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PILOT

BLOODLINES

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ACT ONE

OVER BLACK we hear two people, a man and a woman, struggling. Could be biker sex. Or, as Elton John might put it: but then again, no.

EXT. JOGGER'S PATH - NIGHT

TIGHT ON a BLONDE TEEN GIRL, eyes fixed and fierce, death grip on the handle of a sword. SHISH KEBABBED on the end of that sword is a violent HULKING MAN. He's taking wild swings at her. Pot shots. Two feet of steel is all that's keeping her from getting cold cocked.

GIRL
My cell phone is in my bag. If you stop trying to hit me, I'll call an ambulance.

Meet **BIRD BENSON** (18) unsuitably dressed for battle in her field hockey uniform. As the guy leans forward, fingers grasping at her throat, A RED BLOSSOM rapidly stains his shirt to the size of a dinner plate.

BIRD
You're only making it worse.

His hand grabs her collar, clumsily making its way up her neck.

HULKING MAN
First time?

BIRD
For what?

As he closes his hand around her windpipe.

HULKING MAN
First time. I can tell because you'd rather choke to death than --

Bird withdraws the sword in one smooth, quick movement. And the guy crumples. It's just that simple. She rubs her throat, nudging his body with her foot. Bird takes no pleasure in his stillness.

Her entire life, she's been trained to control her emotions. Bird looks down at HER HANDS. They're trembling. Easier said than done.

The guy was right, she's just killed her first person.

As we SLOWLY PUSH INTO HER KILLING FACE.

BIRD (V.O.)
Long ago, in 1994, there was a wedding between two warring families...

FLASHBACK TO:

EXT. HOLY RESURRECTION CHURCH (1994) - ESTABLISHING - DAY

A suburban Greek orthodox church. Sensible cars in the parking lot. Mostly Volvos.

BIRD (V.O.)
And no matter how hard they tried, they just couldn’t seem to make it through the ceremony without fighting.

A CHYRON tells us we're in: BLUFFTON, SOUTH CAROLINA, 1994

INT. HOLY RESURRECTION - DAY

ON A CHINESE GROOM, waiting impatiently at the altar.

BIRD (V.O.)
Understandable. Weddings are boring as hell.

The Groom checks his watch; scanning the faces of a strange confluence of people.

BIRD (V.O.)
And every family is a battlefield in its own way.

ANGLE THE GROOM'S SIDE: Shaolin monks, some in ORANGE ROBES, some in plain clothes -- warriors in today's world (and their plus-ones.)

BIRD (V.O.)
The Groom's side had been refining their *wushu* since before the days of the Yellow Emperor. We’re talking 2700 BC.

As we SCAN THE FRONT ROW of PROUD CHINESE MEN.

BIRD (V.O.)
They have a *total,* some might say obsessive, commitment to honor.

ANGLE THE BRIDE'S SIDE -- a well-muscled bunch. They look like Italian or Greek mercenaries but are much more.

BIRD (V.O.)
And the Bride's side? For now let's just say my mom’s family tree has a lot of branches -- most of them bent.

INT. HOLY RESURRECTION - BRIDE'S ROOM - DAY

Where our bride, STELLA KILLPRIEST (20s) an achingly beautiful loose cannon is in the midst of being CINCHED INTO HER WEDDING DRESS by LEO KILLPRIEST (40s) her father. After one FINAL CINCH. Leo wipes the sweat from his brow.

LEO
So, how long’ve you been pregnant?

Stella glares at him in the mirror as she primps.

STELLA
Is it that obvious?

LEO
It will be if the kid’s not Asian when it comes out.
(a beat)
Is it even his?

STELLA
Whose?

LEO
The guy outside. The one you’re about to marry.

We hear a RAP on the DOOR. Leo opens it, REVEALING CHARLES (40s, Chinese) the Groom's father.

CHARLES
How long must we wait?

LEO
You don’t have daughters, do you?

Charles cranes his neck, scolding the bride.

CHARLES
I paid the organist for one hour.

LEO
Give us five, ten minutes, tops.
Will ya?

As Leo closes the door we STAY ON CHARLES, following him to,

INT. HOLY RESURRECTION - MAIN AISLE - MOMENTS LATER

Where Charles makes his way down the aisle with an update.

CHARLES
[in Mandarin; subtitled]
It is a big dress. Complicated.

The Groom nods gravely. He knows something's up.

INT. CHURCH ENTRANCE - MOMENTS LATER

Leo ushers Stella to the designated starting point.

LEO
You know how much this little union means for both families. I mean, lately there've been more funerals than baptisms. If we keep this up, how much longer you think we'll be around?
(a beat)
They may even let you train on Mount Song. *Mount Song.*

Stella stops him. None of this matters.

STELLA
I'll marry whoever you want. But I will love who I want.

Leo smiles tightly as the WEDDING MARCH BEGINS.

STELLA (CONT'D)
Do I look pretty daddy?

LEO
Pretty as the moon...

As Leo lowers her veil,

LEO (CONT'D)
And just as cold.

INT. HOLY RESURRECTION - AISLE - MOMENTS LATER

ON STELLA walking down the center aisle, a bat-winged angel with the face of a Botticelli bathed in the light of huge STAINED GLASS WINDOWS. Like any woman, Stella takes her time to enjoy this moment. She's looking; listening; watching... But Stella is no ordinary woman. She's a soot-hearted swirl of contradictions with the supreme physical bearing of a warrior at the height of her powers.

Leo shakes hands with the Groom, handing his daughter over.

LEO (CONT'D)
She's all yours. Congratulations.

The Groom nods. Leo winks at Charles across the room. We get the sense this marriage satisfies some debt between them.

GREEK ORTHODOX PRIEST
Blessed is our God always, now and ever and to the ages of ages. Amen.

EVERYONE SITS.

GREEK ORTHODOX PRIEST (CONT'D)
Lord, I beseech thee for the salvation of the Bride and Groom...

The Groom cocks his head, with a look of suspicion at STELLA from the side. Stella sees this look, flattening out the material over her belly.

GREEK ORTHODOX PRIEST (CONT'D)
To preserve them in steadfastness of faith...

The Groom places his hand on her stomach...

GREEK ORTHODOX PRIEST (CONT'D)
To bless them with a blameless life...

The Groom and Stella lock eyes for a tense beat.

GREEK ORTHODOX PRIEST (CONT'D)
To grant them an honorable marriage.

HE TEARS OPEN HER DRESS REVEALING for everyone -- THE BABY BUMP. What happens next, happens with incredible speed:

Stella pulls a WHITE TANTO SWORD out from underneath the train of her dress. The SWORD RINGS AUDIBLY as she assumes a fighting stance. The Groom pulls out a sword of his own.

ON LEO, shaking his head as the Groom backs Stella up against the wall, placing the tip of his sword against her stomach.

BIRD (V.O.)
Honor gave the groom every right to take my mother's life.

ALL SOUND FADES AWAY except for the beating of a tiny heart, we hear it like a sonogram: BOOM-BOOM. BOOM-BOOM.

BIRD (V.O.)
But, in the end, he couldn't bring himself to take the life of a child whose heart he had felt through the length of his sword.

BOOM-BOOM. The Groom lowers his weapon, an act of supreme resignation and honor. He MAKES EYE CONTACT WITH CHARLES. CHARLES' POV as Stella plunges her White Tanto deep into his son's chest.

WE LINGER MOMENTARILY ON STELLA'S KILLING FACE.

BIRD (V.O.)
Did I mention my mother is a direct descendant of Spartans?

CUT TO:

INT. KILLPRIEST FAMILY COMPOUND - SIX MONTHS LATER - DAY

The Killpriests are rich from centuries of graft, pillage and corruption. It's snowing OUTSIDE as WE FIND STELLA in the last primal throes of a childbirth without pain-killers, aided by TWO MIDWIVES.

BIRD (V.O.)
Like gypsies or the Amish, they adhere to the old ways.

A CHYRON: KENNEBUNK, MAINE, SIX MONTHS LATER

ON LEO waiting across the room as the Midwives work...

BIRD (V.O.)
And they're particularly picky about who they bring into the world.

After a few BEATS OF SILENCE -- He hear the INFANT CRY.

BIRD (V.O.)
Several thousand years of baby selection has made them freakishly strong, fast and numb...

The child is washed with wine (as the Spartans once did) and lifted to the light of a window for Leo to inspect. Leo gives the kid a once-over. Then, shoots a disapproving look at Stella.

LEO
Who did you say the father was?

