

Donna starts to lead him back to their spot, but Malik
resists.

MALIK

NO, WAIT, THE BAND. WE SHOULD DANCE
AND SHIT.

Malik grabs her by the hand and drags her toward the stage,
pushing his way through the crowd toward the front. Donna
tries to pull away but Malik tugs harder.

DONNA

Seriously, I need you to let go.
You're a little too aggressive
right now.

MALIK

DON'T BE A WET BLANKET GIRL, THIS
SHIT IS LITTY.

DONNA

I SAID LET GO.

Malik releases her, surprised at her voice. Bystanders also
turn towards them. A few of the men step forward, ready to
step in the way.

MALIK

YOU...JUST...DON'T KNOW
HOW...FUN...CONTROLLING EVERYTHING
AND...AND...MAKING IT
ALL...ABOUT...

Malik wobbles. He's gonna be sick but he's trying to hold
back.

MALIK (CONT'D)

Shit. Gonna be...ah fuh--

Malik vomits everywhere. The now gathered crowd gasps and
recoils. Donna walks away and pulls out her phone to make a
call.

DONNA

(into phone)

Gurl. You ain't gonna believe this
shit. Come pick me up.

Donna looks back at Malik, shakes her head, and keeps walking
away.

INT. MALIK'S APARTMENT - THE NEXT DAY

Malik nurses a hangover while watching the local news. The sound is turned down but on the screen is a story about the city's greatest superhero, Sonus, stopping a runaway subway train. There's a knock at the door.

MALIK

I think it's open.

The doorknob jiggles but nothing happens.

MALIK (CONT'D)

(groans) Nooo...

He slides off the couch and drags himself to his feet, finally reaching the door after a few more impatient knocks. He unlocks and opens the door. It's Heartly.

MALIK (CONT'D)

(mutters unintelligably)

Heartly holds up two cups of coffee as she enters.

HEARTLY

Damn. What did you get into last night?

Malik carefully settles back onto the couch.

MALIK

I got into too much wine, apparently.

HEARTLY

Amateur. Didn't nobody warn you to pace yourself?

Heartly sits next to him and hands him a coffee.

MALIK

She did. I ain't listen and puked all over everything after looking like an ign'ant a-hole.

HEARTLY

What in the entire hell?

MALIK

It wasn't gonna work out anyway. She was all about having things her way, seemed like a know-it-all, but she was right.

(MORE)

MALIK (CONT'D)

I should've paced myself but I made
a damn fool of myself. Thank god it
didn't end up on --

Heartly has already pulled out her phone and hit YouTube.
Sure enough, there's the clip, "Man gets dumped at Local Wine
Fest, pukes."

HEARTLY

Oh damn...that's a lot of puke.
Still can't really tell it's you,
though. I mean, I can...

Malik groans and covers his face with a pillow. Heartly is
shaking her head, disgusted.

MALIK

(from under the pillow)
How'd you do?

HEARTLY

What?
(snatches the pillow)

MALIK

Miss Niecey's magic pick for you?

HEARTLY

Ohhhh myyyyyy gaawwwwwd. This fool.
We ain't even make it 5 minutes.

MALIK

So no maintenance man?

Heartly gives him the most sincere I'm-not-kidding face ever.

HEARTLY

He comes over to me with a tea--
already bought-- but didn't even
ask me what I wanted. Then had the
nerve to get mad when I called him
out on it--

Malik rolls his eyes.

HEARTLY (CONT'D)

--and THEN he launched into some
xenophobic mess about Notofearths
and I was just done.

Malik holds up a finger, hesitantly, but changes his mind.

HEARTLY (CONT'D)

Come on! That's that bullshit! It's one thing if you know someone well enough to know what they like and THEN get it for them. It's a whole other thing to just decide you gon' buy somebody something without even knowing them. That's like offering someone peanut butter at a nut allergy conference.

Malik looks incredibly confused but says nothing.

HEARTLY (CONT'D)

AND THEN TO BE XENOPHOBIC -- SPECIESIST--WHATEVER THE HELL, AND NOT EXPECT ME TO GET MAD. FUCK OUTTA HERE WITH THAT BULLSHIT.

Malik is now clearly afraid as Heartly regains her composure.

HEARTLY (CONT'D)

Anyway. I guess you ain't goin' nowhere today.

MALIK

(weakly shaking his head)
Mm-mm.

HEARTLY

Where your roommate?

MALIK

Why?

HEARTLY

(annoyed)
Is he here? I need to know if I'm gettin' comfortable.

MALIK

You ain't gettin' nekkid, calm down.

HEARTLY

CALM DOWN?!

MALIK

If you gon' keep bein' loud, you gotta leave.

HEARTLY
 (gets up and walks toward
 the bedrooms)
 Hello?? Roommate?

MALIK
 He's out of town. Damn.

HEARTLY
 (comes back to the sofa)
 I'm ordering lunch. Why is he
 always outta town?

MALIK
 You can ask him when you meet him.

He turns over and puts the pillow over his head.

FADE TO BLACK.

EXT. OUTSIDE SOMEHWERE- MAN ON THE STREET INTERVIEWS - DAY

"I'll Take You There" by The Staples Singers plays softly while several Black people riff in response to the question of whether they would go "Out There" with the Notofearths if they were invited.

PERSON ON STREET 1
 I heard some people say they was
 goin' Out There, but I'm like, out
 where? Like, where you goin'?

PERSON ON STREET 2
 I don't know, man... I heard they
 only invitin' Black people?

PERSON ON STREET 3
 Yeah, I'd go. Especially if I could
 come back. But then again, Mother
 Earth seem kinda mad at us, so...

PERSON ON STREET 1
 If they would say whether they
 takin' us to a planet, another
 dimension... I mean, what?

PERSON ON STREET 2
 That sound like a trap...

PERSON ON STREET 3
 If they Black like us, we should
 try to build for-real universal
 bonds, right?

INT. HEARTLY'S APARTMENT - EVENING

Heartly sits at her desk reading emails. She opens a video invitation from Miss Niecey speaking in front of a green screen-assisted background about an event called "MERCURY RETROGRADE ROMP & STOMP." Once again, the Zodiac Song plays.

MISS NIECEY
 (ON VIDEO)
 It's Miss Niecey's MERCURY
 RETROGRADE ROMP & STOMP! If you're
 receiving this, I've chosen YOU to
 meet other like-minded SINGLE
 people, THIS Saturday night at 8pm.
 Open and curious minds are most
 welcome. BE THERRRRRRE!

CUT TO:

INT. MISS NIECEY'S MERCURY RETROGRADE ROMP & STOMP - NIGHT

Heartly enters the party. It's an average space, but the party is jumping. DJ Heat's "City Girl (ft Styme & Reece P)" plays as we make our way through the party, seeing how much fun everyone is having. People are wearing different colors of wide ribbons that hang around their necks, each imprinted with a zodiac sign. Heartly spots the table where these ribbons are being distributed and makes her way over.

An interesting CAPRICORN woman (Black, 30s, thin, unique look) is handing them out. We can tell by the tag she is wearing.

CAPRICORN
 Hi! Welcome! And you are a...?

HEARTLY
 (extends hand for
 handshake)
 Heartly!

CAPRICORN
 (leans in closer to hear
 better)
 I'm sorry?

HEARTLY
HEART-LEE. Like a heart!

Heartly makes a heart shape with her hands. Behind her, Malik approaches, then leans past her and speaks to the Capricorn.

MALIK
Scorpio!

The Capricorn smiles and hands him a Scorpio ribbon.

HEARTLY
(embarrassed)
Oh. Gemini.

The Capricorn hands Heartly her Gemini tag and smiles with interest.

CAPRICORN
It's nice to meet you, Heartly,
like a heart.

HEARTLY
(blushes)
You too.

Malik faces the crowd, puts his ribbon around his neck, and smiles, captivated by what's guaranteed to be a fun night for him. Heartly's gaze lingers on the Capricorn before turning to Malik.

MALIK
Looks like it's gonna be a good
night!

HEARTLY
Right?

MALIK
(seeing the bar across the
room)
Star Bar?

HEARTLY
Please.

They make their way to the bar as someone else reaches the Capricorn to receive their zodiac ribbon.

From the bar, Heartly and Malik see Miss Niecey take the stage and pick up the mic.

