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The Church of Leila

Nikki Haririan

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FINAL THESIS
TELEVISION PROJECT DESCRIPTION

Student Name: Nikki Haririan

Thesis Logline: After speaking with God during a suicide attempt, an aimless disaster of a woman sets out to start her own religion while moving back in with her parents.

The Church of Leila

Title

A teleplay written and produced and presented to the faculty of
the Writing and Producing for Television MFA Program in the
School of Film & Television at Loyola Marymount University of
Los Angeles, California

In partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree

Master of Fine Arts

Writing and Producing for Television

By

Nikki Haririan

Student Name


Nikki Haririan / Apr 27, 2022 14:22 PDT

Student Signature

APPROVAL TO ADVANCE TO CANDIDACY

The following student has met all the criteria to advance to candidacy for an M.F.A. in Fine Arts with an emphasis in Writing and Producing for Television:

Nikki Haririan

Student Name

Apr 27, 2022

Date

SCWR 680 Instructor Signature

SCWR 681 Instructor Signature

Graduate Director Signature

THE CHURCH OF LEILA

Written by

Nikki Haririan

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INT. GOD'S OFFICE - DAY

A gaudy ultra-feminine office. In one chair sits LEILA (25, dazed Iranian-American burnout). Across from her is Hollywood actress, MEGAN FOX. Leila stares at her in shock.

LEILA
You're Megan Fox.

MEGAN FOX
Thank you.

LEILA
Is this Heaven? Or like, a girly
version of Peewee's Playhouse?

MEGAN FOX
No. You're in my office.

Megan points behind Leila. Leila turns around to see a placard stating: OFFICE OF GOD.

LEILA
You're fucking with me.

Megan snaps her fingers. Leila's hair instantly gets trimmed and her highlights get refreshed. Leila gasps.

MEGAN FOX
I couldn't look at your dead ends
any longer.

LEILA
Holy shit...wait, if you're God,
why'd you let Jennifer's Body flop?

MEGAN FOX
It's way rude of you to come into
my office and question how I work.

A lightbulb goes off for Leila.

LEILA
Wait, God, could you undo--

MEGAN FOX
Jake breaking up with you? No. It
happened. Get over it.

LEILA
(choking up)
Okay, you don't have to be so harsh
about it. It's still fresh.

MEGAN FOX

He broke up with you a month ago.
Stop crying. You're here because
I've gotta tell you something big.
Like, actually huge.

LEILA

(sniffling, sarcastic)
What? The meaning of life?

Megan Fox nods, then leans in and whispers into Leila's ear.
Leila perks up as she listens. Her mind is blown.

LEILA (CONT'D)

Incredible...but what am I supposed
to do with this knowledge now?

MEGAN FOX

Bitch, I just told you the meaning
of life. I can't do everything for
you!

Everything fades away into whiteness as Leila screams.

FADE IN:

INT. LEILA'S HOSPITAL ROOM - NIGHT

Leila groggily wakes in a hospital bed. Her wrists are
heavily bandaged & braced down, indicating a suicide attempt.
Standing above her, shaking her and staring, is TODD (30s,
sweaty and red).

TODD

Yo, you're awake now!

LEILA

Who...the fuck...are you?

TODD

Forgot ya didn't meet me! I'm ya
Postmate. I was bringin' yer tikka
masala, but ya didn't answer the
door, so BANG! I bust it down and
find ya in the tub. I'm a hero!

Todd expectantly smiles at Leila.

TODD (CONT'D)

So, uh...can I get my tip now?

INT. LEILA'S HOSPITAL ROOM - DAY

All alone, Leila pokes at a bowl of disgusting soup. She tries a sip, but quickly spits it out.

A NURSE (40s, nasal & chipper) enters, clutching a chart.

NURSE

How are we doing this morning?

LEILA

...Seriously?

NURSE

You're right. Would checking
Twitter help?

The nurse shows Leila her phone. Leila snatches it from the nurse and immerses herself in the interwebs.

NURSE (CONT'D)

Fantabulous news for ya, the doc
found nothing to worry about since
your blood loss was minimal!

LEILA

Good to know I'm even bad at
killing myself.

NURSE

I do not know how to respond to
that, so I simply will not!

LEILA

So...as much as I love hanging
here, if I'm good, can I go home?

NURSE

Ooh, well, there's rules that
patients who attempted suicide be
sent to inpatient psychiatric care
for 72 hours of observation.

LEILA

(matter of factly)

Well, I can't do that. I've been
before and it was horrible.

NURSE

Maybe it'll be better this time!

LEILA

No, like, I'm not going back. Can't I just like pinky promise that I won't hurt myself again? I'm really not crazy.

The nurse is clearly irritated with Leila's pleading.