STELLA
I didn't.

LEO
Whoever he is, he's not one of us.

BIRD (V.O.)
I just didn't make the cut.

Leo cocks his head to the midwives, wiping his hands on a towel.

LEO
Weak legs. Get rid of it.

STELLA'S BLOODCURDLING SCREAM follows us to...

EXT. KILLPRIEST CIRCULAR DRIVE (1994) - DAY

The midwives whisk the baby away from the house, quickly getting into a Volvo (a very Spartan vehicle.)

INT. VOLVO - MOMENTS LATER

One of the midwives rides with the child as the other removes a "Club" lock from the steering wheel.

INT. VOLVO - DRIVING - ACADIA NATIONAL PARK (1994) - DAY

As the Midwives drive, one of them flicks on a cassette. **Ace of Base's** "I Saw The Sign" is playing: "*No one's gonna drag you up to get into the light where you belong... But where do you belong?*" It's an impossibly happy song.

As the Midwives bop their heads to the tune we can't help but notice a DARK BLUE BUICK REGAL is FOLLOWING THEM.

EXT. ACADIA NATIONAL FOREST (1994) - DAY

Where THE MIDWIVES abandon the infant to exposure (an ancient Spartan practice) somewhere deep in the woods. No blanket, no comfort, no nothing. The goal is to forget it existed.

INT. VOLVO - MOMENTS LATER

The Midwives get back in the car, cranking the ignition: "*Life is demanding, without understanding...*"

As they drive off the MUSIC STAYS WITH US. After a beat, the Buick EASES INTO FRAME. Charles is behind the wheel.

EXT. WOODS - DAY

Charles hikes through the snow, following the DISTANT CRIES of the forgotten infant: "*I saw the sign and it opened up my eyes... It opened up my eyes.*"

CHARLES' POV of a BIRD SITTING NEAR the child. A sign if there ever was one.

Charles lifts the baby up, claiming it as his own. As he does this, THE BIRD TAKES TO THE SKY.

CHARLES
(to the raised child)
You will be my bird of vengeance.

And as **Ace of Base** takes us out*:* "*I saw the sign...*" we,

PUNCH TO BLACK:

END ACT ONE

ACT TWO

EXT. MOTEL SIX - ESTABLISHING - DAY

ON THE BUICK parked in the blistering heat. CICADAS BUZZ. **A CHYRON** tells us we're in: *TEMPE, ARIZONA; 1994*

INT. MOTEL SIX - DAY

Charles does his best to assemble an IKEA crib, a task made more difficult by the thankless cries of the COLICKY BABY...

Charles throws a screwdriver into the wall. It sticks with a THWAP! Charles yells at the baby:

CHARLES
[in Mandarin; subtitled]
You chubby vermin! Perhaps I should have left you to die at the hands of an owl.

Bird stops crying. Evidently, she likes Chinese hyperbole.

CHARLES (CONT'D)
It is a warrior's duty to protect the weak, not to switch places with a helpless infant.

Charles yanks the screwdriver out of the wall.

CHARLES (CONT'D)
My son gave his life for you. It is your sacred duty to avenge him.

Charles picks up the child.

CHARLES (CONT'D)
You will kill your mother. After that, your life is your own.

Off Bird, staring blankly.

CHARLES (CONT'D)
Let us begin.

EXT. DESERT ROAD - DAY

BIRD AT TWO is made to crawl behind Charles on a median. **A CHYRON** tells us we're in: *Provo, Utah; 1996*

CHARLES
Many people believe the world is full of warriors... WRONG!

We see the Buick broken down behind them, SMOKING, overheated in the distance. Charles tries to thumb a ride.

CHARLES (CONT'D)
Any dog can be trained to fight but fighting alone does not make it a warrior.

CARS WHIP BY them incredibly fast.

CHARLES (CONT'D)
HONOR is a warrior's most precious possession. Once damaged it can never be restored.

Charles tries to force Bird to stand. Bird stands on shaky legs. We see why she's having trouble walking. CLOSE ON: METAL BRACES ON HER LEGS.

CHARLES (CONT'D)
[in Mandarin; subtitled]
Your family has been studying the art of dogs for 30 centuries.

Then finally, a TRUCK stops.

TRUCKER
Where you goin'?

CHARLES
Autozone.

TRUCKER
Hop on in.

Charles CROSSES to the open door, watching as Bird attempts to walk across the median in her leg braces.

TRUCKER (CONT'D)
You best pick her up mister. I ain't got all day.

Charles watches stubbornly as Bird makes the excruciating 20 foot walk by herself. The Trucker just shakes his head.

TRUCKER (CONT'D)
Tell you what. Changed my mind.

By the time Bird arrives, the TRUCK IS GONE. Bird looks down at her legs. Charles raises her chin with his hand.

CHARLES
Honor is fragile. We will walk.

EXT. HOSTEL - ESTABLISHING - NIGHT

The Buick is being pelted by rain. **A CHYRON** tells us we're in: *PORTLAND, OREGON; 1998*

INT. HOSTEL - CONTINUOUS

BIRD AT FOUR, laying in a bunk bed in a quiet corner. She has wet hair from having been outside. ANGLE CHARLES as he removes one of Bird's LEG BRACES.

CHARLES
When I was a boy, a Buddhist monk journeying to Mount Song in Henan Province found me orphaned in the street along his travels.

BIRD
You didn't have a mom?

Charles nods, setting the first leg brace aside.

CHARLES
He brought me to the monks at the Shaolin Monastery where I was made to face a wall for nine years. Speaking to no one the entire time.

He begins removing on the next brace.

CHARLES (CONT'D)
After nine years was up. I walked away from the wall and it was the monks this time who were speechless. Because I had pierced a hole in the wall with my stare.

Off her look, CHARLES removes an ORDINARY BRICK from his RUCKSACK:

CHARLES (CONT'D)
This brick feels nothing and yet it nurtures you more than your mother. This brick asks you to focus. Because of that, it serves a higher purpose. This higher purpose comes at a cost to the brick.

After a few INTENSE BEATS of him staring at it, THE BRICK CRUMBLES INTO FINE RED DUST which he simply BLOWS AWAY. Off her astonished look, Charles hands Bird a BRICK of her own.

CHARLES (CONT'D)
[in Mandarin; subtitled]
When it flows like blood through your fingers, we will know you are ready to kill your mother.

Charles reaches up and throwing her LEG BRACES in the nearby TRASH and FLICKS OFF THE LIGHT, causing the street lamps outside to cast long shadows.

BIRD
I will break this brick, it will not break me.

Rain streaks the window, casting shadows on the wall.

CHARLES
The choice is yours.

INT. WORKING CLASS BAR - ESTABLISHING - DAY

Long moustaches and short tempers abound in an all-white clientele. **A CHYRON** tells us we're in: *Tulsa, Oklahoma; 2004*. BIRD AT TEN sits at a corner booth with Charles. The two of them stick out like Obama on a twenty dollar bill.

ANGLE TWO COWBOYS playing darts, staring at Charles and Bird.

BIRD
I want to go back to our room. It's not safe here.

Charles looks to the cowboys, unconcerned.

CHARLES
I will finish my chicken wings.

BIRD
Why did you bring me here?

CHARLES
The rent is cheap. The food plentiful.

BIRD
Not to this town. To this bar.

NO ANSWER. ANGLE THE BRICK in Bird's hand.

CHARLES
Focus on the brick.

BIRD
I’m getting tired of running.

CHARLES
So am I.

BIRD
Then why are we doing it?

CHARLES
If your mother knows you are alive.
She might come looking for you.

BIRD
(slightly hopeful)
She might be looking for me?

CHARLES
To kill you.

Bird absorbs this.

BIRD
I want a home.

CHARLES
I want a pet golden eagle and three concubines.
(a beat)
Focus.

Bird stares at the brick as the COWBOYS LAUGH in the BG.

BIRD
They’re laughing at me.

Charles shoots a circumspect look at the cowboys.

CHARLES
No. They are racists.

BIRD
(in all honesty)
Am I Asian?

A DART lands on the table right in front of Charles.

CHARLES
No. But I am.

BIRD
Why don't you just kill them?

CHARLES
If your ability to focus were as strong as your temper, there would be no brick.

We PUSH INTO BIRD'S EYES as she makes another attempt to dust the brick.

BIRD
I can't do it. Not here.

CHARLES
Then, not anywhere.

BIRD
You brought me here to make me angry.

CHARLES
You were angry the day I found you. I brought you here to teach you to control it.