MISS NIECEY

Thank you all for coming! We are so happy to have you here! Miss Niecey's is a special singles' community that wouldn't be what it is without YOU. If you are recently joining us, please know that we believe in intergalactic solidarity. We do have some Notofearth friends joining us, amen-ase'?

Voices in the crowd "amen" and "ah-shay" in response.

MISS NIECEY (CONT'D)

If you AIN'T from Planet Earth...make some noiiiiiiise!!

A significant portion of the crowd makes noise while the others look around, impressed and excited at the energy in the room. Heartly looks back at the Capricorn and realizes she's cheering as well. A happy smirk crosses Heartly's face as the music kicks back in and the party goes back into full swing.

EXT. PARK - DAY

Heartly and Capricorn are finishing a brisk walk/run on a trail in a park. They are clearly enjoying each other's company.

CAPRICORN

Alright, cool down's over. I need to rest.

HEARTLY

Rest? Don't you people have powers?

CAPRICORN

What do you mean, "you people?"

HEARTLY

Oh...oh my goodness...oh God I'm so sorry.

CAPRICORN

(smiles)
Just teasing.

HEARTLY

(relieved, then playfully
irritated)

(MORE)

HEARTLY (CONT'D)

You ain't right! But, like, seriously, don't you all have powers so you don't get tired or whatever like we do?

They sit on a bench.

CAPRICORN

What do powers have to do with being tired? I don't trust any being that doesn't get tired.

HEARTLY

(nodding)

I hear you.

She sips water.

HEARTLY (CONT'D)

Beings. Wow. So...like, what other types of beings have you met? Out There? And how far away do you actually live?

CAPRICORN

I *live* up the street from here.

HEARTLY

Yeah, but, like, you know--

CAPRICORN

But like, where am I *really* from? Am I gonna kill you in your sleep? But, more importantly, what's sex like with me? Is it so good that you'd take the chance that I'd kill you in your sleep?

Heartly looks embarrassed.

HEARTLY

Come on...I'm not like that!

Capricorn gives her a look.

HEARTLY (CONT'D)

So I can't ask you any questions?

CAPRICORN

Sure, you can ask questions. About ME. There's getting to know me, and there's treating me like a science project.

HEARTLY

Isn't you being Notofearth a big part of who you are? Like how being Black is a big part of who I am on Earth?

CAPRICORN

(disappointed in Heartly's insistence)
I guess it is.

HEARTLY

Don't people ask you questions all the time?
(finally understanding the annoyance)
Oh.

STACEY (O.S.)

Heartly!

Heartly and Capricorn look toward the voice to see Stacey running toward them. She has also been jogging.

STACEY (CONT'D)

Hey woman!

She stops in front of them and speaks to the Capricorn.

STACEY (CONT'D)

Hello!

CAPRICORN

(pleasant)
Hi.

Stacey addresses Heartly with her hands on her hips.

STACEY

You puttin' that new outfit to good use or you just flexin'?

HEARTLY

Don't roll up on me startin' nothin', I'm on a date!

Stacey raises an eyebrow and smirks at Capricorn, who returns the look with a slight negative shake of the head indicating that their "date" is no big deal.

STACEY

You are so sensitive! Get it together, girl!

CAPRICORN
 (laughing)
 Oh, you DO have friends!

Heartly gasps, offended.

STACEY
 (to Capricorn)
 And the struggle is REAL, sis.

HEARTLY
 You know what, y'all have fun
 running together. I will go where
 I'm appreciated.

Heartly starts to get up.

STACEY
 Oh, sit down, you big baby.

CAPRICORN
 We were just finishing up. I need
 to get home.

HEARTLY
 Already?

Capricorn gets up.

CAPRICORN
 We've been out here a while.
 (apologetic)
 I gotta get home.

HEARTLY
 (standing up)
 But...

STACEY
 You two say goodbyes.
 (to Heartly)
 I'll meet you in the parking lot.
 (to Capricorn)
 It was nice meeting you.

CAPRICORN
 Same here.

Stacey walks away. Heartly steps forward, closer to Capricorn with a look and body language indicating that she knows it's not going to work out but there's no hard feelings.

CAPRICORN (CONT'D)
 I'm sorry too.

HEARTLY
YOU CAN READ MINDS?!

CAPRICORN
(laughs)
I should take a picture of the look
on your face right now. Priceless!

HEARTLY
Oh my God! Are you messing with me?

CAPRICORN
You. Are. Adorbs.

Capricorn smiles.

HEARTLY
Ha. Ha.

CAPRICORN
Give me my hug so I can go.

HEARTLY
(mumbling sarcastically)
YOUR hug?

CAPRICORN
(as if to a child)
Come on.

They embrace.

CAPRICORN (CONT'D)
If we're hugging when I teleport,
you go with me.

Heartly hugs her tighter and her eyes dart back in forth in
anticipation.

CAPRICORN (CONT'D)
(kind and gentle)
Aww. You wanna go, don't you?

Heartly pulls away.

HEARTLY
That's not funny.

CAPRICORN
It is.

Heartly clearly wants a resolution.

CAPRICORN (CONT'D)
Keep in touch, Heartly, ok?

HEARTLY
And endure this kind of torture
again and again?

Capricorn just smiles.

HEARTLY (CONT'D)
So...how do we say goodbye? You
gonna...pop out, or...?

CAPRICORN
Well, we just hugged so I'm
gonna...
(gestures over her
shoulder)
...start walking to my house. Over
there. See ya!

Capricorn walks away and Heartly watches her for two seconds.

HEARTLY
See ya.

Heartly walks up to Stacey.

STACEY
You ok?

HEARTLY
Yup.

STACEY
I'll take you for a smoothie. My
treat. How's that?

HEARTLY
Homemade. With vodka.

INT. HEARTLY'S APARTMENT - NIGHT

Stacey and Heartly are painting their toes, listening to
music and sipping wine.

STACEY
So you're really not gonna bring up
Miss Thing, huh?

Heartly sighs loudly.

STACEY (CONT'D)

Or all those texts lately about you being on a date and letting me know where you'd be, just in case...

Heartly sighs again, louder.

STACEY (CONT'D)

I think I've been patient enough, haven't I?

HEARTLY

Yeah, and you also tried to block me today!

STACEY

What's for you is FOR YOU, and there's nothing I could do to block your blessings --if it's actually a blessing...

HEARTLY

I hate when you talk like a --

STACEY

And I hate when you use the word "hate."

Stacey looks at her smugly, sipping her wine.

HEARTLY

I joined a dating service, ok?

STACEY

(clearly shocked)
Dating service??

HEARTLY

Yes. Dating. Service.

STACEY

How you gon' swear off dating after the fake Doctor Feel Good...and then join A DATING SERVICE?

HEARTLY

It was on a dare. Malik, my friend I told you about, he joined too.

STACEY

On a dare?

HEARTLY

Yeah, we saw this commercial on TV
about a place that matches you by
zodiac sign.

(shrugs)

We called and joined.

STACEY

Zodiac sign, that's not even real!

Heartly stands and stretches, waddles over to get another
bottle of wine while keeping her toes from touching the
floor, then sits back down.

HEARTLY

It doesn't have to be real...it...

She searches for words while shaking a bottle of nail polish.

STACEY

Yes?

Heartly paints a nail.

STACEY (CONT'D)

Hello??

HEARTLY

You know the Notofearths, right?

STACEY

Dear Lord, why...?

HEARTLY

(sadly)

Please don't turn into Reverend
Killjoy right now.

STACEY

Not. Of. Earth. Zodiac... Not. Of.
God.

HEARTLY

See...this is whyyyyyyyy...

STACEY

(genuinely concerned)

Look, I really want you to be ok.
Ok? A lot of people are going
through it right now. Maybe you
should join a support group, or see
a therapist again--

HEARTLY

Been there, done that. I'm doing what I want to do. I'm grown. I don't need a mother.

Stacey shakes her head.

STACEY

You talk to her lately?

HEARTLY

(shaking her head)

I can't put myself through it again, Stace. Going to therapy helped me be ok with cutting her off. You *know* she breaks me. Every time. I deserve better. I deserve to be happy.

STACEY

(softening)

I know. I'm sorry.

Stacey reaches for Heartly's hand and holds it.

HEARTLY

Maybe what I need is...Out There. I need something better, something more than this.

STACEY

OH LORD!

(lets go of her hand)

Now you wanna go Out There with them? Out where? Tell me that.

HEARTLY

I'm researching it. Look...

