

GUILTY PARTY

EPISODE #101

"Pilot"

Written By

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OVER BLACK

FADE IN:

PRE-LAP: TSSSSSSSSSS-- the sound of searing heat

CHYRON: EAST COLFAX DISTRICT, DENVER, APRIL 27 7:52pm

INT. KITCHEN - NIGHT

An egg cracks into a hot pan.

A SKINNY WHITE GUY, WALLACE PLIMPTON (25), has his back to camera as he hums and cooks. A distinctive **MUSTARD-YELLOW FLORAL WALLPAPER** from the 1970s covers the wall behind him. A dog wanders underfoot.

We watch Wallace. He does not know he's being watched.

WALLACE
(humming to Eminem)
"Wha', my name is / Who, my name is
/ Wha', my name is / Slim Wall-ace!"

He takes an old melted spatula and flips the egg like a pro. TSSSSSSSS-- the other side sizzles.

A sound, a footstep maybe, catches Wallace's ear. But before he can turn around a gun barrel is shoved against the back of his head. (NOTE: WE DO NOT SEE THE PERSON WHO HOLDS THE GUN. WE DO NOT EVEN SEE THEIR HAND.) Wallace feels the steel on his cranium and hisses:

WALLACE (CONT'D)
You better pull the trigger, cause
I'm about to *fucking* kill you--

There's a sharp BARK and deafening POP.

A bullet rips through Wallace's skull. He falls forwards, onto the hot pan of eggs. TSSSSSSSS. His lifeless face sears.

Blood runs down the **MUSTARD YELLOW FLORAL WALLPAPER** to the stained floor.

PRE-LAP: APPLAUSE! CHEERS! The sound of praise and adulation

CHYRON: THE CRAWFORD HOTEL, DENVER, APRIL 27, 7:52pm

INT. HOTEL BANQUET HALL - NIGHT

CLOSE ON: BETH BAKER (37), a spotlight illuminating her flush, happy face. She clutches a glass award in her hands and leans into a microphone.

BETH

Thank you. Thank you so much. Ahh. Wow. This is surreal. First of all, I'd like to say that this award is a testament to the unrelenting, unwavering journalistic spirit of all of my colleagues and comrades at the Post. To all of you brave souls this is for you--

Beth claps at the crowd, rewarding them for their work. As flashbulbs go off, faces in the crowd are illuminated. Colleagues stare up at Beth. Most of them smile back warmly, happy for her win. But one BLONDE WOMAN (think Nicole Kidman in *To Die For*) claps back ruefully.

BETH (CONT'D)

And of course I have to thank my wonderful husband, Marco. I wouldn't be up here without you, you are my rock, my main squeeze, and you deserve a trophy of your own for dealing with me every morning *before* I've had my coffee.
(laughter from crowd)
Love you--

We see MARCO RAMIREZ (38), smiling with pride. She tosses him an air-kiss. He catches it.

BETH (CONT'D)

And then there's Ravi Mehiri--

We see RAVI MEHIRI (58, South Asian, editor-in-chief vibes). The crowd cheers for him.

BETH (CONT'D)

Yeah, that's right, show him love. Ravi, you've never stopped pushing me, even when I didn't want you to--
(crowd chuckles)
--but thank god you did. You wouldn't let me stop until I got to the truth. Well, here I am!

Ravi returns the praise with a restrained smile and nod.

BETH (CONT'D)

But there's one person who's responsible for all this. For helping me get here. For making me who I am. You know her as Susan Baker...

The crowd begins to murmur and cheer, a wave of excited energy coursing through them. THE SPOTLIGHT ANGLES ON: SUSAN BAKER (early 70s, sophisticated, regal; clearly someone of note). Susan motions shoo'ing the spotlight away from her.

BETH (CONT'D)

...thank you, mom.

A cheer goes up. Beth holds her trophy aloft. She's attained dizzying heights!

INT. HOTEL BANQUET HALL - SECONDS LATER

Beth walks off stage to thunderous applause, her speech a success, her moment in the sun warm and blissful. Marco gives her a celebratory kiss, Beth reaches out to her mom.

BETH

Mom! How was it? Did I sound stupid?

SUSAN

I have notes--
(off Beth's pained look)
Darling, I'm joking! Don't let success make you humorless. You were sensational!

Beth beams. Ravi appears at Beth's side, clutching Beth by the elbow. He looks distressed.

BETH

Hey!

Beth tries to hug him, but Ravi holds her at bay.

RAVI

Come with me--

BETH

But wait-- where are we--?

Ravi forcefully steers Beth through a door and into a small, dimly lit room. Susan and Marco trail behind.

INT. HOTEL BANQUET HALL - SIDE ROOM - CONTINUOUS

BETH
What's going on?