BIRD'S POV THE LAUGHING COWBOYS throw YET ANOTHER DART. It sticks into the table in front of Bird's brick this time. Bird picks up the brick and heads toward the cowboys with a full head of steam. Charles grabs her hand, stopping her.

CHARLES (CONT'D)
[in Mandarin; subtitled]
Never give control of your emotions to anyone or anything outside yourself.

BIRD HEAVES THE BRICK AT THE COWBOYS, SHATTERING THE MIRROR BEHIND THE BAR. The MUSIC STOPS. ANGLE CHARLES, standing and reluctantly cracking his knuckles.

ABRUPT CUT TO:

EXT. COUNTRY WESTERN BAR - MOMENTS LATER

A COWBOY LAUNCHES out the front window. A beat later, Charles and Bird step over him on their way out. The Cowboy halfheartedly tries to stab at their ankles with a broken dart. Charles nods at Bird, permission to knock him out.

CHARLES
Never get angry, except on purpose.

Bird PUNCHES THE MAN, taking us to --

EXT. FOREST - DAY

ANGLE BIRD AT TWELVE meditating with her eyes closed. **A CHYRON** tells us we're in: *JACKSON HOLE, WYOMING; 2006.*

CHARLES (O.S.)
You will kill your mother a thousand times in your mind before you ever meet her in battle.

CAMERA ADJUSTS to reveal CHARLES DOWN BELOW, LOOKING UP at Bird balanced precariously, with her BRICK on a tree branch.

Bird OPENS HER EYES, falling. Charles catches her.

CHARLES (CONT'D)
You broke concentration. Why?

BIRD
I didn't like what I saw.

CHARLES
What did you see?

BIRD
I was happy to see her.

OFF CHARLES, the slightest hint of worry.

EXT. FOREST - DAY

BIRD AT TWELVE. As Bird and Charles fight, he sweeps her feet out from under her. We notice that Bird has learned some rudimentary Kung Fu, but she still has the clumsiness that comes with youth. She kicks him, he absorbs it graciously.

CHARLES
Spartan dog blood makes you strong. But you lack the control of emotion my son had.

Bird launches herself headlong at Charles.

BIRD
I am not him. I am me.

He holds her off with one hand, laughing as she swings wildly with her brick.

CHARLES
You are right. He would never try to hit me with a brick. You are nothing like him. But with each growing day you are more like her.

Bird pauses for a beat, confused/conflicted.

CHARLES (CONT'D)
You are turning into your mother.
(a beat)
Does that anger you?

BIRD
No.

Charles sweeps her feet out from under her.

CHARLES
Wrong answer.

As Bird hits the ground hard as we PRE-LAP **MARIACHI MUSIC.**

EXT. MOTEL SIX - ESTABLISHING - DAY

Charles suns himself by the pool as a Mexican family celebrates a quinceanera nearby.

A CHYRON tells us we're in: *San Antonio, Texas; 2008*

INT. MOTEL SIX - ROOM - DAY

BIRD AT THIRTEEN, tries to dust her brick over and over, a seemingly limitless cycle of failure and renewed mental effort.

INT. MOTEL SIX - ROOM - NIGHT

Bird cries herself to sleep. The brick is by her pillow. In the dark, Charles overhears her.

CHARLES
Control your emotions.

BIRD
I can't. My stomach hurts.

Charles flicks on the light.

BIRD (CONT'D)
Can you get me some chocolate from the vending machine? Please?

He slips his CROCS on.

CHARLES
My son never ate chocolate. He never cried. He never had so many stomach pains.

Bird grabs her stomach. It's another cramp.

BIRD
What the hell is wrong with me? Am I dying?

CHARLES
No. It is nature.

Charles runs his hand through his hair, utterly exasperated.

CHARLES (CONT'D)
[in Mandarin; subtitles]
I think it is perhaps time you befriend some girls your own age.

EXT. HIGH SCHOOL - ESTABLISHING - DAY

Charles drops Bird off in front for what is essentially her first day of school ever.

BIRD
Thanks for taking me to the drug store.

Charles nods gravely.

BIRD (CONT'D)
Did you know they have little cotton bullets that women put in their --

He raises his hand, cutting her off.

CHARLES
A warrior does not speak of such things.

The TWO OF THEM sit for a long awkward beat. BIRD takes a deep breath, STEPPING OUT OF THE CAR INTO...

EXT. HIGH SCHOOL - ESTABLISHING - DAY

BIRD'S POV: Asian kids wearing preppy clothes, Deadheads playing HACKY SACK, Emo kids smoking cloves. Bird takes her time to enjoy the moment.

Some passing boys react to her. And then it hits her: She may actually be pretty.

Bird bumps right into A STUDENT with a flyer.

STUDENT WITH FLYER
Do you want to join the bowling club?

BIRD
(overly enthused)
YES!!!

Bird takes the FLYER and hugs the student. Off this bizarre exchange.

CLASS - LATER

As Bird sits in BIOLOGY CLASS eagerly scribbling down the details of the day's lesson:

TEACHER
Regular menses, also called eumenorrhea, lasts for a few days, usually 3 to 5 days, but anywhere from 2 to 8 days is considered normal.

The teacher watches with interest as Bird takes notes, then,

TEACHER (CONT'D)
Excuse me. Why are you carrying a brick in my class?

Bird looks down at THE BRICK, stealing glances at the other kids, as if for the first time suddenly discovering they're all brickless. TWO GIRLS giggle.

BIRD
(guileless again)
It's a reminder of my destiny.

The teacher takes the brick from her.

TEACHER
Which is what exactly?

Always protective of the brick, Bird takes it back.

BIRD
That when I kill my mother, my life will be my own.

INT. HIGH SCHOOL - HALL - LATER

Bird sits on a wooden bench as Charles walks by her without uttering a word. BIRD watches him walk through a door where a man waits with a stern look on his face.

CHARLES
Principal Sprague. Allow me to explain...

Charles shoots her a troubled look as the door is CLOSED.

CUT TO:

EXT. COLORADO STREET - DAY

ON LEO getting out of a VOLVO his chauffeur is driving. He's older now, more grayed in the temples than last time we saw him. He walks with a CANE.

As he stops to check the address, a **CHYRON** tells us we're in: *Colorado Springs, Colorado.*

We follow Leo into --

INT. OLYMPIC TRAINING CENTER - SWIMMING POOL - DAY

Where a boy of fifteen is in the midst of his final lap of a 200M BUTTERFLY STROKE. This is **TROY.** From under the water, we see his LEGS KICKING and ARMS PUMPING furiously. Truth is, he's working twice as hard as his competitors to go half as fast.

ON TROY, failing the heat, EXITING the pool discouraged, bumping into Leo on the way out.

LEO
You have great endurance, but you swim like you're going punch for punch with the pool.

Troy looks up to find LEO standing there.

TROY
Mr., what do you know about swimming?

LEO
I know some people are built for it. Others sink like a stone. Especially when they're built like one.

Leo hands the kid a business card: ***LEO KILLPRIEST; KILLPRIEST AND ASSOCIATES.*** Off Troy's look.

LEO (CONT'D)
I've been putting together a family tree. And as it turns out, your grandmother was my sixth cousin.

Troy laughs.

TROY
You know what that makes us?
(a beat)
Nothing.

Troy goes to EXIT but Leo stops him. They're toe to toe. ANGLE TROY'S FIST, CLENCHED MENACINGLY. Leo grabs this fist and raises it to eye level.

LEO
Tightly balled fists like yours have fractured our family like a Grecian urn.

Leo starts squeezing Troy's fist in his own huge hand.

LEO (CONT'D)
We've been the quiet thug, the hired killer, the hand that wipes the knife under the moon since the dawn of civilization. We're one of the oldest families in the world and what do we have to show for it? Pain.

Leo squeezes harder. Troy's tries not to show it, but he's in pain.

LEO (CONT'D)
I'm sick of the weak and slow making speeches while we fight over the crumbs swept from the throne we put 'em in.

TROY
What do you want from me?

Leo suddenly let's go of Troy's fist, releasing him.

LEO
Be my glue. Help me put the urn back together.

A beat.

LEO (CONT'D)
There are more of us than I was even aware of. There's power in that. There's power in family. I happen to know you like power.

TROY
You don't know anything about me.

Troy heads for the lockers. Leo stops him with the following words,

LEO
I know you applied to the Citadel.

Troy turns.

LEO (CONT'D)
The elite military school in South Carolina. Got thrown out after two months.
(a beat)
Because you like to fight.