Heartly reaches for a copy of *ThinkPiece* magazine on a nearby table. She opens it and we can see the cover, featuring the Notofearth representative from the news segment she watched. One of the cover lines reads "Master Malik, Gaming's Newest Hero." She turns to a page and begins to read out loud.

HEARTLY (CONT'D)

(reading)

"Where we come from, there is peace because we serve the elements. Water, light, terra, and others that are not understood on Earth, we understand. Life force is sacred.

(MORE)

HEARTLY (CONT'D)

Those who serve Self over Life face immediate karmic retribution, enforced by the elements..."

STACEY

(cutting her off)

It could be one giant hoax! People are zappin' in and out of reality? People with powers that won't help us? And now they're offering us a way off the planet? None of us have gone and come back to say it's safe. It could be one big ass trap!

HEARTLY

Trap for what?

STACEY

Who knows what?

Heartly sits back and exhales deeply.

HEARTLY

THAT is what research is for. I didn't say I was leaving tomorrow. I'm just looking into it.

STACEY

You're just looking into it. Not too long ago you were trying to convince me to go into business with you, then you start zodiac dating, and now this. Do you even know what you want?

Heartly looks wounded. Stacey exhales.

STACEY (CONT'D)

Do you even KNOW any aliens?

HEARTLY

I don't like that word. Neither do they. Notofearths are everywhere. I know how to make friends and meet people.

STACEY

They ain't people.

HEARTLY

I wanna see. I wanna check it out.

STACEY

Heartly.

Stacey knows she won't win. There's nothing she can say once Heartly has made a decision.

STACEY (CONT'D)
Tell me EVERYTHING you find out.

HEARTLY
(serious behind a grin)
I knew you believed in my skills.

Heartly looks up toward the window and sees what looks like two brightly lit forms flying and playing around in the sky.

HEARTLY (CONT'D)
Look!

They get up and run to the window. Stacey takes pictures with her cell.

STACEY
Everything is SO WEIRD.

INT. - UPGRADE RESTAURANT - DAY

Heartly and her COWORKER (white woman, 40s) are at lunch in a fancy spot, complete with tablecloths and a bar.

COWORKER
We are here to LISTEN. We don't want to give this guy any indication that we need software or that our servers are a complete mess. None of that. Just let him make his sales pitch, we get a free lunch, and...it's after noon, so...

HEARTLY
The usual.

COWORKER
(smiling)
The usual.

Heartly makes her way to the bar. As she walks, she locks eyes with a handsome man (MICHAEL) and walks straight toward him. He takes her in, with interest, as she walks. When she reaches him, she turns away from him to the BARTENDER, a woman.

BARTENDER 2
(familiar)
Hey there, Miss.

HEARTLY
Hayyyy Boo. The usual.

BARTENDER 2
Coming right up!

MICHAEL
Oh, "the usual," huh?

HEARTLY
(coy)
Are YOU a regular here?

MICHAEL
No, I'm new in town.

There's an undeniable, palpable attraction between them. They can barely stray from their mutual locked gaze.

HEARTLY
Really? You have friends or family here?

MICHAEL
Some family. I could use some more friends though.

He hands her a business card.

MICHAEL (CONT'D)
I'm here on business, but...keep in touch.

Heartly takes the card and begins to read it.

HEARTLY
Michael--

Her coworker pops up behind them.

COWORKER
You found him! Michael, good to see you!
(shaking his hand excitedly)
We're right over here.
(She gestures toward their table.)
What're you drinking, water?

MICHAEL
Well, no one told me about "The Usual."

COWORKER

You two have a seat, I'll get our
"usuals."

Michael, being a gentleman, lets Heartly walk in front of him to lead the way. He admires the view. They sit facing each other.

Heartly smirks as if the work connection ruins any chance of them hooking up.

HEARTLY

Darn it.

Michael gives her the same look.

MICHAEL

Yeah. Darn it.

Heartly's COWORKER returns with the drinks.

COWORKER

Alrighty then! Let's talk software!

MICHAEL

Ok...but I'll definitely need more
than a liquid lunch.

COWORKER

Right, yes! Let's order!

Heartly passes the menu to Michael and they lock eyes again.

CUT TO:

EXT. - MICHAEL'S CAR - LATER THAT NIGHT

Heartly and Michael are making out in the front seat of his car. It's hot and heavy. "Free" by Deniece Williams is playing on the radio. Michael stops at the sound of one of his favorite songs, pushing her back, gently.

MICHAEL

(sitting back, out of
breath)

Whew! This song WOULD play right
now.

HEARTLY

Let me find out you're sentimental.

MICHAEL
This song reminds me of the best
birthday I ever had.

HEARTLY
Oh? A woman?

MICHAEL
Nah, just the vibe. I'm still
chasing that high.

HEARTLY
When IS your birthday, anyway?

MICHAEL
January.

HEARTLY
(making a face)
Capricorn?

MICHAEL
Nah, Aquarius.
(returns her twisted face)
You one of them Zodiac people?

HEARTLY
Uh, no, just asking.

MICHAEL
(studying her)
Ok. Oh, your lipstick.

Heartly pulls down the visor to look in the mirror,
embarrassed.

HEARTLY
Oops.

She reaches down to remove a tissue and lipstick from her
purse. She cleans her face and reapplies it while Michael
checks his face. He gets a napkin from his console and wipes
his mouth.

HEARTLY (CONT'D)
Too bad. It was such a nice shade
on you.

MICHAEL
You can paint me up again later.

Michael unlocks the doors. They exchange glances again,
intense heat between them. They deny their impulses and get
out of the car.

INT. COMEDY CLUB - NIGHT

Heartly and Michael are sitting near the front of the stage and a COMEDIAN is on the mic. The audience is in stitches.

COMEDIAN

I can tell who's on a date and who's in a relationship.

(looks at a couple)

Y'all look like you like each other, so that's a date.

(looks at another couple)

She done had a attitude since I got up here, so that's a relationship.

What did you do, man? How you gonna make your woman mad before coming to a comedy show? Now I gotta work extra.

(looks at Heartly and Michael)

You two look like you IN LOVE.

Y'all in love?

Heartly shakes her head "no."

MICHAEL

First date.

The audience oohs and ahhs to tease them.

COMEDIAN

First date?? Wow, y'all glowin' though.

(to Heartly)

Y'all smashin' tonight?

Michael and Heartly laugh in embarrassment.

COMEDIAN (CONT'D)

(to audience)

Let me explain something to y'all. Since people like to get caught up judging women by what they want to do on a first date. We need to enjoy ourselves while we can. Remember when the thought of aliens was scary? Because what did we think? That they want to take over Earth! Guess what? They don't want this shit! They take a vacation and be OUT.

(to Heartly and Michael)

Y'all need to get it in while you can. Fuck that singles shit!

(MORE)

COMEDIAN (CONT'D)

If y'all tryna fall in love, DO IT!
 Have some sex! A lot! TONIGHT!
 Promise us y'all gonna do it! For
 the human race, come on!

Michael and Heartly laugh and look at each other as the crowd goes wild.

CUT TO:

INT. MALIK'S APARTMENT - NEXT MORNING

Malik reclines on the couch watching TV and eating cereal.

TV HOST

Our guest today is Lola Swann, the author of *Booty Balance*. This book is taking the Singles' Movement by storm. You may already be a fan of Lola Swann from her podcast...

Michael enters the living room, groggy but amused. It's clearly been a good night.

MALIK

ALL NIGHT LONG, huh?

MICHAEL

(plopping down on the couch, smirking)
 I think I may like it here after all.

MALIK

Did you at least take a damn shower?

MICHAEL

Nope! Eff yo' couch!

Michael digs his feet and butt into the cushions disrespectfully.

MALIK

Ugh...you nasty!

Malik gestures toward the TV.

MALIK (CONT'D)

See, this what I'm talkin' 'bout. While you be out here tryna settle down.

MICHAEL

(annoyed)

What?

The AUTHOR of *BOOTY BALANCE* begins to give her dating philosophy on the show.

LOLA SWANN

We may, in fact, be doing ourselves a disservice by settling down with just one person. Especially because this planet may not last much longer.

TV HOST

What about the MANY people who still believe in true love, marriage, families? A love to enjoy in these end-of-days times?

AUTHOR

People have been talking about the "end-of-days" for centuries now. We're still here. But, just in case this is it, many, many people are finding comfort in committing to a Single Life. At least through their 30s. Some through their 40s, and even 50s.