NURSE

Look, you need a doctor's sign off to get released.

The nurse's pager starts buzzing.

NURSE (CONT'D)

Duty calls, sorry!

The nurse exits. Leila contemplates while staring at the phone, before dialing a number. She groans as it rings.

LEILA

Hi. It's me. I need a favor.

INT./EXT. PARISA'S CAR - DAY

A dinged up Mercedes with a "DOKTOR" license plate. Behind the wheel, with a doctor's white coat slung over the back of the seat, is PARISA (58, brow permanently furrowed).

Leila, dressed in normal clothes but wrist bandages still visible, hops in and kisses Parisa on the cheek.

LEILA

Hi maman jaan.

PARISA

Please put your hands away. It's upsetting to look at.

Leila sits on her hands and wrists. Parisa begins driving.

LEILA

Wait, where are you going? My apartment's over there.

PARISA

You're coming home.

LEILA

What? I'm not going to Baltimore!

PARISA
Fine, I can have them readmit you
to the loony bin.

Leila ponders before releasing a loud, angry mini-scream.

PARISA (CONT'D)
This is my fault. If we didn't work
so much when you were a kid--

LEILA
Here we go again.

PARISA
--you'd be happier. More normal.

LEILA
Mom, you're already kidnapping me,
can you at least not do this too?

They sit in silence. Leila turns the radio on and pop music fills the car. Parisa smashes the radio button, turning NPR on. Terry Gross and Ira Glass mumble in the background.

PARISA
I thought you were doing better.

LEILA
I was! I am! I'm fine!

PARISA
Then why did you...

LEILA
I thought he might have Google
Alerts on for my name.

Parisa slams on the brakes and Leila's head smacks the dash.

LEILA (CONT'D)
I'm kidding, jeez. I don't know why
I did it. And I'm not talking about
it with you, that's what therapists
are for.

PARISA
I made you an appointment with one.

LEILA
Good. As long as it's not Meredith.

PARISA

What's wrong with her? She was so good for you in middle school with the whole...

LEILA

Me chugging a bottle of Tylenol hoping I'd die? We can acknowledge it, y'know. And besides, Meredith's a child psychologist!

PARISA

She's right by my hairdresser, so you *will* see her.

Parisa reaches out and pets Leila's hair.

PARISA (CONT'D)

(in Farsi)

By the way, your hair looks great.

LEILA

Thank God.

INT./EXT. PARISA'S CAR - LATER

The Mercedes flies by the "MARYLAND WELCOMES YOU!" sign.

LEILA

Can I ask you a random question?

PARISA

That's the only kind you do.

LEILA

When you were like *actually* Muslim, did you ever talk with Allah?

PARISA

What? No. Are you crazy?...Wait, I didn't mean to say *crazy*--

LEILA

I spoke to Allah. Or God, or whoever in the hospital.

PARISA

Not one of your better jokes.

LEILA

I'm not joking! She told me all this stuff and...I dunno, it felt really important, like I should--

Parisa grabs her cell phone and tosses it into Leila's lap.

PARISA

Can you take a selfie and send it to my friends on WhatsApp? Jila's son just got engaged and I need to remind everyone that at least my child didn't need a nose job.

Leila sighs and obliges, taking half-hearted pictures.

EXT. SUBURBAN STRIP MALL - DAY

Amidst dinky shops sits a large medical practice, brandishing the name "Shirazi Practice." Leila and Parisa climb out of their parked car and head towards the practice.

PARISA

These bitch nurses can't do anything on their own.

LEILA

Can't I just drive home?

PARISA

In my Mercedes? Hell no.

INT. SHIRAZI PRACTICE - WAITING ROOM/RECEPTION AREA - DAY

Leila sits on a faded couch, watching the RECEPTIONIST (30s) tapping at the computer. Finally, the receptionist gets up to go to the bathroom.

Leila bolts to the reception desk, rifling through the pile of mail. She shoves aside all the letters, and rips open all the packages of sample medication, looking for anything good.

EZRA (O.S.)

Egad, Leila! It's been ages!

Leila shoves all the medication back in time to get accosted by EZRA (28, Nice Jewish Boy™) up in her face. Ezra forcibly hugs her, despite Leila's cringing.

EZRA (CONT'D)

So what's the deal, you come here to seduce me?

LEILA

No. I'm here against my will.

Ezra has somehow invaded more of Leila's personal space.

EZRA

Seems like you're gonna be waiting a while. We may as well go grab a drink in the meantime.

LEILA

It's 3pm. Don't ya have work to do?

EZRA

Marketing can wait as I take you on a long-awaited first date.

LEILA

I hate rhymes. And I just got out of a long-term relationship, so--

EZRA

So you're single! No issues!

Leila holds up her arms, showcasing her bandages.