Troy nods, vaguely ashamed of his temper.

LEO (CONT'D)
How'd you like to attend the oldest military school on earth? It's been out of commission for 2000 years. Come with me and I'll restart it. Today. With you as the first pupil.

ON TROY considering.

INT. KILLPRIEST FAMILY COMPOUND - GUEST QUARTERS - DAY

An empty room save for Troy and a RED CLOAK known as a *Phoinikis*. Troy approaches the RED CLOAK with trepidation. ANGLE TO REVEAL LEO IS THERE SHOWING HIM AROUND.

LEO
The agoge was the rigorous training regimen once mandated for all male Spartans. The aim was to produce physically strong males to serve in the Spartan army.
(MORE)

LEO (CONT'D)
The training involves stealth, pain tolerance, loyalty to the group... When I'm done with you, you will be a brick in the walls of Sparta.

TROY
Sparta doesn't exist.

LEO
It does, if we believe it.

Troy puts the RED CLOAK on, assuming his new identity...

EXT. KILLPRIEST FAMILY COMPOUND - CIRCULAR DRIVE - DAY

Troy fist fights with another boy, named BIG BILL (14). Bill is a big boned boy.

LEO
For every new family member, there will be a fight to determine the leader.

Troy knocks Big Bill down easily. JUMP TO, Troy knocking down another boy. Then another boy. Another.

INT. KILLPRIEST FAMILY COMPOUND - DINING ROOM - DAY

Troy and Big Bill eat at a long plain table with FIFTEEN OTHER BOYS. Bill spears a piece of MYSTERY MEAT with his fork. It's MOSTLY BONE. Leo approaches.

LEO
Hunger is your friend.

INT. KILLPRIEST FAMILY COMPOUND - KITCHEN - LATER

ON BIG BILL is eating LEG OF LAMB directly from a GINORMOUS SUB ZERO refrigerator in the opulent main quarters. ANGLE LEO, sickened as Bill guzzles the entire contents a HUGE TWO LITER BOTTLE of PEPSI ONE.

INT. KILLPRIEST FAMILY COMPOUND - LATER

Where Bill is tied to a tree, in the midst of being punched in the kidneys by Leo.

LEO
I want you to know, this punishment is not for stealing.

Bill turns around ANGLE some 40 STRONG BOYS waiting in line to also punch him in the kidneys.

LEO (CONT'D)
It's for getting caught.

ON TROY, contemplating Bill's bruised and battered back for a beat and then, after a moment of deliberation --

PUNCHING US TO:

EXT. BIRD AND CHARLES' NEW HOUSE - DAY

A CHYRON tells us they've moved to: BETHESDA, MARYLAND. As Charles unpacks the moving truck, he chastises Bird.

CHARLES
You do not break the brick because you feel for the brick...

Bird's distracted by something ACROSS THE STREET.

CHARLES (CONT'D)
What did I tell you about emotion?

She's a million miles away.

CHARLES (CONT'D)
Are you even listening to me?

Charles follows Bird's gaze ACROSS THE STREET.

BIRD
Why can't we be like them?

ANGLE ON A WOMAN in her FRONT YARD with HER DAUGHTER carefully tending a ROSE GARDEN.

BIRD (CONT'D)
Why can't I be normal?

CHARLES
It is not in your nature.

EXT. NEIGHBOR'S HOUSE - MIDDLE OF THE NIGHT

Bird stands in the middle of the garden in her pajamas. The MOONLIGHT casts a silvery light on a stout shrub of white roses. Bird leans over to smell one of the flowers.

WE PULL BACK <u>just in time to see Bird begin hacking at the GARDEN with a sword</u>.

INT. NEIGHBOR'S HOUSE - NEXT MORNING

ON THE LADY of the house, heading DOWNSTAIRS, finding -- an EMBARRASSING AMOUNT OF FLOWERS in drinking glasses scattered around the house. She frantically moves between rooms. There are literally THOUSANDS and THOUSANDS OF FLOWERS.

THROUGH AN OPEN WINDOW, the woman SEES...

EXT. STREET - CONTINUOUS

BIRD watching on her bike as the woman SLAMS her window shut.

EXT. BIRD AND CHARLES' HOUSE - FRONT STOOP - DAY

Bird sits with her first boyfriend, RANDY, a stoner. They're in the midst of a heated conversation.

BIRD
You're breaking up with me?

He nods.

BIRD (CONT'D)
(horrified)
Why?

RANDY
Your hands are calloused.

Bird looks down in her hands holding THE BRICK.

BIRD
I'll use moisturizer.

A beat, then...

RANDY
Your father tried to stare a hole in my chest.

A BRIEF POP TO:

INT. WAL-MART - DAY

Where Charles, working as a cashier, tries to stare a hole in Randy's chest as he scans Randy's bag of Flaming Hot Cheetos.

ANGLE CHARLES' KILLING FACE as the BAG POPS.

BACK TO:

EXT. BIRD AND CHARLES' HOUSE - DAY

Bird calmly acknowledging the simple facts:

BIRD
Look. I admit it. I'm weird. The only white girl in the world to be adopted by an Asian family. But it's not always going to be like this.

Then Bird shares something she could never say to Charles:

BIRD (CONT'D)
Someday soon I'm going to surprise my birth mother somewhere and she'll realize that she made a mistake. And we'll discover we have the same laugh, then we'll go to the mall and get our toes done.

Randy looks at her, cocking his head to the side.

RANDY
If she wanted any part of that, don't you think she would have found you by now?

NO ANSWER. ANGLE BIRD's KILLING FACE as she watches him EXIT. AFTER A BEAT, she turns her killing face on THE BRICK, expertly **turning it to dust.**

And OFF BIRD, watching the red dust flow through her hands like blood, we --

END ACT TWO

ACT THREE

INT. TGI FRIDAYS (2012) - NIGHT

BIRD sits in front of her EIGHTEENTH BIRTHDAY CAKE as Charles, like any good Asian dad takes photos.

CHARLES
You are a perfect instrument.

Charles presents her with a gift -- ROLLED IN A PIECE OF BLACK CLOTH.

CHARLES (CONT'D)
Happy eighteenth birthday.

BIRD
I was hoping it would be make up.

Bird unties the black cloth, unwrapping it. Inside is the WHITE TANTO SWORD that her mother killed Charles' son with. As Bird studies the sword her blood goes cold.

BIRD (CONT'D)
You said the choice was mine. What if I can't do it?

CHARLES
A warrior who has turned away from her vows is nothing.

The WAIT-STAFF ENTERS, puts a hat on her head and begins singing her BIRTHDAY SONG.

BIRD
I'm asking you seriously. What if I can't kill my mother?

STRANGE LOOKS from the wait-staff as they begin SINGING AND CLAPPING. Charles responds in his usual minimalist fashion.

CHARLES
Then I will be forced to.

WE STAY ON BIRD'S FACE as the BIRTHDAY SONG continues.

BIRD
What does that make us? Will you and I be enemies?

CHARLES
Blow out your candles.

We HOLD ON BIRD, as her birthday candles continue to burn.

A careful viewer might notice A MAN WATCHING from another booth. This is the Hulking Man from our opening.

INT. DOJO - DAY

Bird and Charles fight with swords in front of a panel of MASTERS. We get the sense this is some sort of assessment of her abilities.

After a few beats of heavy fighting -- Bird knocks Charles' sword out of his hand. They exchange a look, somehow keenly aware they are living through a special moment.

She has surpassed him.

The LEAD MASTER raises his hand. Bird places her sword in a rack and EXITS.

LEAD MASTER
You remind me of the farmer who found a snake out in the cold. It was barely alive, almost frozen. So the farmer wrapped the snake in his coat. He brought it into his home and placed it near the fireplace only to discover that it was a cobra.

ON BIRD EAVESDROPPING through a half-opened door.

LEAD MASTER (CONT'D)
He cared for the cobra until it got its strength back. Then, one morning, as the farmer went to feed it, the snake lunged at him, biting him on the neck.

ON CHARLES listening to the end of the parable.

LEAD MASTER (CONT'D)
The farmer cried out: 'why would you do this?' As the cobra slithered away, she said: 'I can't help it. It's my nature.' This Bird of yours is such a snake.

A beat as Charles picks up his broken sword from the floor...

LEAD MASTER (CONT'D)
She will accompany me to Mount Song in the winter.

CHARLES
No.

LEAD MASTER
No?

CHARLES
For how long?

LEAD MASTER
However long it takes to fix her.