TV HOST

What if they have children? People usually want to have a complete family.

AUTHOR

(shrugs)

Children happen. But, for those of us - with and without children - who are committed to the Singles' Movement, we need systems that help us pick the best matches for our life phases.

Michael's jaw drops.

MICHAEL

Children hap--

MALIK

Shh! SHHHH!

TV HOST

Life phases?

AUTHOR

Think about it. At different phases, you're into different things, and many times, you date based on those interests. After a breakup, when you look back at what went wrong... you still realize that the other person gave you two things: Booty and a common interest.

Malik nods in agreement and Michael shakes his head in disbelief. The TV Host looks as if she is sincerely trying to understand.

AUTHOR (CONT'D)

According to my Single Societal Orientation, two people being honest about that sex and that common interest allows a strong - albeit temporary - relationship. It's never going to last, but then again, neither is our planet.

TV HOST

(trying her best not to look at Lola as if she is crazy)
So let's see some of these booty matches--uh, Booty Balances that your book suggests.

The TV Host reads a list displayed as an onscreen graphic.

TV HOST (CONT'D)

Bougie Booty. Black Power Booty.
Nerdy Booty. Corporate Booty. Artsy
Booty. Boozy Booty. Sporty Booty.
Shopping Booty.
And in your book, there are even
more...

The author looks quite smug and proud of herself.

MICHAEL

(incredulously)
WHAT??

MALIK

You could use this book.

MICHAEL

How you figure that?

MALIK

You ain't been in town five minutes and already met a woman you stayed out all night with. THAT is the single life. AND you don't LIVE here. You gettin' the booty. You need the balance.

MICHAEL

How you know what I'm getting and what I need?

MALIK

Women in *this* area ain't goin' for all that mushy stuff no more. That's what they talkin' about. Singles' Movement got 'em.

MICHAEL

And you speak for every woman in town, huh?

MALIK

Fine. Don't take my word for it.

Malik puts his hand on Michael's shoulder as though he's about to say something wise. Sage advice is coming.

MALIK (CONT'D)

Just...don't start pushing up too quick. Give her some space.

MICHAEL

(offended)

I ain't no loser ass dude, bruh!

MALIK

(mocking)

OK, BRUH. I'm just saying, this single life is all about equal opportunity.

MICHAEL

Uh huh.

MALIK

Give HER the opportunity to make the next move. Did she seem clingy?

Malik looks dramatically toward the door, grabbing the couch in mock fear.

MALIK (CONT'D)
She ain't gonna show up here, is she?

Michael yawns, rising from the couch and stretching.

MICHAEL
Let me go get some shut-eye.

MALIK
Nah, stay woke.

MICHAEL
You so woke you high. On some bullshit.

Michael walks away toward his room.

MALIK
That was corny, bruh.
(calling over his shoulder)
Aye, can you pass me that cereal?

MICHAEL
(without turning around)
Nope!

CUT TO:

INT. MICHAEL'S ROOM - MOMENTS LATER

Michael is lying on his bed. We see the back of his head. He turns toward the camera and reaches for his phone. He starts to call, then stops. Then opens the text messages, starts to type something, then hears Malik's voice.

MALIK (V.O.)
Give HER the opportunity to make the next move. SUCKA.

Michael closes the message app and tosses the phone aside.

CUT TO:

INT. HEARTLY'S APARTMENT - MORNING

Heartly lays in her bed looking at her phone, wearing her reading glasses. She opens the message app to see Michael's texts. Three dots appear for a few seconds.

She giggles with anticipation. The three dots disappear. Then nothing. She sighs, then calls Stacey.

STACEY (V.O.)

You up early girl, or getting in late?

HEARTLY

Both? (She takes off her glasses)
Girl. This man... he's a delight.

STACEY (V.O.)

Uh oh. You only use that word for people you really feelin'. That's saying a lot.

HEARTLY

But I mean, I definitely like him. We vibe, there's an undeniable attraction, the things he can do with his--

STACEY (V.O.)

(cutting her off abruptly)
Yeah, yeah, I don't need to be a party to your debauchery. Look, you're still a lady, right? As crazy as you are, you still have SOME standards, right?

Heartly rolls her eyes as she sits up in bed.

HEARTLY

Yes, obviously.

STACEY (V.O.)

Then let a man be a man. He needs to be the one to make the next move. He needs to call you, make the next date, show you he 'bout that life and that you aren't just some random ass ...ass.

Heartly nods in agreement.

HEARTLY

I AM a LADY. You are absolutely right. He need to show me something other than what dat mouf do.

STACEY (V.O.)

Ew. Goodbye. Good luck.

Heartly ends the call and tosses the phone aside.

CUT TO:

INT. HEARTLY'S APARTMENT - EVENING

Malik, still in his coat after arriving, is taking food out of a bag and putting items on Heartly's dining room table. Heartly is in the middle of a rant.

HEARTLY

--The girl clearly just hates herself. I told you about her weave. You ever seen a weave just give up on life? I DID. She is just the Mother Teresa of basic bitches.

Malik nods but keeps his mouth shut as Heartly continues.

HEARTLY (CONT'D)

It's been two years and we don't even speak words to each other in meetings, in the hallway, nothing. It would take a burning bush, a pillar of fire, a dove, the physical presence of the *Lord Himself* for me to acknowledge that ho. I was triggered. I felt a sliver of compassion because she is obviously going through something, but...

Malik sets down a blender. Then he triumphantly sets down a bowl.

MALIK

Guacamole. Homemade.

HEARTLY

SHUT THE FRONT DOOR! GIMME!

Heartly runs to the kitchen drawer and grabs a spoon to taste it.

HEARTLY (CONT'D)

Mmmmmmmmm...oh my goooooodddddd.

Malik is pleased with himself and Heartly is clearly grateful. They take the food to the living room.

MALIK

What time is it?

HEARTLY

We still got a few minutes.

Heartly grabs the remote and turns on the TV as they sit on the couch.

We see:

- A trailer for the new Sean Short action movie "Wheeled Warrior" featuring a vigilante hero who specializes in martial arts. The scene opens on a flyover of the city as the movie trailer guy voice kicks in:

TRAILER VOICEOVER

In a world where crime is rampant
and no one dares to act...

The scene cuts to a dark alley, where a pair of thugs approach a man in a wheelchair from behind.

TRAILER VOICEOVER (CONT'D)

...one man dares to turn the
wheels...OF JUSTICE.

THUG #1 grabs the man in the wheelchair by the shoulder. A gloved hand reaches over his shoulder and breaks the Thug's hand, then flips him over. The man in the shair whirls around to reveal SEAN SHORT, THE WHEELED WARRIOR, in superhero gear. THUG #2 recoils in fear as the Wheeled Warrior rolls toward him, extending a collapsible bo staff.

WHEELED WARRIOR

Let's go for a spin.

The Wheeled Warrior spins the bo and clips the Thug's legs from under him, flipping him into the air. He lands hard and finds the staff at his neck. The camera pans up to the Wheeled Warrior's face. He smirks.

WHEELED WARRIOR (CONT'D)

Justice isn't blind...it's capable.

The scene cuts to a police chief screaming at some officers.

CHIEF

This wheeled vigilante is beating
the tar out of the city's criminals
and you geniuses can't figure it
out? He's rolling right under our
noses!

We then find ourselves in the Wheeled Warrior's Dojo.

SENSEI

Your training is complete. You're
the deadliest of any of my
students.

Sean bows to his Sensei.

Cut to an action packed gunfight between a DETECTIVE (woman, 30s) and a group of thugs. The Wheeled Warrior enters the room.

DETECTIVE

Sean, no! What are you doing?

WHEELED WARRIOR

Dirty work.

Sean rolls through the gunfight deflecting bullets with his staff and taking them out one by one, efficient and deadly. The Detective steps into the open as the last thug falls. She looks around. The Wheeled Warrior has vanished.

DETECTIVE

What the hell...?

TRAILER VOICEOVER

Wheeled Warrior. Coming up next.

The next commercial is for a Shea Butter & Comic Convention (SheaCon) featuring LEVAR BURTON enthusiastically promoting the convention while various pictures and graphics illustrate his words.

LEVAR BURTON (V.O.)