LEILA

And I just got out of the hospital for slitting my wrists.

EZRA

That's perfect! I love crazy girls!

Ezra caresses Leila's wrists. Leila's pissed.

LEILA

EZRA, LEAVE ME THE FUCK ALONE!
THERE'S NO CHANCE IN HELL THAT I'D
FUCK YOUR NASTY ASS, LET ALONE GO
ON A GODDAMN DATE WITH YOU!

She tugs away from him, and trips backwards, knocking over file cabinets. The cabinets fall over and land on a NURSE. It's pure pandemonium.

Everyone turns to stare at Leila, mouths agape. She sputters, trying to excuse herself, and sees...

Her mom and dad, BABAK (57, shy librarian energy) glaring at her with the ire of a thousand pissed parents.

LEILA (CONT'D)

In my defense, I didn't even want to be here in the first place.

INT. LEILA'S BEDROOM - NIGHT

Photos of young, dorky Leila and friends. Unopened SAT Prep books. Tacky Urban Outfitters decor. Leila scrambles around, looking for something...

MONTAGE --

- Leila flips her mattress over, finding loose change and a starter vibrator from Spencer's. Ugh, not it!

- Leila digs through her closet, finding an old box of Hostess Ho Hos. She sniffs it, then eats one. ...*Ew, girl.*

- Leila opens the Shahnameh, a massive Persian fable book. The pages have been carved out, hiding a lighter and a teeny-tiny joint. DING DING DING! Leila's eyes light up.

She scampers to the window, opens it, and desperately smokes the joint. Megan thee Stallion's "Hood Rat Shit" plays as Leila takes a deep inhale.

As she exhales, barely any smoke comes out. Leila looks at the joint -- all filter, no flower. The music abruptly ends.

LEILA

Fuck.

Grumpy, Leila thinks. She pulls out her phone, scrolling through her contacts. She lands on "Izzy Weed" and calls.

IZZY (V.O.)

Hello?

LEILA

Hey Izzy! It's, uh, Leila, from high school. Dunno if you remember--

INT. IZZY'S KITCHEN - SAME

IZZY (25, chipper & kind airhead) pulls a large family-sized dish of Hamburger Helper out of the oven.

IZZY

Leila Shirazi! Of course I remember you! We flunked French together!

INTERCUT CONVERSATION:

LEILA

Yep yep, c'est moi!

Izzy digs into the massive casserole by herself, scarfing huge forkfuls down. It's disgusting.

IZZY

How are you doing?! Gosh, it's so exciting to hear from you! Are you in town visiting your parents?

LEILA

Sort of! I'm staying with them for a bit while...my apartment gets fumigated. Gotta love rats!

IZZY

(mouth full)

So fun! Must be nice catching up with them!

LEILA

It's not! That's, uh, actually why I'm calling. I was wondering if...if you were still dealing?

IZZY

What'd you say? Sorry, I was chewing too loud, couldn't hear ya!

LEILA

Can I buy weed from you?!

Izzy pauses her gorging feast.

IZZY

Uh. You know I'm a cop now, right?

LEILA

What?

(beat)

Um, yeah! Of course, totally, I was just playing, buddy. Ha! Ha!

IZZY

(laughing)

Oh, yes! Forgot you were so funny! Well, if you're in town, we should get dinner soon and catch up!

LEILA

I'm not in town. Maybe next time!

IZZY

But you just said you were staying with your parents?

Leila hits herself in the head, pissed at her ineptitude.

LEILA

I guess we can do it tomorrow.

INT. MEREDITH'S OFFICE - WAITING ROOM - DAY

A dorky kids-themed waiting room. Wearing a neon green helmet and sitting next to a beat up bike, Leila reads a Highlights magazine. Across from her is a SNIFFLY KID (8), also waiting.

The office door opens and a CHUNKY KID (12) exits, toting two Nerf water guns. Behind him is MEREDITH (50s, spacey weirdo Goop customer) waving to Leila. Leila gets up and wheels her bike in to enter...

INT. MEREDITH'S OFFICE - CONTINUOUS

An average therapist's office, except everything is SOAKED. Leila plops down on a chair and double-takes at its dampness.

MEREDITH

Sorry about that, my last client's trying mindfulness while playing with water guns to combat his OCD. But how are you?! You're such a big girl now!

Leila looks down at her stomach, fretting.

LEILA

I'm big?

MEREDITH

So why are you here? Your mother gave me the gist, but from your point of view?

Leila limply raises her arms, gesturing to the bandages.

LEILA

I dunno. Maybe this?

MEREDITH

Oh, I forgot you were one of those. Your mom mentioned something about a breakup. Did you and Ralph finally end things?

LEILA

Ralph?? Yeah, in seventh grade when he jerked off in Algebra!