ON CHARLES suddenly worried.

CHARLES
You intend to change her nature with marrow cleansing.

Charles looks to the other masters. It appears this decision has been made unanimously in his absence.

LEAD MASTER
Her strength is unmatched, her technique is perfect yet with each day she grows more dangerous. She needs to be purified.

CHARLES
She has been the sole reason for my existence these past eighteen years. I'm not going to let you take her from me.

The Lead Master laughs at Charles' broken sword.

LEAD MASTER
It is not wise for a pupil to stay with one Master for too long.

CHARLES
I assure you, she gets practice fighting those who would harm her elsewhere.

LEAD MASTER
And where is that?

PRELAP **AC/DC's** "*Back In Black*"

SMASH CUT TO:

EXT. HIGH SCHOOL - PARKING LOT - ESTABLISHING - DAY

A raucous high school parking lot in Bethesda, Maryland... As Bird ROLLS INTO FRAME in Charles' old Buick Regal -- a RAW EGG EXPLODES on the WINDSHIELD.

She gets out, making boys flinch with a sudden, half-kidding gesture. Truth is, every one of them wants to fuck her.

INT. HIGH SCHOOL - HALL LOCKERS - DAY

AC/DC CONTINUES TO PLAY as Bird arrives at her locker to find the word "*EGG*" scrawled on it in black marker.

An EGG is thrown at her. SHE CATCHES IT without even looking. Bird approaches the boy who threw it and forces the egg into his mouth. ANGLE ON an EMO GIRL digging the sadomasochistic relationship Bird seems to have with the boys of this school.

EXT. HIGH SCHOOL - FIELD - DAY

AC/DC CONTINUES as Bird plays on her field hockey team... The girls play a violent intramural game full of pushing and body-checks which gives the whole game a roller derby feel.

QUEEN BEE body-checks Bird.

QUEEN BEE
Egg.

EMO GIRL
Leave her alone.

Emo makes a move to stick up for Bird. Bird stops her with a hand on her shoulder.

QUEEN BEE
White on the outside, yellow on the inside.

AC/DC CONTINUES as the next play is called. When the ball is thrown -- BIRD DETONATES -- running after the ball with everything she has -- BODY-CHECKING the Queen Bee -- JABBING another girl with her stick.

And -- GGGOOOAAALLL!!! In the BG A WHISTLE BLOWS.

Bird turns; smirking with satisfaction that every player except for Emo Girl is on the turf reeling in pain.

COACH
YOU. HWANG. I WANT YOU OUT OF HERE. NOW. You understand me?

Bird walks off the field, shooting a look of thanks at Emo, and as she does, **AC/DC ENDS.**

EXT. PARKING LOT - NIGHT

Bird digs for her keys in her bag. THROUGH THE WINDOW of the Buick Regal she can see they're still in the ignition:

BIRD
Great.

And as she walks off into the night, she's being watched.

EXT. JOGGER'S PATH - NIGHT

Walking the dark path, Bird HEARS FOOTSTEPS behind her. She turns to find a MAN RUNNING TOWARD HER. This is no jogger, it’s the Hulking Man from our opening running at her with a BRONZE SWORD OUTSTRETCHED.

The man HACKS at her in a fighting style reminiscent of the “300”. AGAIN and AGAIN. Bird dodges, moving in quick, deft half circles. She delivers an avalanche of kicks to his chest, barely phasing the guy.

BIRD (CONT’D)
Dude. Who are you?

He KICKS HER INTO A TREE.

HULKING MAN
You and the Walmart greeter have become complacent. You never should’ve stopped running.

She charges him, ramming her head into his sternum.

BIRD
He’s not a greeter. He’s a sales associate. And we’re not complacent, blissfully dysfunctional maybe.

HULKING MAN
No one’s blissful in Crocs.

He claps her ears. We hear RINGING. Then he knocks her back into a tree.

HULKING MAN (CONT'D)
Mastery inevitably leads to comfortable footwear. Comfort leads to weakness. Weakness to death.

She rebounds from the tree with a flip, going toe to toe with him for a barrage of traded punches.

HULKING MAN (CONT'D)
I'm going to kill him.

BIRD
For what purpose?

HULKING MAN
For running my friend down like a dog.

ON THE HULKING MAN as Bird jumps into the treeline.

HULKING MAN (CONT'D)
Trying to come behind me. You think I don't watch Shark Week?

She comes out of nowhere, hitting him with her FIELD HOCKEY STICK, GRABBING HIS SWORD.

BIRD
You know why sharks hunt like this?

And DISAPPEARING INTO THE TREES AGAIN. THE HULKING MAN, watches the tree line as the branches bend SILENTLY in a WIDE CIRCLE.

BIRD (O.S.) (CONT'D)
Why they've ambushed their prey for a million years?

He HEAVES HER STICK into the tree line. And then -- an eerie SILENCE descends on the woods. The man waits for the tiniest sound, GRADUALLY TURNING to REVEAL -- BIRD has been behind him the whole time.

BIRD (CONT'D)
It works.

SHE SKEWERS HIM WITH HIS OWN SWORD. **And it's here we reprise the action from our opening sequence.**

GIRL
My cell phone is in my bag. If you stop trying to hit me, I'll call an ambulance.

But this time we see things from an ENTIRELY DIFFERENT PERSPECTIVE. SOMEONE'S WATCHING as the guy's meaty hand begins choking Bird. SOMEONE'S WATCHING as Bird withdraws her sword in one smooth, quick movement. SOMEONE'S WATCHING as the guy crumples.

ANGLE BIRD looking down at HER TREMBLING HANDS. THEN -- A KNIFE LODGES itself with a healthy THWAP! In Bird's leg.

Bird makes a quick move toward the OBSERVER, but she is wounded. Bird pulls the KNIFE out of her leg REVEALING it's made of BRONZE.

ON BIRD, unable to give chase, watching the second man disappear into the,

BLACK:

END ACT THREE

ACT FOUR

INT. CHARLES AND BIRD'S HOUSE - KITCHEN - NIGHT

CHARLES sweeps the items off their kitchen table, LAPTOP included.

BIRD
What did you do that for?

CHARLES
You are hurt.

BIRD
It actually doesn't hurt bad enough to ruin my computer.

CHARLES
Your high pain threshold cannot be relied on.

Bird sits on the NOW CLEARED kitchen table. Charles applies pressure to the injury with a hand towel.

CHARLES (CONT'D)
You are lucky it was not poisoned.

Bird examines the BRONZE KNIFE.

BIRD
I'm more worried about tetanus. While the other kids were getting regular checkups where was I? Oh yeah,
[in Mandarin; subtitled]
Up in a tree, *laying the ground work to die from something only ragpickers in third world countries die of.*

CHARLES
[in Mandarin; subtitled]
Forgive me, but I was too busy teaching you to catch projectiles. Something which took 4 years of my life. Perhaps you should honor that sacrifice by ***catching the dagger next time****?*

BIRD
[in Mandarin; subtitled]
Wear a green hat, you stupid melon.
(MORE)

BIRD (CONT'D)
(then, back to English)
I killed a man tonight.

Charles stops dead in his tracks.

BIRD (CONT'D)
Did you hear me? I said I killed a--

CHARLES
Where?

BIRD
In the stomach.

CHARLES
(exasperated)
I'm not asking about anatomy --

BIRD
In the park --

CHARLES
This should have been the first thing you told me.

A long grave beat, Charles is weighing his options here.

CHARLES (CONT'D)
The Buick, where is it?

BIRD
At school. I locked the key inside.

Charles throws her the dish towel and begins EMPTYING A JUNK DRAWER in search of an extra key.

BIRD (CONT'D)
Hello? Still bleeding here.

CHARLES
If we had good relations with the neighbors, perhaps I could have borrowed one of their cars but your penchant for home invasions has made that all but an impossibility.

Charles pluck A CAR KEY from the contents of the overturned drawer.

BIRD
Your monk friend is right. I'm a snake not a bird.

He grabs her by the arm.

CHARLES
Either way, you are 18 years overdue for your first tetanus shot.

INT. SUBURBAN HOSPITAL - WAITING ROOM - NIGHT

As they wait to be called, Charles thumbs through a National Geographic as Bird continues to hold the dish towel to her leg.

BIRD
My hands won't stop shaking.

CHARLES
Subduing the enemy in battle can be intoxicating.

BIRD
I keep thinking about the guy I killed. The color of his eyes was blue. They were kind of pretty.

CHARLES
This feeling will soon give way to something else entirely.