Get ready for the Shea Butter and
Comic Convention! Guest appearances
by the city's finest... the Urban
30 Superheroes! We'll have Artists!
Vendors! Cosplay contest, and don't
forget the SHEA BUTTERRRR! Raw shea
butter! Whipped shea butter! Chunky
shea butter! Funky shea butter!
Musical Guests, and a special
appearance by the Twerk-A-Gram
Crew! Moisturize yo' self! At
SheaCon 2020!

MALIK

I wish somebody would send me a
Twerk-A-Gram.

HEARTLY
No, you don't.

MALIK
Uh, yeah! You a hater, for real.
You can't even fathom the beauty of
a Twerk-A-Gram!

HEARTLY
Full disclosure?

MALIK
(brow furrowed, turning
down the volume)
Go on.

HEARTLY
I used to work for them.

MALIK
As what, a receptionist?

Heartly just stares at him.

MALIK (CONT'D)
YOOOOOOOOOOOOOOO!!! YOU SERIOUS?!

Malik doubles over with laughter.

MALIK (CONT'D)
What in the entire hell, man?

HEARTLY
Remember that time you asked me how
I, of all people, would date the
Leotep?

Malik recoils in horror, his face drops.

MALIK
Oh noooo...

HEARTLY
Where's your drink?

MALIK
I'm... not drinking right now...

HEARTLY
(frowning)
Okayyyy...well I'mma tell you about
this, then you're gonna tell me
about *that*.

MALIK
Just start talking, please.

CUT TO:

INT. FITNESS STUDIO - AFTERNOON

Heartly is wrapping up a twerking class in a fitness studio with poles installed. All genders are represented, some dressed for burlesque including a few big, muscular, masculine guys - including one or two with tutus and Jheri curls.

HEARTLY (V.O.)
I was looking for some extra money to get my business started. At the time, I was taking Levar Burton's fitness classes - pole dancing, twerk-aerobics, burlesque, all that.

LEVAR BURTON stands at the front of the room, dismissing the class.

LEVAR BURTON
Great class today! Newbieeeeees, don't forget your homework!

CLASS MEMBERS
(in unison)
Spread love - (class claps once in unison) - through twerk!

LEVAR BURTON
And, as promised,
(picks up a stack of fliers)
information on our new business venture! Twerk-A-Gram has been born!
(waving fliers)

The class applauds and cheers.

LEVAR BURTON (CONT'D)
Take a flyer! We pay WELL.

Six or seven members file past LEVAR BURTON, each taking a flyer, including a big muscular dude in a belly dance skirt with coins. Heartly is the last in line, taking a flyer and studying it.

FADE TO:

EXT. ROWHOUSE - DAY

Heartly makes her way up the front stairs of a townhouse. She's wearing a long trench coat buttoned most of the way up to the top.

HEARTLY (V.O.)

Turns out, the twerk-a-grams ain't all birthdays and anniversaries.

A man opens the door to the townhouse.

HEARTLY

Kevin?

KEVIN

Yeah. Who are y--

Before he can fully ask his question, Heartly hits a button on her phone. A Baltimore Club Beat - "PULL YA GUNZ OUT" by Miss Tony - plays as she sheds her trench coat and starts to twerk and rap.

HEARTLY

SHE-LEFT-YOU-FOR-YOUR-FA-THER. IT'S O-VAH-DON'T-BOTHER...

We can only see Heartly's head and shoulders, as to only imagine how horrible her twerking skills are. A woman walking by smoking a cigarette and walking a dog stops to stare at her.

CUT TO:

INT. OFFICE BUILDING - DAY

The elevator doors open and Heartly gets off - again dressed in the same trench coat - and walks up to the receptionist's desk.

HEARTLY (V.O.)

And their idea of good news? It's different.

Heartly reaches the desk, hits play, drops the coat, and starts to twerk and rap to "PULL YA GUNZ OUT" in the same manner:

HEARTLY

The-test-came-back-neg-a-tive. Your-rash-should-be-gone-soon...

The woman looks embarrassed and yet slightly relieved.

CUT TO:

INT. APARTMENT BUILDING - EVENING

Heartly makes her way up the stairs in a garden style apartment building.

HEARTLY (V.O.)

I never did get good at matching my twerks with the messages.

Heartly knocks on door. A massive amount of smoke emanates into the hallway as The Honorable Doctor Kimet Robinson opens the door. Before he can even speak, Heartly hits play and drops the coat. "PULL YA GUNZ OUT" once again blasts.

HEARTLY

Don't-come-to-work-tomorrow. You're-fired-please-don't-sorrow...

THDKR

You not even on beat.
(a beat as he realizes what she said)
Wait, I'm fired? With a Twerk-A-Gram? What kind of bullshi--

CUT BACK TO:

PRESENT DAY - HEARTLY'S APARTMENT

Heartly dips a chip in guacamole and shakes her head as Malik laughs hysterically.

HEARTLY

It was a hard day's work! I wasn't ready.

MALIK

That was all the same day??

HEARTLY

Hell yeah! I was making my money! But, I just couldn't hack it. And you know me, I do NOT admit defeat. By the end of the day, I was in a bad place.

She takes a bite, making a loud crunching sound.

CUT BACK TO:

INT. APARTMENT BUILDING - EVENING

THDKR smiles at Heartly, who just finished her Twerk-A-Gram.

THDKR

QUEEN. Why dishonor yourself and
degrade your ancestors with this
sad and pathetic excuse for work?
You are above this. Rise to be the
Nubian Queen I see you as. Come in.
Smoke and commune with us.

Heartly is exhausted enough to take him up on it and enters.

CUT BACK TO:

PRESENT DAY - HEARTLY'S APARTMENT

Heartly bites into another chip.

MALIK

Awwwww mannnn... he gotchu wit da
Hotep smoke!

HEARTLY

(shrugs)
He got me in the right place at the
right time.

MALIK

You mean the WRONG place and time!
Damn!

HEARTLY

And THAT is why I don't smoke.

MALIK

Hold up. You did that WHILE working
for the city government?

HEARTLY

That's confidential. Anyway, how's
your sex life?

MALIK
 (stares blankly)
 Why are you like this?

HEARTLY
 You have something to tell *me*, sir.
 Why aren't you drinking?

MALIK
 Well, an embarrassment for an
 embarrassment, I suppose. I did
 have a date... with... a
 Notofearth.

HEARTLY
 OH SHIT.

She grabs her wine glass and sits Indian style on the couch at rapt attention like a small child hearing about Santa for the first time.

MALIK
 (takes a deep, dramatic
 breath)
 I met her at Miss Niecey's Romp and
 Stomp...

HEARTLY
 Of COURSE you did.

CUT TO:

INT. MISS NIECY'S MERCURY RETROGRADE ROMP & STOMP - NIGHT

The party is in full swing, everyone is having a blast. An upbeat song plays.

MALIK (V.O.)
 This woman was like a dream.
 Beginning to end, I--I don't know
 that any of this actually happened
 except...never mind, I'm getting
 ahead of myself.

Everything switches to slow motion as Malik sees SAGITTARIUS at the bar. Juvenile's "Slow Motion" plays as Malik approaches.

MALIK (V.O.)
 She was sittin' at the bar, lookin'
 like the baddest chick in the
 place...

A faint spotlight is on Sagittarius - who is wearing the Sagittarius ribbon. There are several Sagittarius-tagged people around her, as though they're in their own group. As the song continues, the scene plays like a fantasy of how he sees her:

Sagittarius is in the center, nearly glowing, her hair blowing magically in some imaginary wind; the other Sagittarians are turned toward her but are looking at Malik (the camera's view), and are doing a slow body wave to the music. The slow motion sequence lasts long enough for the song's lyric, "Unnnnhh...I like it like that..."

The scene stops abruptly.

CUT BACK TO:

INT. LIVING ROOM - PRESENT DAY

HEARTLY
WHO CARES?! What HAPPENED???

CUT BACK TO:

INT. CASINO - NIGHT

The Casino is abuzz with activity and excitement as people are winning and losing. An eventful night is unfolding.

MALIK (V.O.)
We made a date to meet at the
casino.

HEARTLY (V.O.)
That's just tacky.

MALIK (V.O.)
Says YOU, Bougie McBoujerson?

HEARTLY (V.O.)
I'm getting bored already.

The scene suddenly fast forwards through what would have been a cool establishing shot of the casino, and finally starts up again normally with Malik and Sagittarius at the roulette table, drinking and winning. She has won an obscene amount of money/chips and a crowd has gathered. Malik looks impressed and shocked at her winnings.