MEREDITH

Hey! People your age shouldn't be talking like that!

LEILA

People in their mid-20s??

MEREDITH

If not Todd, then who? What happened? Share with Meredith.
(deadly serious)
Sharing is caring.

LEILA

Okay, look, I don't think this is a great fit, me and you. So I'm just gonna go--

MEREDITH

Your mom said it's been a month since he broke up with you. Why do it now?

Leila stops trying to leave.

LEILA

I couldn't take it anymore.

MEREDITH

And now you're at home, being taken care of by your parents.

LEILA

Yeah. I'm thankful and all, but it's so infantilizing being back in their house, driven around, bossed around, and all that.

MEREDITH

You need to regain your own power!

LEILA

(genuine agreement)
Yeah, you're right. For once.

MEREDITH

Set a goal to accomplish! Something you can be in total control over!

LEILA

Maybe that's not a bad idea.

INT. LEILA'S HOUSE - KITCHEN - NIGHT

Moderately nice, but terribly decorated. Leila and her parents sit eating rice and stew. Babak watches Shark Tank clips on his phone instead of engaging with the family.

PARISA
You smell terrible.

LEILA
I had to bike to Meredith's.

PARISA
How did it go? And did you see if Uno's is doing half off blowouts?

LEILA
They're not. It went fine actually. She says I should "set a goal to accomplish" while I'm here.

PARISA
That's great! Your goal can be to get into medical school!

LEILA
For the millionth time, I'm not going to med school.

PARISA
Just think about it. What other goal could you even have?

LEILA
Well, I dunno. I was thinking maybe I could do something based on that talk I had with God.

PARISA
Oh, not with this again.

LEILA
I could do a TedTalk! Write a book!

PARISA
That's stupid. Read this instead.

Parisa pulls out an MCAT study book, almost from thin air, and hands it to Leila.

BABAK
(sarcastic, while not looking up)
You could start a religion.

Leila's eyes light up as she turns to her father.

LEILA
(excited)
A religion.

PARISA
Don't fill her head with shit.

BABAK
It is a joke.

LEILA
Baba jaan, you're totally right!

What? BABAK What? PARISA

LEILA
Since I'm a prophet, I like, HAVE
to start a religion!

PARISA
Stupid! What idiot would think to
do such a thing! Don't waste your
time!

LEILA
(already running off)
Thanks for the support!

INT. LEILA'S BEDROOM - DAY

Leila ecstatically clicks away at her stickers-clad MacBook. On her desktop, we see a flyer with the design value of a third grader's experimentation in Microsoft Paint.

FREE SERMON! START UP RELIGION!

~ PATTERSON PARK THIS SATURDAY ~

☠ NO UGGOS ALLOWED ☠

She's so proud of herself.

INT. LIBRARY - DAY

A cluttered bulletin board. Leila pushpins her flyer on top of the others. She smiles. A TEEN (16) comes up to the board.

She expectantly watches the teen peruse the flyers. The teen stares at hers, then excitedly grabs a monster truck event flyer. Scorned, Leila rips up the teen's flyer.

INT. TOWSON MALL - FOOD COURT - DAY

Flyers are being shoved at MALL PEOPLE. Leila smiles at them, almost pained. People are avoiding her gaze.

A CHICK-FIL-A EMPLOYEE shoos her away. She pockets some Chick-fil-a sauce packets while running off.

INT. CAR - DAY

A BUSINESS MAN is sitting at a red light. A hand SLAPS on his windshield. Terrified, he looks to his side window and sees Leila, shoving a flyer in through the crack in the window.

He frantically closes the window, catching Leila's fingers. She screams in pain.

EXT. BALTIMORE TEA AND COFFEE SHOP - DAY

With bandaged fingers, Leila checks her phone, looking at the Facebook event for her sermon. 2 RSVPs yes, 5 maybes, and 100+ nos. She snarls at the phone.

She braces herself to enter the café, clearly unhappy.

INT. BALTIMORE TEA AND COFFEE SHOP - CONTINUOUS

A moderately cozy café. In the corner sits Ezra, clicking away at a typewriter and drinking a deconstructed latte. Leila approaches him, swallowing her pride and disgust.

LEILA

Ezra, what a surprising unplanned run in! What are ya up to?

EZRA

I was writing the weekly newsletter for the followers of my Garfield blog, but now, I'm admiring the fair maiden before me.

Leila fights back an eye roll as she sits at his table.

LEILA

So, I dunno if my parents told you what I've been up to.

EZRA
Your parents never talk about you.

LEILA
Oh... Really?
(beat)
Uh, well, I'm actually starting my
own religion.

EZRA
That's fantastic!

Leila's a bit taken aback at his enthusiasm. Her religion's first positive response.