BIRD
What's that?

CHARLES
Retribution.

He puts the magazine down. After a long, meaningful beat.

CHARLES (CONT'D)
It's clear your family has found us. We're no longer safe together.

NURSE (O.S.)
(trouble pronouncing it)
Bird Hwang?

Bird rises, rolling her eyes.

BIRD
Right here.

ANGLE Bird watching Charles grabbing his coat.

BIRD (CONT'D)
You're not going to come with me?

He can't even look at her.

CHARLES
The human heart is divided into two perfect halves. This is a biological fact.

In an uncharacteristic display of emotion, Charles hugs her tightly:

CHARLES (CONT'D)
Always remember: Bird or Snake... You have more than one nature. Everyone does.

BIRD
Why do I feel like this is goodbye?

And he's gone. ON BIRD watching Charles head out the AUTOMATIC DOORS, for the first time feeling she's lost him.

INT. EMERGENCY ROOM - MOMENTS LATER

A bustling ER on a Friday night. **DR. BENSON** (40s handsome) examines Bird with the help of a nurse.

DR. BENSON
After Nurse Gupta finishes cleaning the wound we'll do a scan to make sure there's not a piece of, whatever it was, still in your leg.

BIRD
It was a knife.

Bird shows Dr. Benson the BRONZE DAGGER. He examines it curiously.

DR. BENSON
What'd you get stabbed in a museum?

Bird laughs until she sees Nurse Gupta coming at her with a needle.

BIRD
You've got to be kidding.

DR. BENSON
It's a tetanus shot.

BIRD
I've never had a needle of any kind before.

DR. BENSON
I don't think it'll be a problem after the Arkansas toothpick.
(a beat)
Please put the blade down.

CLOSE ON Dr. Benson's hand taking the knife then gently squeezing her hand as the Nurse does her job. For him, this is a comforting gesture that costs him nothing, part of his bedside manner. For Bird, it is much more; a mix of tenderness and familiarity.

Then, the moment ends. ANGLE BIRD, watching his hand slip out of hers.

DR. BENSON (CONT'D)
Any allergies to antibiotics?

BIRD
To be honest, I'm not really sure.

DR. BENSON
Your dad... Would he know?

BIRD
He's not here.

DR. BENSON
He left?

BIRD
His son kind of died, so he acts weird when I get hurt.

DR. BENSON
I'll write you for Primaxin just in case.

As the Doctor bandages her wound, she opens up.

BIRD
And he's not my dad. He's my guardian. I'm his charge. Like Robin or something.

Dr. Benson nods as he finishes patching her up.

DR. BENSON
All right kiddo, you're done.

As the Doctor moves away, Bird grabs his arm.

DR. BENSON (CONT'D)
Did you want something else?

SILENCE.

DR. BENSON (CONT'D)
I have another patient.

OFF HIS EXIT, she collapses onto the bed, savoring the weirdness of their encounter.

EXT. HOSPITAL - PARKING LOT - NIGHT

Bird EXITS THE HOSPITAL to finds Charles waiting by the Buick, cleaning egg off the windshield.

BIRD
I was bleeding to death and you're detailing the Buick.

CHARLES
It is a classic.

BIRD
A GTO's a classic. You can see the street through a hole in the Buick's floor.
(a beat)
Why did you leave me back there?

Charles opens the TRUNK, REVEALING the DEAD HULKING MAN.

CHARLES
Someone has to bury your opponent with honor.

BIRD
You mean hide him from the cops.

Charles throws the wipe down chamois, in the trunk with the dead man.

CHARLES
I have to admit, part of me hoped you might go home with the doctor.

Bird stares at him incredulously,

BIRD
Why would I go home with the doctor?
(off his SILENCE)

BIRD (CONT'D)
Have you always been a freak or is that something that happens when a kid stares at a wall for nine years?

CHARLES
Dr. Benson... He is your father.

Charles SLAMS THE TRUNK, LEAVING US IN BLACK with the dead man.

END ACT FOUR

ACT FIVE

EXT. WOODS - MORNING

As Bird and Charles work to get the Hulking Man's body into a shallow grave.

BIRD
How can you be sure that doctor was my father?

Charles shrugs.

CHARLES
I looked into it after your mother killed my son.

BIRD
So the whole reason we moved to Maryland? Was to be close to him.

CHARLES
I knew this day would come.

As Charles lowers the HULKING MAN into the grave, Bird rifles through the DEAD MAN'S WALLET.

BIRD
The day you felt like ditching me.

CHARLES
The day when you and I would be safer apart than together.

BIRD
So now what?

CHARLES
You go to Mount Song. I'll meet you there in December.

BIRD
After I'm brainwashed.

Bird removes an ID CARD from the dead man's wallet, it reads: **KILLPRIEST AND ASSOCIATES; PRIVATE SECURITY.**

BIRD (CONT'D)
I'm sick of running.

CHARLES
What did you have in mind?

BIRD
Time to show my family I'm not the baby they left in the woods.

ON BIRD, eyes fixed and fierce, throwing DIRT INTO THE GRAVE.

INT. CHARLES AND BIRD'S HOUSE - NEXT MORNING

Charles finds Bird putting on makeup, in a tight red dress. This is highly uncharacteristic and not at all allowed. Bird doesn't care. She glances at him in the mirror as she CRIMPS HER EYELASHES.

BIRD
There's a chance I could die today.
(off his nod)
Why die ugly?

INT. BUICK - DAY

As Charles and Bird roll to a stop in front of KILLPRIEST AND ASSOCIATES,

CHARLES
You have developed the instinct of knowing who to trust and who not to trust.

Bird looks up, with more than a little curiosity, at the rather innocuous looking building.

CHARLES (CONT'D)
I'll be double parked with the engine running.

He hands her the Tanto. She nods, tucking the WHITE TANTO into the curve of her back. Then, Bird turns to look at Charles one last time.

CHARLES (CONT'D)
Honor is sacred.

BIRD
I love you too.

EXT. KILLPRIEST AND ASSOCIATES - MOMENTS LATER

Bird struts confidently toward the building, a converted warehouse in a loft district that is home to the some 400 workers and support staff of Killpriest, a Blackwater-like firm. If ever there was a time to cue the **SPAGHETTI WESTERN MUSIC**, now is that time.

INT. KILLPRIEST AND ASSOCIATES - LOBBY - DAY

Workspaces are organized into 'mini-lounges' that occupy the building perimeter and contain dedicated resources: conference spaces, kitchens and cubicles, etc. But in the center of it all is an odd architectural element --

AN OPEN COURTYARD that looks like something straight out of the Getty Villa. In the middle of this courtyard, FIFTY YOUNG MEN PARTICIPATE IN A VERY MENACING HAKA-LIKE ANCESTRAL DANCE. It is full of posturing and vigorous group oriented movements: RHYTHMIC SHOUTING, STAMPING OF THE FEET, that sort of thing. This is the agoge, all grown up.

Bird watches the war dance, perhaps somewhat alarmed, but also, somewhat turned on.

One MENACING MAN is TROY, the boy from our pool scene earlier, aged 20 now. And he senses Bird’s presence, eye-fucking her so vigorously in the midst of the haka that the air between them could pop black sexual popcorn kernels.

After a beat or two, Troy approaches her.

TROY
You must be Bird.

Bird cocks her head at Troy, who reaches out to shake hands, smiling.

BIRD
Do I know you?

TROY
No. But you look just like your mother.

Troy directs her attention to a nearby SECURITY CAMERA.

TROY (CONT’D)
Come on. There’s someone who’d love to meet you.

INT. LEO'S OFFICE - DAY

As Troy leads Bird into a study containing an odd mix of ancient artifacts and arts and crafts furniture... The place has a cozy feel despite the collection of BROKEN SWORDS ON THE WALL.

ANGLE A PHOTO of BIRD'S MOM on the desk. Bird looks at it, picks it up, it's her first time ever seeing her mother's face. Bird runs her finger along the smooth, cold glass, putting the frame down when LEO ENTERS.

Leo sticks out his hand.

LEO
You look just like her. Doesn't she Troy?

Troy nods.

LEO (CONT'D)
Pretty as the moon...

AND THEN,

LEO (CONT'D)
Sorry doll, but I'm gonna have to ask you for your sword. I can't have people runnin' around here half cocked with sharp objects. I'm on Coumadin. It's a blood thinner. If I so much as look at a knife I'll bleed like a stuck pig.

Bird unsheathes the sword.

BIRD
Forget it.