RAVI
Beth, this is Jeannette Paulson,
she's our in-house attorney--

BETH
What's happening? Ravi, what is
this?

RAVI
I'm sorry, Beth.

Beth turns and locks eyes with her mother, who stands in the doorway. Susan shifts her gaze, sees someone she recognizes, and wanders off to give this person a kiss-kiss greeting.

JEANNETTE
Ms. Baker, have a seat. We need to
talk...

As Beth watches her mother go, she grips her award even tighter and sinks into a chair.

TITLES: GUILTY PARTY

CHYRON: THREE YEARS LATER

INT. BETH & MARCO'S HOUSE - BEDROOM/BATHROOM - NIGHT

The room is dark. Red numbers of an alarm clock glow as the time changes from 5:14 to 5:15. The clock shrieks.

MARCO
Fuuuuuuuck you.

MARCO, now 41 (a sweet nature-boy with BDE), reaches over and slaps the alarm off. Silence.

Like a bear just out of hibernation Marco hurls himself out of bed and lumbers toward the bathroom. He flicks on the bathroom light which splashes a bright yellow triangle on BETH (now 40). Beth ducks her head under the covers.

We stay on Beth, but from the bathroom we hear Marco continue his loud morning routine. Water runs. A strange burping hiccup. Some lotion bottles get knocked over. Lotion bottles get rearranged. Toilet seat flips up.

Marco pees. As he pees, he farts.

MARCO (O.S.) (CONT'D)

Sorry babe!

He farts again.

In a series of quick cuts:

- Marco brushes his teeth.
- Marco puts on his National Park Ranger uniform.
- Marco leans over to kiss Beth goodbye. Her eyes are closed.

MARCO (CONT'D)

Faker.

(beat)

My farts definitely woke you up.

Beth laughs. He kisses her. She kisses him back.

BETH

When will you be home?

MARCO

It's another double. Not till late.

BETH

You need a new job.

MARCO

You need to be nicer. Love you.

BETH

Love you too.

Beth rolls over and tries to go back to sleep. Beat.

BETH (CONT'D)

Nope.

She throws the covers off and gets up.

INT. BETH & MARCO'S HOUSE - KITCHEN - DAY

A showered Beth putters in the kitchen, hot mug of coffee in hand. As she putters, she walks underneath a huge framed black and white photograph: Susan Baker circa 1985 sits at one end of a farmhouse table staring at Baby Beth who sits at the other end. (NOTE: We will return to this image again.)

Something catches Beth's eye from the corner of the room.

BETH

Aw shit.

ANGLE ON: A goldfish floating belly up in a little bowl.

BETH (CONT'D)

I'm sorry, Norma...

Beth reaches a fish net into the bowl. As she holds the dead fish, a lightbulb clicks on in her brain.

INT. BETH'S CAR / EXT. CITY STREETS - DAY

Dawn breaks. A bright, cold, winter city morning. Beth sips coffee from her KEEP CUP, a stack of real paper-and-ink newspapers ride shotgun. She stops at a red light. To her right she notices a bleak tent city. Many homeless residents, fending off the cold. Beth makes eye contact with a woman.

She rolls the passenger side window down and beckons the woman over.

BETH

Hi! Excuse me! I don't have any cash on me, but take this.

Beth hands over her coffee and cup. The woman accepts it, appreciative.

EXT. THE DENVER POST - SECURITY GATE - DAY

Beth's car pulls up to the security gate at the Denver Post. Beth swipes her badge under the badge-reader. Nothing. She tries again. Nothing. She smiles up at the SECURITY GUARD.

BETH

Heyyy, I don't know what's wrong with this stupid thing.

(then)

You're new right? I'm Beth. Beth Baker.

She flashes him her badge and a smile.

SECURITY GUARD

I'll call you up--

He picks up a phone, but before he can dial:

BETH

You calling Linda?

He looks at her. Yes, he's clearly calling Linda.

BETH (CONT'D)
She's not in till 6:30. You and I
are the only two early birds.

Beth flashes another winning smile. The guard thinks, then pushes a button and lifts the gate. Beth's car scoots in.

INT. THE DENVER POST - OUTSIDE THE PRINT ROOM - MOMENTS LATER

Beth's heels click down the shiny, empty halls of the city's last remaining print newspaper. Beth passes the printing-press. Large windows let us look in on the huge, ancient machinery that prints the paper every day. Beth gazes at it.

The hallowed history of her noble profession is undeniable.

INT. THE DENVER POST - NEWSROOM BULLPEN - MOMENTS LATER

The carpeted bullpen. The desks are all empty. The hive quiet. For now. DING! An elevator stops. Beth gets off. She looks around. Not a soul in sight. She takes a happy inhale/exhale. Her gaze lands on a large office at the opposite end of the floor. She marches toward it.