LEILA
You really think so?

EZRA
Of course! You're behind it!

LEILA
You might be the only one who
thinks that. My first sermon's
tomorrow and I don't know how to
get people to come.

Ezra shakes his head in disgust, his ugly newsboy cap bobbling with him.

EZRA
This is why our generation is the
worst. Lack of engagement with the
things that matter. If only
Eisenhower were still alive...

LEILA
Yeah. I was thinking since you're a
marketing guru, could you, perhaps,
do some pro bono work for me? Help
spread the good word?

Leila hands him a flyer. He groans at the sight.

EZRA
It's worse than *Cats*.

LEILA
I know. Fix it?

EZRA
Of course. If you finally let me
take you out.

Leila deflates, annoyed at the idea of having to owe him.

LEILA

Well, I so would, but uh, one of the main tenets of Leilaism is that we're unable to go on dates with non-Leilaists.

EZRA

I'll be your first convert.

LEILA

We're not taking new members.

EZRA

Then what's the sermon for?

Leila struggles to come up with a reply. Her phone chirps with a notification: THERAPY TIME. She starts to leave.

LEILA

Fine. But we're going out after the sermon, not before.

INT. MEREDITH'S OFFICE - DAY

Animated and bright-eyed, Leila babbles from her seat.

LEILA

It's so weird, but like, now that I have something to do, I've felt a lot better. I'm thinking about what I need to do, instead of thinking about Jake and--

HONK HONK! Leila glares at Meredith, who we now see is dressed in a full clown outfit.

MEREDITH

Sorry. Continue.

LEILA

Why are you even wearing that?!

MEREDITH

Experimental treatment, hon. Don't worry about it. Unless you're scared of clowns. Wait, did you tell me what your goal was?

LEILA

I'm starting a religion!

Meredith grimaces and honks a sad horn.

MEREDITH

When I said accomplish something, I thought you would do a puzzle or finally beat Super Mario 64.

LEILA

I beat that last year. What's your problem, shouldn't you be happy that I'm listening to you and it's actually helping me for once?

MEREDITH

Mmmmmm...a religion? Kind of a lot, don't you think?

LEILA

I spoke to God. Starting a religion's the natural next step.

MEREDITH

Hon, I speak to God every time my gal pals and I crack open a bottle of Jim Beam, but you don't see me toting around a new religion.

LEILA

They said the same thing about Doritos Locos tacos at Taco Bell and now it's a menu staple.

MEREDITH

How are you feeling about the break up situation? Have you started--

LEILA

I'm over it. Let's talk about the religion some more.

MEREDITH

You need to talk about the breakup at some point. It's time to grieve the loss and move on. You never even told me why you two broke up. What happened there?

LEILA

I can't--we're not doing this anymore. I'm done.

Leila gets up and bolts out. Meredith follows behind, her shoes goofily squeaking as she does.

INT. MEREDITH'S OFFICE - WAITING ROOM - CONTINUOUS

Parisa sits, shopping on The RealReal on her phone. As Leila rushes out of Meredith's room, Parisa looks up at her.

PARISA

Hey, thought you would need a ride.
(as Leila runs past her)
Where are you going?!

Leila flies out the door to the parking lot. Meredith hops out, standing beside a bewildered Parisa.

PARISA (CONT'D)

What the hell's going on?

MEREDITH

We're still working through things.

PARISA

I'm worried about her, she's not getting better. Now she's obsessed with this religion of hers?...Do you think she would benefit from inpatient treatment?

MEREDITH

No, she's fine. She'll get bored and move on. If you want to take her anywhere, take her to Disney! It worked on my other patient when he was obsessed with burp-speaking.

INT. PAPERMOON DINER - NIGHT

Kitschy beyond belief, with cheap trinkets on the walls. In a corner booth sits Leila and Izzy, feasting on a cocktail and a massive stack of pancakes, respectively.

The air between them is uncomfortable. Leila watches Izzy scarf down her food like she's Oliver Twist finally getting that second helping.

LEILA

You may not be a stoner anymore,
but you've still got the appetite.

IZZY

Working on the force uses up a lot of calories! And eating's a passion of mine!

LEILA

Can I ask about that?

IZZY

I practice eating large quantities
as quickly as I can--

LEILA

No, about the cop stuff. Why'd you
do it? Back in the day, you were so
set on not following in your
family's footsteps.

Izzy's chipper demeanor falters, and she shrugs.

IZZY

Y'know, things happen.

LEILA

But you were all ACAB and protest-y
and shit! Did your dad finally wear
you down or...?

IZZY

I pivoted. We didn't all end up at
Ivy Leagues.

LEILA

Sorry, I didn't mean to--

IZZY

(peppy again)

No, I'm sorry! I didn't mean to
snap at you like that. That wasn't
very Godly of me.