LEO
Or, I could have sixty of your male cousins take it from you. Your choice.

She's smart enough to know, after seeing the haka, that the next few decisions are all theirs with or without the sword. She sticks the sword into the surface of his LARGE GREENE AND GREENE DESK, right next to a TINY BOWL OF CANDY,

LEO (CONT'D)
Butterscotch?

Bird shakes her head as Leo unwraps one and eats it.

BIRD
I've heard stories about you.

LEO
Good, bad or indifferent?

BIRD
I was left on a hillside to die. What do you think?

LEO
You were weak.

BIRD
I'm not weak anymore.

LEO
I can see that. And on behalf of the family... I'd like to apologize. I'm not proud of the way things went down.

Leo looks out the window, he's emotional.

LEO (CONT'D)
It can't be easy, the position we put you in. The only chance you have at a relationship with any of us is in the form of some Saturday morning Kung Fu revenge plot. Anything less than that would mean betrayal of the man who raised you. You got one foot on the boat and one on the pier.

BIRD
I didn't come here for a walk down butterscotch memory lane. I simply want to right the balance.

LEO
Which means what exactly?

BIRD
Honor dictates I kill my mother.

ON LEO, fascinated.

LEO
*Honor. Y*ou believe all that crap?

BIRD
You have something better to believe in?

LEO
Maybe. Maybe not.

BIRD
Where is she?

LEO
This destiny of yours, you won't be able to fulfill it. And *that's* where your story really begins.

BIRD
Killing my mother will be easy.

LEO
I hate to break it to you kid. She's already dead. Has been for 4 years.

BIRD
I don't believe you.

LEO
Open your eyes, you don't see the shrine?

He draws her attention to the CANDLES BURNING in FRONT OF SEVERAL PHOTOS of STELLA on the other side of the room.

LEO (CONT'D)
She's buried at Holy Resurrection Church. The place where all this started.

Off Bird, wheels turning, trying to comprehend,

LEO (CONT'D)
That's the funny thing about adoption isn't it? You never know what worse luck your bad luck is saving you from until you meet your real family.
(off her look)
Don't be too shocked, us Killpriests have the life span of a racehorse. The surname was given to us in ancient Rome for rounding up the city's remaining pagan priests and burning them alive in front of the Pantheon. A job we were so good at, the Medicis hired us as their assassins. Til the Borgias outbid them. Loyalties were divided. Brother killed brother over this.

Leo flips tosses her an ACTUAL ROMAN COIN stained with BLOOD.

LEO (CONT'D)
That is the blood you have in your veins.

BIRD
She was killed?

Leo nods.

BIRD (CONT'D)
By who?

LEO
A van she was driving got hit by a train outside of Bamf. She was tired, too impatient to wait for the train because she was on the run.

A QUICK POP TO:

INT. BUICK (2007) - DAY

Charles and Bird drive past a POLICE CORDON at a RAILROAD CROSSING, AMBULANCE LIGHTS FLASH IN THE DISTANCE.

BIRD
What happened?

CHARLES
(shrugging it off)
Crossing incident.

As they drive past, Bird sees a TWISTED WRECK of a VAN, not in any way realizing that her mother is in there.

BACK TO:

INT. KILLPRIEST AND ASSOCIATES - CONTINUOUS

LEO
Charles wasn't just running from her, he did his fair share of chasing too. Didn't tell you that part did he?

Bird's mind is blown.

LEO (CONT'D)
To be honest, the amount of miles you both covered, I'm surprised you didn't bump into each other outside a Dairy Freeze.

BIRD
And that guy I killed last night?

LEO
Was her childhood friend. Always blamed Charles for her death. I tried to tell him it wasn't anyone's fault. But he didn't listen.
(a beat)
Guess you showed him.

Leo hands the WHITE TANTO back to her. A sign of resignation and a bid for peace.

LEO (CONT'D)
Do yourself a favor. Tell that single minded bastard double parked outside my building that your sacred duty is done. You *killed the guy, who tried to avenge the girl, who killed the guy.* The circle of vengeance is complete. Your life is your own. Congratulations. Question is: What're you gonna do with your life now that you have it?

Bird tucks THE WHITE TANTO to its place in the small of her back and opens his OFFICE WINDOW. Air rushes in...

BIRD
Guess I'll just have to live according to my own code of honor.
(barbed)
Wherever that takes me.

LEO
Just like the rest of us.

And SHE'S GONE. Disappeared OUT THE WINDOW with a catlike grace. Leo watches her spectacular exit for a beat,

LEO (CONT'D)
I take it back. She's nothing like my daughter, may she rest in peace. She's a lot better trained.

TROY
Think we'll see her again?

LEO
She's a Killpriest. And a woman. There's no telling what she's gonna do next.

Leo smiles, he can see Troy finds Bird attractive.

LEO (CONT'D)
Tell you what, maybe you should keep an eye on her.

TROY
Do you think she can get me onto Mount Song?

LEO
You just saw her jump out a six story window.
(off Troy's nod)
With a girl like that, who needs Mount Song?

INT. BUICK - DAY

Bird gets in the car to find Charles listening to "*Stuck on You*" by **Lionel Richie.**

CHARLES
What happened?

Bird responds like a miffed teenager,

BIRD
Nothing.

CHARLES
[in Mandarin; subtitled]
I've waited 18 years to see the last glowing embers of your mother's life snuffed out.
(then, English)
Perhaps you could me humor me with a little more detail.

Bird JABS OFF his music.

BIRD
The score has been settled. My mom is dead.
(MORE)

BIRD (CONT'D)
My debt to your son is paid. I guess that means you and I are through now. Happy?

NO ANSWER. Bird FLINGS OPEN HER DOOR.

EXT. SUBURBAN STREET - DAY

She storms out of the car, SLAMMING THE DOOR. Cars HONK as Charles watches FROM THE STREET as Bird takes to the ROOFTOPS.

EXT. ROOFTOP - DAY

Bird runs over rooftops in order to let off steam. All this running ultimately lands her on one roof top in particular. A rooftop with an excellent vantage point of...

EXT. HOSPITAL PARKING LOT - CONTINUOUS

From here, Bird watches DOCTOR BENSON get into his car. She follows, leaping from rooftop to rooftop all the way to,

EXT. DR. BENSON'S HOUSE - NIGHT

Bird LOOKS THROUGH THE WINDOW of what seems to be an idyllic home. She watches as Dr. Benson puts down his coat and joins in an impromptu game of Scrabble with his TEN YEAR OLD DAUGHTER. This is a DOMESTIC TABLEAU that is equal parts heartwarming and gut wrenching for Bird. This moment is interrupted when her CELL PHONE RINGS.

ON BIRD'S CELLPHONE SCREEN, the name: *CHARLES*. Bird hits *IGNORE*.

THEN -- BIRD HEARS the Benson Girl SCREAM.

ANGLE BIRD staring at HER OWN BLUE FACE, REFLECTED in the dark of the Benson home's window. The light from her PHONE has illuminated her face, revealing her hiding spot.

ON DR. BENSON staring straight at her, perhaps a bit confused as to why one of his patients is now in his tree.

ON BIRD, backing INTO THE SHADOWS, as we --

END ACT FIVE

ACT SIX

EXT. HIGH SCHOOL - TRACK - DAY

Bird runs around the track dressed in her gym clothes... As she does, she notices someone is suddenly running next to her. It's Troy.

TROY
I believe I was put in your life for a reason.

BIRD
If it's all the same to you, I'd rather just run in silence.

After a beat more of running.

BIRD (CONT'D)
Did you go to her funeral?

TROY
Yes.

BIRD
Did she ever talk about me?

He shakes his head. Bird runs faster, trying to outrun the pain. Troy matches her speed.

BIRD (CONT'D)
You could've at least lied.

ANGLE the QUEEN BEE, exempt from gym because her arm is in a CAST.

QUEEN BEE
Who's the new guy? And why is he talking to her?

Emo Girl shoots Queen Bee a look.

EMO GIRL
Chelsea, you are such a bitch.

QUEEN BEE
I'm a bitch? Your mom's a bitch for having a bitch and your dad's a bitch for impregnating a bitch. So who's the real bitch, bitch?

QUEEN BEE WATCHES AS IN THE DISTANCE, Troy continues talking closely with Bird.

TROY
People in our family have grown thick skins around themselves for thousands of years. But it comes at a cost. Nobody can hurt a Killpriest, but nobody can make a Killpriest happy either. I'm a half-breed, like you.

Bird stops running.

BIRD
You're not a Killpriest?