MALIK

This is amazing. I've never seen anyone win like this. How are you this... lucky?

SAGITTARIUS

Keep playing your cards right, and you might get lucky too.

Malik smiles broadly as we--

CUT TO:

INT. HOTEL - LATER

Sagittarius uses the hotel room key to open the door, and Malik follows her inside. Sagittarius gently lays her purse on the dresser.

SAGITTARIUS

Sit down.

Malik does as he's told, sitting on the edge of the bed. This is clearly a first for him, and he looks a bit sheepish and vulnerable.

SAGITTARIUS (CONT'D)

Are you scared?

MALIK

No. I'm not scared.

Sagittarius smiles at him as though she doesn't believe him.

MALIK (CONT'D)

Question. How does the Zodiac thing work, I mean, where you're from? Notofearths have the same signs we do?

SAGITTARIUS

(shrugs with a half scoff,
half laugh)

I just picked up a sash.
Do you really believe in that stuff? The *Zodiac*?

As "Incubus" by Dimensions plays, Sagittarius unbuttons the first button of her blouse, revealing a bit of cleavage, and stares at him with a slight smile that would otherwise be creepy if she wasn't unbuttoning her blouse seductively.

SAGITTARIUS (CONT'D)
Let's play a game.

She pulls a large wad of cash from her bra.

SAGITTARIUS (CONT'D)
(seductively)
I got your money.

She starts to go through the wad of cash as though she's counting. Malik's jaw drops. He's having a momentary fantasy and wants to see where this goes.

CUT TO:

INT. MOVIE THEATER - CONCURRENT

People in the audience watching the movie lean forward and slowly eat popcorn, engrossed to see what happens next.

CUT BACK TO:

INT. HOTEL - NIGHT

Malik is speechless as the show continues.

SAGITTARIUS
I have cash stashed... everywhere.

She unbuttons another button, leans forward and waits a beat.

SAGITTARIUS (CONT'D)
You wanna help me find it?

The camera slowly closes in on Malik's face, clearly in shock and awe. Intercut are quick shots of Sagittarius reaching behind her to pull out her phone from her back pocket without him noticing. We see closeups of bodies/skin touching sensuously and seductively as we hear the sensual hip hop music.

FADE TO:

INT. HOTEL - NEXT MORNING

Malik wakes up groggily. He brushes his hand over his face and \$100 bills fall off of him.

He sits up and more money falls off his body. He's under the sheet (presumably naked), covered in cash, and she is gone.

CUT BACK TO:

INT. HEARTLY'S LIVING ROOM - PRESENT DAY

Heartly stares at Malik in disbelief.

HEARTLY

What?!

MALIK

I ain't finished. The next day...

CUT TO:

INT. DOCTOR'S OFFICE - DAY

Malik sits in the examination room on the raised table. He eyes the posters on the wall, diagrams, health messages about men's health, including one of the male reproductive system. His phone dings - a series of texts from an unknown number appear in succession.

Malik opens the text to see a series of photos of him from last night. Ludacris's "SPLASH WATERFALLS" plays as he begins to swipe through the pics. We don't see nudity in the photos, but can tell that each image is a bit more risqué and ridiculous than the last, each image punctuated with the song's "Oh!" He's clearly in ecstasy but these photos are EMBARRASSING.

CUT TO:

INT. MOVIE THEATER - CONCURRENT

The movie theater audience collectively facepalms.

CUT BACK TO:

INT. LIVING ROOM - PRESENT DAY

Heartly laughs hysterically as she snatches his phone.

HEARTLY

How you gon' start the story like Biggie (does a Notorious B.I.G. voice impression) "It was all a dream!" and the whole time you had pics of what happened? Unlock this and lemme see!

MALIK

Oh, you wanna see me naked now?

HEARTLY

Ew. Never mind.

She tosses his phone back at him.

MALIK

Anyway, I don't remember it like it was real.

HEARTLY

(laughing)
You don't have to! That's what pictures are for! Evidence!

Malik pockets his phone.

MALIK

And anyway, I don't drink right now.

HEARTLY

(concluding her laughter)
That's smart. I think that's smart.

On the TV we see the "Wheeled Warrior" movie trailer begin, with the onscreen bar indicating that the volume is increasing.

INT. HEARTLY'S APARTMENT - NEXT MORNING

Heartly pours coffee from a French press into two mugs on the table, where Malik sits among blankets - he clearly crashed on the couch last night - reading the back of the book, *The Oort Cloud* by Marvin Dixon. In his other hand is a cold slice of last night's pizza.

MALIK

Whatchu know about this?

Heartly sits down and takes the book.

HEARTLY
Don't get pizza sauce on my book!

MALIK
Uh oh.

HEARTLY
(defensive)
Uh oh what?

MALIK
You tryna go? Out There with THEM?

HEARTLY
(with attitude)
And what if I was?

MALIK
You wouldn't go.

Heartly stares defiantly.

HEARTLY
Yes, I would.

MALIK
For what?

HEARTLY
Because I want to!

MALIK
You want to? You don't know what
you want! Now you think you wanna
go out there. You think you want to
date but you keep shooting everyone
and everything down--

HEARTLY
Hold on, I'm tired of everyone
telling me I don't know what I
want!! You don't know me!!

MALIK
Oh I don't?

HEARTLY
Do you know YOURSELF? Three of YOUR
last four dates ended with you on
camera being humiliated by whatever
random Black Barbie you found...

Malik looks mildly offended and shakes off the accusation.

MALIK

Random? I don't do random.

HEARTLY

Oh, you *DO* do random!

MALIK

YOU the one who boned some random ass dude you met for work on the first date! Did you run this alien escape plan shit down to him? Is THAT why he never called you back after the one night stand?

HEARTLY

(gets up from the table
defensively)

I didn't call HIM back! Get that straight!

MALIK

Oh, I see. So the one person you met that you didn't need Miss Niecey for you just *threw* away.

HEARTLY

NEED Miss Niecey? THREW AW--you did the same damn thing I did!

MALIK

ON A DARE!

HEARTLY

Who would *DO* that if they weren't looking for something? There is a hole where your soul should be!

Malik jumps up and points at her accusingly.

MALIK

A-HA!!

HEARTLY

A-HA-HELL. I'm not the one who had to stop drinking because I make bad decisions.

MALIK

No, you just have to leave the *planet* because you make bad decisions.

Heartly's face changes from anger to hurt as she recoils from the accusation.

HEARTLY

And nobody wants me, right?

Heartly heads toward the bedroom.

HEARTLY (CONT'D)

I'm getting the hell off this planet. And YOU can get the hell out my house.

She storms off.

MALIK

(angrily)

RRRRRGGGGHHHH.

Malik goes to the kitchen, grabs his blender from the counter and angrily wraps the cord around it, then grabs his coat as he storms out the apartment.

CUT TO:

INT. SENIOR LIVING FACILITY - POP'S SMALL LIVING ROOM - DAY

Malik sits in a chair at a table opposite POP. POP looks confused.

POP

Zodiac what now?

Malik hangs his head in shame, not making eye contact.

POP (CONT'D)

Never mind. Don't bother explaining.

MALIK

I have to!

POP

Whatchu gon' say? You was lookin' for love?

(channels Eddie Murphy's Buh-weet)

Wookin' pa nub in aww da wong paces...

Malik is not amused.

POP (CONT'D)

You ain't a whole minute past Tig
Ol' Bitty Brenda! But here you go,
using a... dating service?

Malik shakes his head in shame.

POP (CONT'D)

So you dig this way of life, then?
Just collectin' women like baseball
cards? Without even tryin' to live,
and love?

MALIK

Pop, these women out here--

POP

Don't give me that.

(concerned)

You got hurt. You s'posed to be the
only person on Earth that get to
chase big butts and smiles but
never get hurt?

Malik sighs, defeated.

POP (CONT'D)

Chill out, son. Be good to *yourself*
for awhile. Give the ladies a break
until you fix yourself. You broken.
They'll be there when you ready.

MALIK

(scoffs)

Unless they goin' Out There with
the aliens.

POP

(makes a face)

If they tryna do that, they already
gone.

POP taps his temple knowingly.

MALIK

Pop, suppose--

POP cuts him off.

POP

Let's not talk about that alien
shit. I'll cheer you up. Let's go
to the mall.