LEILA

Oh cool, you're religious?

IZZY

Yes! Jesus saved my life, helped me
get on the right path. I owe him
everything. Are you of faith?

LEILA

Yeah, recently got into it!

IZZY

That's amazing, Leila! What church
do you belong to?

LEILA

Actually, uh, the Church of Leila.
I'm forming my own religion.

Leila slides one of her flyers across the table. Izzy's eyes narrow and she glares holes into Leila's face.

IZZY

Are you serious? That's incredibly blasphemous and inappropriate.

LEILA

I'm actually having my first sermon tomorrow. It's about reclaiming one's individuality and identity. Sounds like you might need to come.

Shocked and pissed at Leila's implication, Izzy stands up, ready to leave. She struggles for a come back to Leila, then grabs her plate of pancakes and storms out.

LEILA (CONT'D)

Wait! I need a ride home!!!

EXT. PATTERSON PARK - DAY

On a random dirt path, Leila smiles and waves at her VERY SPARSE CROWD, comprised of only complete crazies.

WASPS walking their dogs gawk as they pass by, nervously whispering to each other and pointing.

LEILA

Hello, welcome to the first ever sermon for The Church of Leila! Glad you could all come! I am Leila, I'll be your prophet today! ...Jeez, I sound like a waitress.

The audience makes a collective gurgling noise.

LEILA (CONT'D)

Today, we're gonna be talking about owning it, and by it, I mean you. Like all those stupid Pinterest posts say, "there's only one you out there, so be you!" or whatever. You know what I mean!

The audience kind of nods yes. Leila grins, encouraged.

LEILA (CONT'D)

It's easy to hate yourself, especially when you keep making mistakes and everything in your life is falling apart, but you can't let depression take you over.

AUDIENCE MEMBER 1
Hallelujah!

Leila's encouraged, and more revved up.

LEILA
You have to find what makes you
you, and just like, dive right into
it! Own it! Be--

AUDIENCE MEMBER 2
Shit, the fuckin' cops coming.

A third of the audience quickly vanishes. Leila squints to see a COP approaching from a few yards away.

LEILA
Hey, what gives?

COP (O.C.)
Got some unlawful assembly
complaints. Do you have a permit?

As the cop comes closer, Leila slowly realizes it's Izzy. Izzy freezes as she also discovers who she's yelling at.

LEILA
Izzy, you made it after all!

IZZY
Answer me. Permit: yes or no?

LEILA
I was just about to get to a part
you need to hear.
(to whole crowd)
We need to own who we are, because
when we don't, we allow others to
make a home in our minds and
bodies, taking them from us. May it
be an ex-boyfriend...
(to Izzy)
...or a demanding dad--

Izzy's boiling mad. She angrily waves her baton at the crowd.

IZZY
That's enough, meeting over.

The crowd slowly begins dispersing.

LEILA
Pretty fucked up of you, dude.

IZZY
I'm doing my job.

LEILA
So am I! You're just pissed that I
called you out for selling out.

Izzy stammers, furious and desperate for a comeback, then she
grabs her handcuffs and slams them on Leila's wrists.

IZZY
You're under arrest.

LEILA
What the fuck, what for?!

Izzy starts dragging Leila away by the cuffs. The lingering
audience begins booing Izzy.

AUDIENCE MEMBER 1
The girl! The girl! Don't touch!

The rest of the audience gets fueled, angrily waving their
fists at Izzy. She throws Leila in the back of her cop car.

INT. COUNTY JAIL - DAY

An oaky, dirty office. A bored OFFICER (50s) pushes a stack
of release paperwork towards Parisa. Parisa begins to sign,
while scarily quiet. Beside her, Leila fidgets.

LEILA
(trying to joke)
Feels like we've done this before.

Parisa, uncharacteristically, does not react.

LEILA (CONT'D)
C'mon, just get mad at me, tell me
I'm stupid, and we'll move on.

PARISA
I am not going to pretend this is
normal behavior, Leila.

Unseen to Leila and Parisa, from her desk, Izzy listens in.

LEILA
Look, I'm sorry. I know I should
have looked into getting a permit
or whatever but--

PARISA

Why can't you be more like Jila's son, Ashkan?

LEILA

What, a fucking loser?

PARISA

A nice, normal accountant! Who listens to his mother!

LEILA

I'd rather kill myself.

PARISA

Again with the suicide! You know, ever since you came home, you've been acting really crazy. Starting a religion??

LEILA

This is my calling! I have to do this, you wouldn't understand. Your calling's whatever sale Neiman Marcus is currently having.

PARISA

(tearing up)

I don't know what to do anymore. You need help, but I don't think I can give it to you, azizam.