Once there she reaches above the doorframe and grabs a spare key. Only then do we see the nameplate on the office door: RAVI MEHIRI, EDITOR-IN-CHIEF.

INT. THE DENVER POST - RAVI'S OFFICE - CONTINUOUS

Beth locks the door behind her and shuts the office blinds. She opens her purse and pulls out rubber gloves, a fish net, and a ziploc bag.

ANGLE ON: A BEAUTIFUL AQUARIUM

Beth's face appears through the glass. She eyes a goldfish. But then an even bigger, prettier RED SWORDTAIL FISH enters frame. *

BETH
Ah. You're his prize piggy.

She plunges the fish net into the water.

INT. THE DENVER POST - LOBBY - MOMENTS LATER

A confident Beth struts through the lobby, clutching her large purse under her arm. Up ahead, she clocks the Security Guard from the exterior gate talking to a WOMAN. The Woman looks distressed, angry, flapping her arms about.

Beth quickens her pace and takes a wide arc to avoid the pair. But the woman, LINDA, sees Beth:

LINDA

Beth!

Beth walks faster, pretending not to hear.

LINDA (CONT'D)

Beth, stop! You can't keep doing this!

Beth begins to sprint toward the doors.

LINDA (CONT'D)

Stop her! Get her purse!

A frantic full-speed chase. Beth narrowly escapes.

INT. THE BITE - LOBBY - DAY

Beth calmly walks through the Bite's lobby. The surroundings are a stark contrast to the Post. The office is small and colorful, the walls covered in celebrity posters, affirmations, astrological charts, etc. A cluster of people herd into a conference room. Beth joins them.

INT. THE BITE - CONFERENCE ROOM - CONTINUOUS

FIONA (early 30s, looks smart and is smart) whispers to Beth.

FIONA

Where were you?

BETH

I'm not late--

Fiona rolls her eyes as they filter in and take seats.

Welcome to **The Bite**, a Denver-based online pop-culture/news site and a BuzzFeed knock-off. Beth is at least 10 years older than everyone in the room.

AMBER (23, looks young, fetus young) runs the meeting.

AMBER

Good *mo-oorning*. Need something for the front page tomorrow, Pierre?

PIERRE

I heard Lady Gaga might run for Congress.

BETH

(sotto, to Fiona)

I like how she calls it a front page as if it's a real paper.

FIONA

And the stories get stupider every day.

Beth laughs. Amber shoots her a look. Beth stifles herself.

AMBER

(to Pierre)

Does she stand a chance?

PIERRE

Who cares?

AMBER

Can we get an interview?

PIERRE

Doubtful, but I could put together something fun, splashy, try to predict what her platform might be.

LULU

B Coop as her veep?

Everyone laughs.

AMBER

Love. Do it. But keep it in the hopper till she announces.

(to the group)

What else? Beth? Anything?

BETH

Okay, so we hold sway over an entire generation. We have a soap box. Let's stand on it. I met a homeless woman today.

Some audible snickers and groans from the group. Beth rises above these school-yard taunts.

BETH (CONT'D)

Every year more and more people in this city, in this country, can't afford a roof over their heads and are forced to move to shelters or even, god help them, to the streets. It's a crisis! But where's the help? The city opens a soup kitchen and calls it a day! I call bullshit on that! And the rest of us should too!

AMBER

Cool. I'll think about it.

BETH

Amber, it's a full-blown epidemic.

PIERRE

No, it's depressing.

Some hushed giggles from the group.

BETH

That's the point.

PIERRE

Not in a good way.

AMBER

Pierre's right, Beth. It's off brand for us.

BETH

So just because it's not candy-coated Lady Gaga fluffy happy fun we don't give a shit?

AMBER

Excuse me, but my uncle is homeless.

BETH

Really?

AMBER

And so are two of my cousins. And another different uncle. So, yeah, you could say I give a shit. But I still have to do my job. And it's just not the kind of story we do.

BETH

But--

AMBER

Beth, as my therapist likes to say,
embrace the "no." Okay?

Beth gives Fiona a look: can you believe this shit? Fiona gives a knowing look in response.

AMBER (CONT'D)

So... we still need a lead story
for tomorrow. Fiona?

FIONA

Okay, this might be a terrible
idea, but it occurred to me it's
the 20th anniversary of Harry
Potter and the Goblet of Fire--

GROUP REACTIONS

Oh my god! / That's the best one! /
Love that book! / Sooooooo good!

FIONA

To celebrate, I thought we could do
a photo essay: Hermione's Hottest
Looks!

AMBER

Love. It.

Fiona beams, proud of herself. Beth's jaw hits the ground -
Fiona, that Judas! Pierre leans over to Beth.

PIERRE

Your bag is leaking.

He gestures to the wet patch growing on her purse.