MALIK
The MALL? That's new.

Pop stands and starts toward the door.

POP
Can my girlfriend go too?

Malik stands, astounded.

MALIK
Girlfriend?!

POP
Look, I know you've been worried about me, but I'm fine here. Got me a little lady live down the hall, got plenty to do. I'm chillin'. And I want you to chill too. Besides, my girlfriend? She got that Shoppin' Booty Balance.

MALIK
(softens, amused)
Aw, Pop, not you too.

Malik puts his hand on Pop's shoulder. Before it touches, a spark jumps from his fingers.

POP
Ow! You shocked me!

MALIK
(laughs nervously)
My bad! That was a big one!

They walk out.

FADE TO:

INT. TEA AND SAMMICHES CAFE - DAY

Heartly walks into the cafe to find a much larger crowd than usual. She looks confused about what's happening until she sees a poster on an easel with Malik's picture. It's a birthday party for "Master Malik."

HEARTLY
(sucks her teeth)
Ohmahgawdwhyyyyyyyyyy.

Jonathan sidles up to her dressed in his best finery.

JONATHAN

Miss Heartly!! I'm so glad you came!

HEARTLY

Uh, not really.
 (looks around nervously)
 I was stopping by to say hi,
 but...I'll come back tomorrow.

JONATHAN

You're not staying? Did you know he's announcing a book release?

HEARTLY

(with fake smile and over the top sweetness)
 Wow. So many surprises.
 (hurriedly)
 Look, I gotta run. I'll check back again soon.

She turns away from Jonathan, starts to maneuver through the crowd and crashes right into Michael. They both look pained to see each other.

MICHAEL

Uh, hey.

HEARTLY

Heyyyyyy.

She looks around nervously as Michael grabs a nearby person to diffuse the situation and pulls him in --it's Malik.

MICHAEL

Have you met my brother, Malik?

Malik's face drops when he sees Heartly.

HEARTLY

BROTHER?

She looks at Malik as if she's been stabbed in the back and storms out. The brothers look at each other, confused.

MICHAEL AND MALIK

YOU know Heartly?

INT. HEARTLY'S WORK CUBICLE - DAY

Heartly looks over documents but keeps nodding off. Her phone sitting in front of her on the desk vibrates, then makes an unusual "alien" noise that jerks her out of her sleep. She looks at it, and a hologram projection rises out of it that reads, "Go see Miss Niecey." Heartly is shocked by the imagery she's seeing - she didn't think her phone could do that! She reaches out with a finger and pokes it through the light. The light retracts back into the phone. She recoils.

Heartly raises her head above the height of her cubicle and looks around quickly. She sees Stacey at her cubicle on the phone.

HEARTLY
(trying to get Stacey's
attention)
PSSST. PSSSSSST!!

Everyone in the surrounding cubicles looks at Heartly. The cubicles are not nearly as private as we previously thought. Stacey continues her phone call, oblivious.

Heartly smiles awkwardly at the people staring at her and sits back down. She stares at her phone, afraid to even touch it again.

MALE COWORKER
(heard from the
background)
Ay yo, Stay-CEE, Heartly want'chu.

Heartly's phone lights up with a call, but it's on silent. Heartly stares at it, afraid to touch it. Once it stops ringing, Heartly reaches toward it nervously.

STACEY
(appears at Heartly's cubicle)
I just called you. What?

Heartly startles out of her phone trance and clutches her chest.

STACEY (CONT'D)
What, girl?

HEARTLY
(keeping her voice low)
Lunch. Now.

STACEY
It's 9:30.

INT. TEA AND SAMMICHES CAFE - MOMENTS LATER

The Cafe is barely open. Heartly and Stacey sit at a small table with two coffees.

STACEY

You think that's what it's about?

HEARTLY

I have this feeling. Like I *know* what it's about.

STACEY

Are you scared? You know you don't have to do this. Wait... are they gonna come looking for you or something?

HEARTLY

(unsure)

No.

Well, it feels like they just did.

STACEY

Well, you can say no. There's a *lot* of people trying to go. They don't NEED you or anything.

HEARTLY

Or *do* they?

STACEY

Romans, Chapter 12, verse 3. Don't think too much of yourself.

HEARTLY

(offended)

Thessalonians 4:11, mind ya business.

STACEY

Oh, so I can go back to work now?

HEARTLY

I'm sorry. I'm stressed. Haven't been sleeping well.

Heartly shifts in her seat and sips coffee. She looks out the window at passersby. People on the street stop to look up and point at something flying overhead.

HEARTLY (CONT'D)

Listen. I made my decision. I'm getting out of here. I'm done with this place.

STACEY

Heartly, are you thinking about suicide?!

HEARTLY

No! God, no. I'm talking about seeing what's Out There. I know Miss Niecey can help me.

STACEY

(exasperated sigh)

Oh Lord, Heartly, we don't know enough. Did you hear, a bunch of Morgan State students went Out There? Parents don't know where they at?

HEARTLY

That's an internet rumor.

STACEY

If these people, things, whatever, can just disappear and reappear, then they can sure make up a story about some imaginary world.

HEARTLY

Well, now's my chance to find out.

Stacey just looks at her as if she can't believe she is really going.

HEARTLY (CONT'D)

You have your family. And a good life.

STACEY

You are my family.

HEARTLY

You know what I mean.

Stacey falls back into her seat. More people pass by the window, one stops to take a picture of something above them.

HEARTLY (CONT'D)

(determined)

Stacey, don't worry about me.

(MORE)

HEARTLY (CONT'D)

Where's your faith? What? God ain't
God out there?

Stacey slowly rubs her temples.

STACEY

How am I supposed to look out for
you if you just up and leave like
that?

HEARTLY

I'm not leaving YOU, I'm just...

STACEY

(sadly)

Trying to go away where I may never
see you again. Got it.

Heartly takes her hand and holds it.

HEARTLY

I'm sorry. I have to do this. For
me.

(trying to get Stacey to
smile)

I know you won't stop praying for
me.

STACEY

I'm praying for you. Always.

HEARTLY

I know, and I need it. And I love
you too.

Jonathan sidles up to the table unnoticed and squats down.

JONATHAN

(excitedly)

Guess who's working the Shea Butter
and Comic Convention?

Jonathan smiles from ear to ear as he holds up a lanyard
around his neck that reads "SheaCon."

INT. MICHAEL'S ROOM/HEARTLY'S APARTMENT - LATE NIGHT

Michael is restless in his bed, wide awake and pondering. Con
Funk Shun's "Love's Train" plays as Michael performs the
actions described in the song:

"Warm night, can't sleep" - Michael turns over on his back and stares up at the ceiling;

"Too hurt, too weak, gotta call her up" - Michael grabs his phone from the nightstand and starts to text Heartly;

"Dial that number, no one answers til two o'clock" - Michael mans up and calls instead;

"And if by chance, you let me come over" - Heartly is awake in her apartment watching TV. She sees the call come up on her phone;

"Out on the street, I wanna see ya baby" - Heartly opens the door to her apartment and stares at Michael;

"And if by chance, you let me just hold ya" - Michael and Heartly sit on opposite ends of her sofa shyly talking and laughing;

"I'm down on my knees, I wanna please ya baby" - Fade into their hands reaching for each other across the back of the sofa;

"I'll be a righteous lover" - they smile at each other; CUT TO:

INT. HEARTLY'S BEDROOM - SECONDS LATER - SONG CONTINUES

"She said Sugar" - he pulls her in and kisses her passionately;

"Honey" - close up of her shirt going over her head;

"Darlin" - close up of her back and his hands unhooking her bra;

"I really wanna see you too" - she removes his shirt then kisses him;

"It's just that someone's" - They are under the comforter, only shown from the shoulders up, then they roll over and he's on top;

"Over," - Her face shows ecstasy;

"and baby" - his face shows serious love;

"I really wanna be witchu" - shot moves from them out the window into the night sky, with extra twinkly stars;

"But if by chance, you let me just hold ya" - night becomes day, camera pans back into the bedroom with Heartly and Michael lying in bed, facing each other. Music lowers as Heartly speaks.

HEARTLY

I need you to listen to me.
Carefully. Music increases.