Izzy's wrought with guilt and empathy.

INT. MEREDITH'S OFFICE - AFTERNOON

The mood is somber between Meredith and Leila.

MEREDITH

I've never had a patient get arrested before! Detention, yes, but actual jail? New ground for me!

Leila crosses her arms, unwilling to play ball.

MEREDITH (CONT'D)

Well if you won't talk to me, speak to my associate.

Meredith pulls out a puppet that looks like Elmo's deranged cousin. Leila hides childhood giddy at the sight.

MEREDITH (CONT'D)

(as the puppet)

Tell Señor Snarf about how you feel after your arrest.

LEILA

You ever had good dick before, Señor Snarf?

MEREDITH

Please take this seriously.

LEILA

I am! Tell him to answer me!

SEÑOR SNARF

I am 13 in puppet years, so no.

LEILA

If you're 13, how are you qualified to be a therapy puppet?

SEÑOR SNARF

I'm the Doogie Howser of puppets. Don't question me. Are you unhappy because you got arrested?

LEILA

Actually, not really? It's just--I dunno, it's stupid.

SEÑOR SNARF

Nothing is stupid in Snarftopia.

Leila takes a moment to compose herself.

LEILA

I know everyone thinks it's dumb, but giving that sermon was the first time I've felt happy since the breakup. Going from that to how my mom reacted? Fucking whiplash.

SEÑOR SNARF

She yelled at you?

LEILA

Worse. She cried. I've never seen her cry, except like, during Princess Di docs. And she was like, genuinely worried about me.

SEÑOR SNARF

What does she think?

LEILA

She thinks I'm crazy. That I need help. It feels like everyone thinks that about me.

SEÑOR SNARF

What do *you* think?

For the first time, Leila truly cracks, tears welling up.

LEILA

I don't know.

EXT. MEREDITH'S OFFICE - AFTERNOON

Leila walks out, still sniffly and teary. She pulls out her phone and calls someone. She pulls herself together to say:

LEILA

Do you wanna hang out right now?

INT. CRAB RESTAURANT - NIGHT

Boisterous and full of jolly FAMILIES. Tables are covered in brown paper and crabs get smashed with wooden mallets.

At an inconveniently center-of-the-room table sits Leila, running on low battery and barely in her body.

EZRA (O.C.)

But the real trick to profiting off NFTs is to buy high and--hey! Are you listening?!

Leila's eyes focus on Ezra across from her, covered in Old Bay and crab guts.

LEILA

What? Yeah, uh, I am.

EZRA

What was I teaching you about then?

LEILA

Uhh, why my feeble girl brain can't understand Tarantino's brilliance?

Like a petulant child, Ezra loudly huffs.

EZRA

Why did you even invite me out if you weren't going to listen to what I had to say? That's what men are supposed to do, you can't do that!

LEILA

I owed you a date. And uh, I want to ask you something. Need to.

EZRA

(smirking)

The turtleneck is on the sausage. Medical reasons but--

LEILA

No. Please. Not that. It's just, I kinda feel like you can give me an objective answer.

EZRA

I want to fuck you, so no, I can't.

LEILA

I won't fuck you if you don't.

EZRA

Hmm. Fine. Shoot.

LEILA

What do you think of my religion?

Ezra sucks the meat out of a claw as he thinks of his words.

EZRA

Honestly?

LEILA

Honestly.

EZRA

It's...pretty fucking stupid.
(off Leila's shocked face)
I mean come on! You attempt suicide, then talk to God?! Among Jesus and Mohammad is a depressed 20something burnout for a prophet?

LEILA

Well, who did I talk to then?!

EZRA

No one! You're crazy! But that's why you turn me on!

Leila slaps the table with her hands, smashing crabs with her brute anger. The other diners turn and stare.

LEILA
Don't call me crazy.

Leila looks around, feeling the eyes on her. The shame begins to sink in and she rushes out of the restaurant.

EZRA
 (calling after her)
 Wait! Don't go! You're supposed to
 fuck me now!

EXT. ROAD - NIGHT

Leila's walking home, disheveled and tearing up. A car drives by with a family inside.

CAR CHILD
 Look! It's the crazy lady from the
 crab shack!

The family points and laughs at Leila as they drive past.

Leila stops and sits down on the pavement. Slowly, she bursts into full blown sobs, finally accepting that they could be right: she might be crazy.

INT. LEILA'S ROOM - NIGHT

In a daze, Leila throws clothes in an old duffle bag. On her bed, her laptop is open on: SHEPPARD PRATT PSYCHIATRIC HOSPITAL SELF-ADMISSION.

She throws the TV on for noise while she packs. Michael Bay's *Transformers* comes on.

At first, Leila continues packing, barely looking at the screen. Suddenly, she spots something on the screen and stares at it, almost in a trance.