BETH

Shit shit shit--

Beth picks up her bag and runs out of the room.

INT. THE BITE - BETH & FIONA'S DESKS - LATER

Beth stares at the fish as it swims in a taped-up ziploc bag
that rests on her desk. She looks at Fiona; Fiona sips her
coconut water and happily screen grabs images of Hermione. *

INT. OBGYN OFFICE - DAY

Beth lies on an exam table. She wears the paper gown, her feet in the stirrups. It's a gynecological appointment. A disembodied voice talks to her.

DISEMBODIED VOICE
Haven't seen you in a while--

BETH
Yeah, work keeps me busy.

DISEMBODIED VOICE
Mmm-hmmm. So how's your mom?

BETH
She's good. Same.

DR. OWENS' HEAD emerges from between Beth's legs. A disembodied voice no more. She snaps off her gloves. Beth relaxes, her exam done.

DR. OWENS
God, I love her writing.

BETH
Yeah. She's good.

DR. OWENS
Necessary Acts was... it got me through med school.

BETH
You've told me.

DR. OWENS
Okay, so, here's the deal. The endometriosis is progressing. It's now quite severe. Are you trying to conceive?

BETH
Uh, no. We aren't.

DR. OWENS
Will you want to try?

BETH
I don't think so. The world has enough mouths to feed.

DR. OWENS

Well, that's good. I have this talk with all of my endo patients when they hit 40. The disease being where it's at, coupled with your age... there are some recourses: surgery, aggressive hormone treatment, but most of it isn't effective.

Beth stares at the doctor.

BETH

I'm sorry, what are you saying?

DR. OWENS

You won't have children.
(chipper)
But no harm no foul. Right?

Beth fights a wave of shock. Disbelief. Numbness.

BETH

Right. Yeah.

Dr. Owens stands and pulls a book off a shelf.

DR. OWENS

Look at this. The thirtieth anniversary edition!

Dr. Owens shows Beth a new copy of *Necessary Acts* by Susan Baker. Beth flips the book over and we see the back jacket: the same photo of Susan and Little Beth from 1985.

DR. OWENS (CONT'D)

My book club is going to re-read it next month.

PRE-LAP: The THUNDERING ROAR of TRAFFIC

EXT. MEDICAL BUILDING - PARKING LOT - DAY

Beth leaves the medical building. On the nearby freeway, an 18-wheeler hurtles past, rattling our nerves.

EXT. CINTHIA'S HOUSE - FRONT DOOR - DAY

*

Beth knocks on the door of a small suburban house. CINTHIA (38, Latina, Marco's sister), and a toddler, ELLIE (3, biracial) answer.

*

ELLIE
Auntie Beth!

BETH
Hey babe.

CINTHIA
My dumb brother still at work?

Beth nods and leans down to greet Ellie. Ellie wraps her arms around Beth. Beth breathes in Ellie's neck, then gently pushes her niece away.

She hands the kid the taped-up ziploc bag with Ravi's fish inside.

BETH
Happy birthday.

ELLIE
A fish! Mommy, Auntie Beth got me a fish!

CINTHIA
Wow, hon, that's awesome. A fish.

Cinthia shoots an oblivious Beth a glare.

INT. CINTHIA'S HOUSE - LIVING ROOM - DAY

*

HUFF-PUFF-HUFF! A BALLOON ANIMAL ARTIST blows up long pink creations (that, honestly, look like dicks) for crazed toddlers. A banner reads "Happy 3rd Birthday Ellie!" Beth wanders through the crowd. She watches the kids play.

Beth chats with two moms (JANINE, STEPH). In the BG, Cinthia and her husband WES (African-American, 50) take photos of the kids.

JANINE
-- the oldest is ten, and then we have two more. Rio over there is four and Lark who is-- god knows where she is-- she's seven.

BETH
Wow. It's a whole brood!

JANINE
Oh yeah. And you? Which one's yours?

BETH
No, no kids. I'm Ellie's aunt.

JANINE

Awwwww. That's so sweet.

(then)

Do you want any? Of your own?

Shit. Beth isn't prepared for this. She mumbles a response.

BETH

No. The world has enough mouths to feed.

STEPH

I get it. It is *not* for everyone. I always tell my friends who don't have kids, enjoy your life. Travel. Go live in a cave in Spain. Have sex in your living room in the middle of the day! If I didn't have kids, I'd still be snorting coke, like, all the time.

Beth smiles and nods until Janine looks away. Then Beth's smile drops.

As the party continues Beth puts on her boots and coat and slips out without saying goodbye.

EXT. CINTHIA'S HOUSE - FRONT YARD - NIGHT

Beth makes it halfway to the sidewalk when the door opens and Cinthia follows her out.

CINTHIA

Beth, wait! Here.