"When in need, you said you would be here" - Michael props himself up on his elbow to listen as we-

FADE TO:

INT. SHEA BUTTER AND COMIC CONVENTION - DAY

A large hall sprawls with hundreds of people milling about. As we pass through the convention we see various sights:

- A shot of the URBAN 30 SUPERHEROES in front of a step and repeat with photographers and people shouting their names.
- A shot of LEVAR BURTON being driven through the con floor on a chariot shouting his catchphrase "Moisturize yo'self!"
- A long shot of the Twerk-A-Gram booth with two people handing out flyers. Different people of all genders practice their twerking around the booth.

CUT TO:

INT. PANEL DISCUSSION ROOM - SIMULTANEOUS

Malik and two others - PANELIST #1 (woman, Black, 30s) and DARIUS (a major software developer for the company *Nappy Nerds* wearing a full VR headset but still able to see everything that's happening) - are on the stage seated behind a table with the SheaCon logo on the table cover.

MALIK

--would do more for families of incarcerated people, as we push to stop this abusive system that just takes more and more of their money. We the people CAN use this technology for our benefit, to improve our own communities.

The audience applauds respectfully. DARIUS nods approvingly.

MODERATOR

Next question, please.

AUDIENCE MEMBER #1 approaches the mic, dressed like Dave Chappelle-dressed-like-Rick James.

AUDIENCE MEMBER #1

(unexpectedly nerdy voice)

Have you guys talked to the Notofearths about, like, their technology, and, like, how it can be used to make games... better?

PANELIST #1

Better how?

AUDIENCE MEMBER #1

Like, I don't know, what do they have? Like, they won't discuss weapons? So like, maybe they'll discuss video games? Do you KNOW any Notofearths, like--

PANELIST #1

You wouldn't be here if WE didn't make great games. Not everything has to be improved by Notofearths. We're doing just FINE.

AUDIENCE MEMBER #1

(incredulously)

The world is like, going up in flames, but everything's FINE?

MODERATOR

Security.

The audience gets restless. Security approaches AUDIENCE MEMBER #1 but he backs off and returns to his seat.

MALIK

(speaking over the restless audience)

Hold on. We are here to answer questions. Let's not go unchallenged here. We can handle it.

MODERATOR

Next question.

AUDIENCE MEMBER #2 - dressed as Michael Jackson in the "Remember the Time" video - stands up at her seat and shouts instead of approaching the mic.

AUDIENCE MEMBER #2
 ARE Y'ALL GONNA LEAVE US TO GO OUT
 THERE WITH THEM?

MODERATOR
 (exasperated)
 Please, use the microphone.

Audience murmuring increases. AUDIENCE MEMBER #3 grabs the mic. He is dressed like Eddie Murray of the Baltimore Orioles, complete with Afro wig.

AUDIENCE MEMBER #3
 They say Notofearths are taking our
 best minds and inviting them to go
 Out There with them. My question
 is, being some of our best minds,
 would y'all go out there and help
 them? Being that they've done
 NOTHING to help us humans?

AUDIENCE MEMBER #2
 That's what I just asked!!

AUDIENCE MEMBER #3
 (shouting back)
 WELL WE ALL WANNA KNOW!

The audience gets rowdy. Malik raises his hands to calm the crowd. They listen, mostly.

MALIK
 Look, we have no evidence to
 suggest that they need our help
 with anything. And as far as them
 not helping us... well, that's not
 actually fair at all, given the
 fact that some very talented,
 intelligent people have revealed
 themselves to be not of Earth. We
 can't just dismiss all of their
 contributions.

Malik pauses, seeing that the audience is now completely paying attention. Darius nods again in agreement.

MALIK (CONT'D)
 When we still believed them to be
 Earthlings, we were talking nonstop
 about how great they were. Now
 everyone just focuses on the fact
 that they aren't from here.

AUDIENCE MEMBER #3

You never answered the question.
Are. You. Goin'?

DARIUS

They'd have to be invited.

The audience stops and all eyes are on DARIUS.

MODERATOR

Wait, "they"? Are you...?

DARIUS

Yes.

The audience murmurs loudly.

MALIK

Chill! That's what I was just
talking about. Watch this. Who else
here is not of Earth?

Three seconds pass. Twenty or so people raise their hands in the audience. One second later, Audience Member #2 raises her hand. Several people in the audience throw their hands up in the air with an audible, "AWWW!"

DARIUS

Some of y'all lyin.

A few of those with their hands up slowly lower them.

MALIK

Look at us. For the little bit of
information we have, we're letting
it drive us crazy. It's nobody's
business if an individual wants to
see what's Out There. Can you
imagine how brave you'd have to be
to take that leap? To imagine
leaving Earth to live your best
life?

He pauses, looks out at the now silent crowd. DARIUS nods his approval.

MALIK (CONT'D)

I lost a dear friend because I
didn't understand that. I couldn't
just let her be great. On her own
terms. And I regret it, deeply. She
may leave and I'll never get to
tell her how much I respect her.
This is serious, y'all.

The audience seems to be coming around to his viewpoint, some nodding in agreement.

MALIK (CONT'D)

If we do know people who are going Out There, we need to let them know how much they mean to us. Especially if we just may get to see them again.

MODERATOR

Well. Let's wrap this up.

PANELIST #1

Wait, there's one more question.

MODERATOR

Oh. Go ahead, Shadow Weaver.

Someone dressed as SHADOW WEAVER (from She-Ra) stands at the mic. She doesn't speak, but instead has a series of Sharpie written flash cards.

SHADOW WEAVER

(on cards)

"WHAT IS THE BEST WAY"

"TO SAY GOODBYE"

"TO A FRIEND WHO IS"

"GOING OUT THERE"

The panelists all look at each other.

MODERATOR

Anyone? Darius?

DARIUS

I got nothin'.

MALIK

I wish I knew.

SHADOW WEAVER removes her wig and mask to reveal she is Heartly.

HEARTLY

(yelling with tears in her eyes)

I'LL SHOW YOU HOW! BEFORE I GO!

Malik jumps to his feet, nearly knocking over the table.

MALIK

I'm sorry, Heartly! I didn't want to lose you!

HEARTLY

I get it now! I'm sorry too!

Malik starts to make his way off the stage as Heartly starts to head towards him. They embrace.

MALIK

Movin' on, havin' fun, no tears.

HEARTLY

(crying) Movin' on, havin' fun, no tears.

DARIUS nods approvingly then pops out. Stacey and Jonathan walk up to Heartly and Malik. They both join the hug.

AUDIENCE MEMBER #1

Worst. SheaCon. Ever.

FADE OUT.

FADE IN

INT. - MISS NIECEY'S ASTROLOGICAL CENTRE - DAY

Heartly stops in front of the dangling mobile of the solar system where she and Malik started this journey. She sits a large suitcase on the floor and reaches up to touch a star. As she does, MISS NIECEY joins her.

MISS NIECEY

You're ready.

HEARTLY

I am ready.

MISS NIECEY

(smiling)

You can leave your baggage here.

HEARTLY

(shrugs)

I just...

MISS NIECEY

(understanding)

I know.

Heartly takes a deep breath and looks around.

MISS NEICEY

Let's go.

"Follow Me" by ALY-US plays as they make their way toward the back of the store. The wall opens to reveal a bright light. NIECEY and Heartly walk into it. There is an audible POP sound.

FADE TO BLACK.

THE CREDITS BEGIN TO ROLL AND ARE INTERRUPTED BY -

INT. MALIK'S DOCTOR'S OFFICE - DAY

Malik sits nervously on the examination table. He looks around at the posters and his eyes settle on one that reads, "Use protection. ALWAYS." He shudders as the DOCTOR (male, Black, 50s) enters.

The Doctor sits on a short swivel stool and scoots up to Malik.

DOCTOR

I need to ask you...in the last month...have you....had unprotected intercourse with... a Notofearth?

Malik pauses, then sheepishly answers.

MALIK

Yes.

DOCTOR

Mmkay. We're discovering that sometimes the Notofearths pass on certain... for lack of a better word, abilities... through sexual intercourse. Something about their cells interacting with our human cells...

MALIK

Yeaahh...

DOCTOR

Have you noticed you can do anything... new?

MALIK

Well...there's this.

Malik raises his hand and begins to concentrate. Sparks form between his fingers, then grow to tiny bolts of lightning. The DOCTOR looks shocked. Malik looks into the camera and smiles as we-

FADE TO BLACK.

"FANTASTIC VOYAGE" BY LAKESIDE PLAYS AS THE TITLE CARD READS:
THE END?