TROY
My last name is Robbins.

BIRD
I'm pretty sure I'm either a Benson or a Hwang.

Where we ANGLE ON QUEEN BEE watching Troy and Bird talking closely. Even from this vantage point, there is an odd physical chemistry between them. Troy grabs Bird's arm when she tries to pull away. Bird surprises him with a CLOSE QUARTERS GRAPPLE, and Troy smiles.

BIRD (CONT'D)
Is this what substitutes as foreplay in the Spartan world?

He smiles. Indeed it is. Truth is, they are well-matched opponents. EQUALS. A fact Bird can't fully ignore. She also can't ignore the fact that the Queen Bee is watching them.

BIRD (CONT'D)
So, are we like, eighth cousins or something?

TROY
Ninth? Or, Tenth?

We POP INTO the QUEEN BEE'S POV as **Bird plants a long, forceful, open mouth kiss on Troy**. ANGLE BIRD, shooting a knowing look at Emo Girl, both loving every minute.

INT. DR. BENSON'S HOUSE - NEXT MORNING

Dr. Benson's daughter wakes up, rubbing the sleep from her eyes, only to find A BREEZE BLOWING IN. ANGLE AN OPEN WINDOW.

She finds BOOT PRINTS of MUD all over her PRETTY PINK RUG.

A SCRABBLE BOX sits empty on the floor.

The board is missing along with the letters -- all, that is, except for FOUR TILES left conspicuously on the SILL.

They spell: B. I. R. D. The BENSON GIRL's POV of BIRD in the street below, strutting away with her Scrabble game.

INT. DINER - DAY

Bird and Charles are in the midst of breakfast. As they eat, we can plainly see the stolen SCRABBLE BOARD on the table between them.

BIRD
Choose seven letters from the bag.

CHARLES
I've never played a game.

BIRD
Never? What the hell kind of life is that?

CHARLES
The monks on Mount Song consider games a frivolous waste of life energy.

BIRD
And you want me to go train there? The monks can suck it.

CHARLES
At what point do we roll the dice?

BIRD
It's not that kind of game.

Bird shakes the bag at him... He happily takes a tile.

CHARLES
I found a woman on Craig's List. She is a therapist.

Bird almost chokes on her food.

CHARLES (CONT'D)
She told me it is possible that perhaps I focus so much on the past because I do not want to burn a hole in the present with my stare.

BIRD
What?

A long beat as Charles searches for a word in more than just a Scrabble board. He reaches out and holds her hand.

CHARLES
All these years, my feelings about my son have prevented me from seeing that I have a daughter.

ON BIRD absorbing the sentiment...

CHARLES (CONT'D)
[in Mandarin; subtitled]
Thank you for restoring my honor.

Charles studies her beautiful face with the adulation of a father proud of his daughter for the first time.

BIRD (V.O.)
Just for the record, I never actually told him I killed her.

ON BIRD continuing the lie.

EXT. DINER - CONTINUOUS

We're OUTSIDE, looking in.

BIRD (V.O.)
But I didn't correct him either.

Bird is the daughter inside the window this time continuing her woefully bad game of scrabble with her adopted father.

BIRD (V.O.)
What can I say?

As Bird laughs, we hold on this TABLEAU long enough to see...

BIRD (V.O.)
I take after my mother.

It is as real as any father/daughter relationship in the Benson home.

EXT. HOLY RESURRECTION CEMETERY - NIGHT

The Buick ROLLS INTO FRAME. FAST FOOD WRAPPERS on the dash. The end of a long road trip.

Bird EXITS THE CAR with a SINGLE RED ROSE, gradually making her way toward -- A HEAD STONE. The **INSCRIPTION:** *STELLA KILLPRIEST.* Bird gets on her knees, pushing the RED ROSE into the dirt. The soil is hard, so she digs a little.

In fact, she digs all night.

TIME CUT TO:

EXT. HOLY RESURRECTION CEMETERY - DAY

ANGLE BIRD standing in front of a COFFIN and -- just as she THROWS OPEN the lid. Before we see inside it,

A WOMAN'S VOICE
When my mother died we built a pyre in the back yard.

Bird turns, finding the Assailant who stabbed her in the woods STEPPING INTO FRAME. It's no guy.

STELLA
As the oldest child, it was my duty to light the fire. It was a loving act, meant to release her.
(a beat)
Something you just don't seem to be able to do.

ON BIRD, stupefied by the fact that her mother is very much alive and very much in front of her, HOLDING A BASEBALL BAT.

STELLA (CONT'D)
(grudging respect)
You're a stubborn little bitch, I'll give you that.

Bird clocks the BASEBALL BAT in her mom's hand and raises the WHITE TANTO.

BIRD
I've gone over this moment a thousand times in my head. Literally.

STELLA
So tell me, what happens next?

BIRD
We meet in a hotel lobby. I'm so nervous I can't breathe. Then we sit and talk.
(MORE)

BIRD (CONT'D)
I tell you I understood that letting me go must not have been easy, that for whatever reason it was the decision you had to make. Then you apologize for leaving me in the forest.

A beat.

BIRD (CONT'D)
HELLO? I said you apologize.

Bird kicks her mom A LONG DISTANCE through the STAINED GLASS WINDOW of the CHURCH INTO --

INT. HOLY RESURRECTION CHURCH - MOMENTS LATER

As Bird approaches Stella with her TANTO raised.

STELLA
Would you forgive me if I did?

BIRD
I wouldn't forgive you. But I might just let you live.

STELLA
What about your sacred duty to Charles' son?

BIRD
I never even knew the guy. You gave birth to me. It doesn't get more sacred than that.

STELLA
You'd betray your Master for me?

Bird nods, sticking the TANTO POINT DOWN in the railing of the altar. For a long beat Stella stares at the TANTO.

STELLA (CONT'D)
You know, I paid twenty thousand dollars for that sword in 1994. It was tempered to be as hard as I thought I was. This made it sharp. But it also made it brittle.

Stella raises the baseball bat.

STELLA (CONT'D)
See this bat? 10 bucks at Target.

Stella swings the bat at the TANTO, shattering it. Bird tries her best to stay calm as Stella approaches with the bat.

STELLA (CONT'D)
You're not the only one that's been training for 18 years.

BIRD
If you wanted to kill me you would have done it in the park when you threw the bronze knife at me.

STELLA
(growing condescension)
Sweetie. Things changed the moment you dug up that grave.
(a beat)
See, nobody else in the world knows I'm alive but you and me.

BIRD
Who are you hiding from?

STELLA
My father is amassing an army.

BIRD
I'll help you fight them.

SILENCE.

BIRD (CONT'D)
I'm on your side.

STELLA
After you would so easily betray your master? I don't think so.

Stella laughs kicking Bird right into the TABERNACLE.

STELLA (CONT'D)
I got work to do kitten. And where I come from...

Stella takes a menacing step forward forcing Bird to scooch back.

STELLA (CONT'D)
The only way two can keep a secret is if one is dead.

BIRD
We can fix this.

ON her mother's KILLING FACE --

BIRD (CONT'D)
You.

Stella raises the bat --

BIRD (CONT'D)
Me.

Bird's backs into the same church wall Stella found herself all those years ago.

BIRD (CONT'D)
Us.

Nowhere to go as...

STELLA
Fix this.

Mom brings the bat down.

PUNCH TO BLACK:

END OF PILOT

Or, as Elton John might put it: but then again, no.

INT. BENSON HOUSE - THE PINK ROOM - THREE DAYS LATER

ON BIRD, EYES FLUTTERING OPEN.

DR. BENSON (O.S.)
She's waking up. Honey, give her some space.

The first thing she sees is her half-sister STARING DOWN AT HER. Then, Dr. Benson shining a light in her eyes.

DR. BENSON (CONT'D)
Any nausea? Dizziness? Follow the light.

Bird follows the light to CHARLES.

BIRD
What the hell happened?

CHARLES
You were found in a burning church.

CAMERA ADJUSTS to her face is battered. Her head is bruised.

BIRD
Do you really believe it's possible?

CHARLES
What?

BIRD
For someone to change. If they went through a big enough ordeal. On Mount Song.

CHARLES
I know it is. That ordeal was my childhood.
(a beat)
Bird. Who did this to you?

BIRD stands, a Herculean effort as she rips out her SALINE DRIP and then, AS THE CAMERA LINGERS ON HER KILLING FACE,

BIRD
I will break the brick. The brick will not break me.

PUNCH TO FINAL BLACK:

END OF EPISODE