Cinthia holds the ziploc bag with the fish out to Beth.

CINTHIA (CONT'D)

You don't gift pets.

BETH

Won't she be upset?

CINTHIA

I'll handle it.

(she hugs Beth)

See you next week?

Cinthia runs back inside. Beth is alone with her fish.

INT. BETH & MARCO'S HOUSE - LIVING ROOM - NIGHT

Beth enters her dark house, flips on the light, tosses her keys, pushes off her boots.

INT. BETH & MARCO'S HOUSE - KITCHEN - CONTINUOUS

She pours the fish into the empty fish bowl. *

She peels off her jacket. Her sweater. Pours herself a glass of wine. Takes a sip. Takes off her socks.

Barefoot, in only her T-shirt and jeans, Beth opens the sliding glass door that leads to their backyard (and the woods beyond). It's a frigid, snowy night.

EXT. BETH & MARCO'S HOUSE - BACK PATIO/YARD - CONTINUOUS

Without flinching, Beth walks across the icy patio and into the snow-filled yard. When she makes it to the darkest part of the yard she stops, turns around, then flops down on her back into the nearby snowbank.

FWOOOMP. Her body disappears into the soft, silent snow.

She stares up at the stars.

BETH
I'm not cold.

INT. BETH & MARCO'S HOUSE - LIVING ROOM - NIGHT

Beth lies on the couch, fast asleep. On the ottoman in front of her is a spread of take-out food containers. The TV is on, playing at a low volume. It's the local, nightly news.

We stay tight on Beth's face as a man, who we only see from the waist down, approaches. The man leans his crotch towards Beth's face. Beth sleeps. He gently rubs his crotch on her cheek. She sleeps on. He gives her cheek a few crotch taps. Still nothing. He leans down and whispers into Beth's ear:

FACELESS MAN
Hey sexy--

Terrified, Beth leaps up, inadvertently whacking the man in the crotch. The man is Marco.

BETH
Holy shit!! Jesus fucking
Christ, Marco, what the
fuck?!

MARCO
OOOOF! Fuck me-- arrrrgh--
it's me, it's just me, calm
down--

MARCO (CONT'D)
(wincing through pain)
Shit. Motherfucker!

BETH
Are you okay? Do you need
ice?

MARCO (CONT'D)
Whooooo--

Marco hops a little, walking it off.

BETH
I'm sorry, hon. But what the hell
were you doing?

MARCO
You looked so sexy, sleeping there
with your mouth open. I just
thought-- I thought...

BETH
Okay...

MARCO
That maybe you'd wake up and... you
know... give me a... a kind of a...
sleepy blowjob.

BETH
Uh-huh. It's just, when you wake me
up like that, I'm actually more
terrified than turned on.

MARCO
That's fair.

BETH (CONT'D)
Oh Jesus, look at this--

Beth cranks the volume on the TV. On screen is a TELEGENIC
NEWS ANCHOR, the same blonde we saw at the opening awards.
Except she looks blonder, shinier: this is TESSA YOUNG.

TESSA YOUNG (ON TV)
-- the victim was three months
pregnant when her husband stabbed
her twenty-seven times. For Channel
9 News, I'm Tessa Young, Chief
Crime Correspondent.

BETH
She's a "Chief Crime Correspondent"
now! Whatever that is.

(MORE)

BETH (CONT'D)

It's unbelievable how she keeps failing upwards. And do her cheekbones look different to you? I swear she's had work done. And she's *definitely* getting blonder...

Marco looks at her, trying to intuit the problem. He pulls her in to a bear hug.

MARCO

Bad day?

Beth looks at him, eyes on the brink of watering. She wants to tell him everything the doctor said.

MARCO (CONT'D)

That bitch Amber at it again?

Beth laughs. Marco's use of the "b" word is clunky, intentionally crass.

BETH

Don't do that. She is a bitch, but don't do that--

MARCO

You laughed. I'm in the clear.

BETH

She's truly the worst. She thinks they're doing something so important, so *big*, when what they're really doing is taking a hammer and pounding journalism's already lifeless corpse to a pulp.

MARCO

But they have you, keeping 'em honest--

BETH

Ha! I'm only there to make them feel better about themselves. They look at me like I'm diseased because I know who Madonna is. Well guess what fuckers, you're all going to get old, too!

MARCO

I'm sorry, hon.

BETH

It's okay.

MARCO

But I have some good news. A ranger
in Grand Teton killed himself.

Beth stares: wtf?

MARCO (CONT'D)

A job opened up. In the crown jewel
of the parks system--

BETH

The Tetons?

MARCO

The Tetons!

BETH

You want us to move to Wyoming?

MARCO

We always talked about leaving the
city, getting a country house--

BETH

Yeah, when we were old and had
nothing better to do--

MARCO

Babe, we've been in Denver for
fifteen years for you, for your
career, but...