It's Megan Fox. Leila gasps, and drops to her knees.

LEILA
 God. It's really you.

The movie continues to play.

LEILA (CONT'D)

I've been trying to spread your word and start my religion, but I don't think I can.

Leila tears up and presses her face against the TV.

LEILA (CONT'D)

Am I crazy? Everyone's been telling me I'm fucking nuts since I got home, and I'm starting to believe them, and I really think I need some fucking help, either from a psych or medication or from you. Please. I need a sign.

Megan Fox looks directly at Leila through the screen. They lock eyes in INTENSE eye contact...and Megan Fox winks. Leila stares at her, dazed and processing.

TAP. TAP. TAP. Leila notices pebbles hitting her window. She peeks out, and sees Izzy waving up from the backyard! Leila opens the window and climbs onto her tree to come down...

EXT. LEILA'S BACKYARD - CONTINUOUS

Ungraceful and out of shape as she tries to descend, Leila falls out of the tree and lands on her face at Izzy's feet.

IZZY

Oh my word, are you okay?!

Groaning in pain, Leila rolls over and gets up, despite her developing bleeding cuts.

LEILA

I used to do that all the time. Didn't remember how hard it was.

IZZY

I had the same realization last month with cartwheels.

They share a smile, bonding over their 25-going-on-50 bodies.

IZZY (CONT'D)

I wanted to come and apologize for what I did at the park. I *really* overreacted. I guess it was because I knew you were right about me.

LEILA

It's okay. I mean it's not like I was innocent there. But uh, y'know, it's okay now. I'm heading to the crazy house, gonna fix myself for good, I guess.

IZZY

What? But why? You're okay.

LEILA

I'm not. I need them to fry my brain into being good. Throw some magnets on me, electroshock, whatever the fuck. Turn me into a vegetable, at least then I can't attempt suicide anymore.

Izzy puts 2 + 2 together. Sympathetic, she pats Leila's arm.

IZZY

I'm so sorry. You don't need to tell me what happened--

LEILA

My boyfriend broke up with me. He was perfect and I ruined him.

IZZY

Aw, I'm sure that's not true.

LEILA

It is. I cheated on him.

IZZY

Oh.

LEILA

Yeah. And I didn't even like the other guy. I just... did it to do it, I guess. I don't really know.

(laughing)

Why am I even surprised! I ruin everything! I couldn't even give a fucking sermon to crackheads!

IZZY

Your sermon was life-changing!

LEILA

Okay, no need to be a sarcastic bitch.

IZZY

I'm serious! It changed mine!

LEILA

What, you get a free donut for arresting an innocent person?

IZZY

I quit my job.

LEILA

Really? Wait, why?

IZZY

You were right. I only did it to make my family happy. I want to do something that makes me happy. Follow my true passion.

LEILA

Whoa, big of you, dude. What's your true passion then?

IZZY

Competitive eating.

Leila stifles a laugh.

IZZY (CONT'D)

No woman has ever cracked the top three in the MLE's Eater Rankings. But I want to. I'm going to.

LEILA

I'm really happy for you. And it means a lot for you to tell me that I sort of helped you or whatever.

IZZY

Not whatever! My courage is all thanks to you!

Izzy excitedly smacks Leila on the arm.

IZZY (CONT'D)

When I'm not training, I can help out with your church!

(beat)

That is...if you're still doing it.

LEILA

I don't know if I should. I asked God for a sign on what to do.

IZZY
And what happened?

Leila thinks, coming to a slow realization.

LEILA
You appeared.

IZZY
Appeared? I drove here...

LEILA
(getting excited)
Yeah but, you were here, telling me
that my religion's actually helping
people and that I'm totally awesome
and not crazy at all!

Leila grabs Izzy's face in her hands and squishes her cheeks.

LEILA (CONT'D)
You're my sign. My beautiful God-
given sign.

IZZY
Okay, I wouldn't go that far...

LEILA
I'm not going to inpatient. I'm
doing my fucking religion.

INT. LEILA'S ROOM - DAY

INSTAGRAM LIVE VIEW -- @thechurchofleila

Bubblier than we've ever seen her, Leila talks directly to
camera and her 6 IG Live viewers.

LEILA
What's up Leilaists! It's ya girl,
Leila. Just wanted to let you guys
know that I'm already working on my
next sermon! Super excited to share
it with everyone -- after I get the
proper permitting this time, of
course.

@postmatestodd pops up in the chat: "OMG. Total convert."

LEILA (CONT'D)
And before I go. I appreciate the
petition that went around after my
arrest.

(MORE)

LEILA (CONT'D)

Your support warms my heart. But no
need to fear for me. Nothing can
stop me and my teachings anymore.

END OF PILOT