BETH

What?

MARCO

All you do is complain about your
job.

BETH

You're my husband! That's what I'm
supposed to do. It doesn't mean I
want to retire and live like a
sasquatch in Wyoming till I die.

MARCO

You've never seen it, but babe,
it's majestic and intense and
awesome--

BETH

So awesome it makes people kill
themselves?

MARCO

I drive three hours every day so that you can have the life you want. And you don't even want it most of the time!

He crawls up next to her, wraps his arms around her belly.

MARCO (CONT'D)

Please?

Beth looks at him. He's so plaintive. She yields.

MARCO (CONT'D)

I need a change. We need a change. Just think about it, okay? Let's see what the future holds?

INT. THE BITE - HALLWAY / AMBER'S OFFICE - DAY

Beth, a zip in her step and her head held high, raps on the open door to Amber's office and walks in.

BETH

Do you have a second? I wanted to run some story ideas by you.

AMBER

The story meeting is tomorrow.

BETH

I know, I just really want to get a jump on things, get a move on some stuff that's time sensitive.

AMBER

Very pro-active of you. What are you thinking?

BETH

There are rumblings that Taylor Swift is traveling from her home to her car in a large suitcase, to avoid paparazzi. And I thought: what a great way of tackling immigration. We use Taylor as a jumping off point, but then we get into human smuggling, the border, the crisis in Central America--

Amber signals to Beth to stop.

AMBER

It's really *such* an important issue.

BETH

Totally.

AMBER

And my heart breaks when I think about those poor children who are *dying* at our border. I actually just made a donation to the Texas Civil Rights Project.

BETH

That's so good of you.

AMBER

They do amazing work. They've offered me a position on their board.

BETH

Wow, awesome. That's really cool.

AMBER

But I saw the Taylor Swift suitcase story on Buzzfeed in 2017.

BETH

You did?

Amber nods, disappointed in Beth.

BETH (CONT'D)

With the immigration angle?

AMBER

No, but does it matter?

BETH

Yes. That's the story.

AMBER

Sorry, Beth.

BETH

It could be a great opportunity--

AMBER

Is there anything else?

Amber is irritated now. Beth doesn't want to leave on this note. She grasps at straws.

BETH

Okay. Left turn for a minute. What if we take Fiona's Harry Potter ball and run with it. Do a whole section on Harry and the gang.

Amber listens, expressionless. Beth continues to spitball.

BETH (CONT'D)

A "Look Who's Sexy Now" slideshow, like we show Harry back then and we show Harry now, and we do it for the red-headed one, too. For all the little wizards.

Amber looks visibly uncomfortable. Beth trickles to a stop.

AMBER

I don't understand.

BETH

I know it's different than the things I normally pitch, but I thought it could be fun--

AMBER

You want to steal Fiona's idea?

BETH

What?? No. No, no, no, I want to EXPAND on it--

AMBER

Listen, I know that the Bite was your--

(searching for right words)
-- fall-back job.

BETH

I'm sorry?

AMBER

We all know, Beth. The way you were fired from the Post. The scandal.

BETH

I was wrongfully accused!

AMBER

Please! Keep your energy professional.

(then)

(MORE)

AMBER (CONT'D)

My point is, while we aren't exactly the Post, we do have journalistic integrity, which means I can't let my writers steal from each other.

Beth winces, biting her tongue.

BETH

I was just trying to pitch something you'd like.

AMBER

So this is my fault?

BETH

No--

AMBER

Beth. Have you read the Harry Potter books?

BETH

Obviously.

AMBER

Who's Hagrid?

BETH

Hagrid is... really? You want me to do this?

AMBER

Really.

BETH

Okay. Hagrid is a wizard. And she's the best. Everyone loves Hagrid.

AMBER

Listen, Beth, I love your story, your fall from grace, your attempt to keep at it in a profession that tossed you aside, I mean, wow. It tugs at my heart strings, it does. But it's a tough time for our industry. The landscape is constantly shifting.

Beth stares at Amber. Is she... firing her?

BETH

I'm the senior news reporter here.

AMBER

Which I so appreciate. I want to keep you here, I do. But you need to find your spark. Fire. The light of passion that burns eternal. If I were you, I'd find my spark and I'd bring it to tomorrow's pitch meeting. That and a deep sense of gratitude.

Meeting over. Beth is shut down.

INT. THE BITE - BETH & FIONA'S DESKS - DAY

A zombie Beth trudges back to her desk. She collapses into her chair. What a fucking awful meeting. She looks around and sees Fiona, sipping a coco water and zestfully tapping away at whatever soulless piece of crap she's writing. All around her, Beth sees young people with passion and zeal for their abject, meaningless work. They have spark. They have youth. They have purpose.

Beth feels dizzy, at a complete loss. Her phone dings. Marco has texted a link to a one-room cabin for rent in Jackson Hole. He writes: cozy cabin for two?

Beth puts down her phone and spots a small pile of mail next to her desk. On top is a **teal-blue envelope**.

It's a letter. Addressed to Beth in delicate purple handwriting. She flips it around. The return address doesn't have a name. All it says is "CSP." Beth looks up at Fiona.

BETH

What's CSP?

Fiona shrugs and taps something into her computer. Beth stares at the letter. Beth runs her fingers over the words--

FIONA (O.S.)

Colorado State Penitentiary.

Beth's head jolts up.

BETH

What?

FIONA

CSP. Colorado State Penitentiary.
(reading a website)
Holy shit, it's a maximum security women's prison! Also known as the Alcatraz of the Rockies.

Beth freezes, processing this.

FIONA (CONT'D)

Open it!

Beth springs into action and rips the envelope open. She pulls out a handwritten letter on classic foolscap.

BETH

It's a letter.

FIONA

I know! Read it!

Beth begins to read the letter to herself.

FIONA (CONT'D)

Out loud, dummy!

BETH

Oh, right, yeah... Okay, it's from someone named Toni Plimpton. "Dear Ms. Baker"--

FIONA

Wait, Toni Plimpton? I know that name. How do I know that name?

Fiona begins frantically typing into her search engine.

BETH

"Dear Ms. Baker, three years ago I was convicted of murdering my husband, Wallace Plimpton. I was sentenced to 92 years in prison, with no opportunity for parole. My second appeal was just denied and I will spend the rest of my life rotting in this cell unless an act of god saves me. I could come to peace with that if I had pulled the trigger. But Ms. Baker, I didn't do it."

FIONA

The Dick Cutter! I remember her!

Fiona spins her laptop around to show Beth a small news article about Toni's trial. The headline blares: DICK CUTTER STRIKES AGAIN! There's a photo of TONI PLIMPTON'S MUGSHOT next to one of her husband, Wallace (from the opening murder).

FIONA (CONT'D)

A few days before she killed him,
she tried to hack off his dick with
a pair of kiddie safety scissors.
She's a total whackadoo!

Beth continues reading.

BETH

"But no one cares about the truth.
They only care that one more black
woman stays behind bars."

FIONA

Oh my god, she's so crazy.
(reading the news story)
Her husband's body was found in the
bison preserve. Trampled to mush by
the buffalo. They had to identify
him from his teeth.

BETH

"I know your work, Ms. Baker. I
used to follow your career. I
believe you are a genius and the
last real journalist working in
this country."

FIONA

It does not say that!

Fiona rips the letter from Beth's hands and reads the rest.

FIONA (CONT'D)

"Ms. Baker, please help me. I know
you can find the truth. And the
truth will set us both free."

A slip of paper included in the envelope drops on Beth's lap.
She hands it to Beth: a Colorado Department of Corrections
visitation form.

Beth examines the form. Fiona, who is only a blurry haze in
the B.G. as we sharpen our focus on Beth, yammers on.

FIONA (CONT'D)

-- Beth? Beth what are you going to
do? You don't think she's telling
the truth, do you? I mean, the
whole thing is sketchy. It's a
total catfish situation. Besides,
what does she mean that the truth
will set you *both* free? The whole
thing reeks of a scam.

Beth stares at the box on the form that reads NAME OF VISITOR. She picks up a pen and fills in her name and we

HARD CUT TO: *

INT. COLORADO STATE PENITENTIARY (CSP) - VISITOR HOLDING - DAY

Beth is aggressively searched and patted down by TWO PRISON GUARDS. There are hands all over her body, she's turned around, her hair touched, her ass frisked.

GUARD 1 waves a hand-held metal detector over Beth and when it grazes her knee it BEEPS! Beth rolls up her pants. It BEEPS again.

BETH

There's nothing in there. I swear.

Another wave, another BEEEEEEEEEP!

CUT TO: Beth's pants are around her ankles as Guard 1 waves the detector over her bare knee, but still beep, beep, beep, beeeeeeeeeeeep! A THIRD GUARD joins Guards 1 and 2. They all fiddle with the detector and Beth's knee as Beth stands in her underwear. Beep. Beep. Beeeep.

A FOURTH GUARD walks up with new batteries and pops them in the detector. No more beep. Beth pulls up her pants.

INT. CSP - HALLWAY - DAY

A LARGE MALE PRISON GUARD leads Beth down a long, bleak corridor. Beth peers around, trying to catch a glimpse of something through the tiny windows.

LARGE MALE GUARD

Stay on the line!

He shouts at Beth to walk on the red tape that runs down the middle of the corridor. They stop in front of a thick metal door. The Guard looks Beth up and down, his eyes rest on her chest. He points to her shirt's top button.

LARGE MALE GUARD (CONT'D)

Do that up.

BETH

Really? It's just--

LARGE MALE GUARD

Do it up.

Beth does as she's told and buttons her collar. But the shirt is too small and it chokes her (just a little).

The guard nods, pleased, then opens the door to reveal a small cement room with one metal chair and a glass window on one wall.

INT. CSP - PRIVATE VISITATION ROOM - CONTINUOUS

The guard gestures and Beth sits down (though sitting causes her to be choked even more by her collar).

And with that, the Guard slams the door shut.

Beth waits. She fidgets. Her heart beat is loud inside her head. It's all so dangerous!

And then the heavy metal door on the other side swings open.

In **SLOW-MOTION** a prisoner enters, led by a blonde guard JIMMY. The prisoner emerges from behind Jimmy and we see...

*

*

TONI PLIMPTON (25), a beautiful young African-American woman. Toni's piercing eyes lock in on us.

CUT BACK TO: Beth's face, filled with shock and some awe. Toni looks sweet, fragile... innocent.

Toni smiles. Beth smiles back, her neck squeezes against her too-tight collar as she does.

We SNAP to **REGULAR SPEED**

Toni shuffles awkwardly into the room, her hands and feet in shackles. Jimmy shoves her into the chair. Toni's eyes intensify with rage, but then she quells her anger and re-focuses her attention on Beth. Jimmy leaves.

*

*

Beth and Toni both smile. There's an awkward, first-date tension in the air.

Hi. TONI

Hi. BETH

They laugh.

TONI
You came.

Beth blushes, smiles.

BETH
I did! I came.

Another beat.

BETH (CONT'D)
So, how are you?

TONI
Oh, you know...
(re: shackled hands)
The best.

BETH
Right.

TONI
They're punishing me cause I
knocked out a bitch's front teeth.

BETH
(uncomfortable)
Ahhh.

TONI
She's a nazi.

BETH
Ah. I'm Jewish, so, let's hope she
eats through a straw for a good
long time.

Awkward silence. Beth points to Toni's neck.

BETH (CONT'D)
I like your tattoo.

TONI
Thanks.

BETH
Is she...
(leaning closer)
... holding a head?

TONI
Yeah.

We see a CLOSE UP of the tattoo. It's a horribly gory comic book panel of a woman holding a man's severed head.

TONI (CONT'D)

I wanna add to it, have her bake
his head into a cake and eat it.
Like Titus.

Beth is intrigued and impressed - she reads Shakespeare? But
maybe Toni is a little nuts, too? Toni locks in on Beth,
smiles, leans closer.

TONI (CONT'D)

You'd look good with a few tats.

BETH

Me? No.

TONI

Something pretty on your wrist.
That'd be hot.

BETH

(very flattered)
Really? I don't know. I'm not that
kind of person.

Toni shrugs, stares at Beth.

BETH (CONT'D)

I guess I just always... I mean,
look at me... You don't think I'd
look like I was trying too hard?

Long beat as Toni stares at Beth.

TONI

No.

BETH

(more flattered)
Really?? I *have* always wanted one.

TONI

Back of the neck is sexy too.

BETH

But how do you choose something
that's going on your body for the
rest of your life?!
(then)
A few years ago, I was *this* close
to getting an old-timey typewriter
on my upper thigh--

Toni makes a judgy face, like "Nah, bad idea."

BETH (CONT'D)

Yeah, no, I know. Stupid.

TONI

You could do your kid's face. You got any kids?

Beth can't believe it. Everywhere she goes. The same fucking question.

BETH

(annoyed)

Uh, no.

TONI

Did I say the wrong thing?

BETH

No. It's just I get that question a lot. I don't have kids, and I don't want kids. I'm too focused on my career.

TONI

Okay.

BETH

Okay.

Pause.

BETH (CONT'D)

Why don't we talk about the case. If I'm going to write your story I need you to help me piece together what happened the night of the murder. Where were you? Who were you with? And why had you been violent to your husband a few days earlier?

TONI

Shit. The dick thing?

BETH

The dick thing.

TONI

Tell me this, why would I try to cut off his dick if I was going to kill him? The whole reason you cut off a dick is so the dude has to walk around without a dick. Right?

BETH

Huh... that actually makes sense.

TONI

He hit me all the time. One time I go after his "precious white dick" and I'm the psycho?! What about circumcisions?

BETH

Yeah. Circumcisions are something I think we as a culture should re-assess.

TONI

You know what they all need to reassess? Cody. That's the dude who should be in here.

BETH

Who?

TONI

You don't know Cody?? Wallace's brother. He and Wally ran guns, he was into some for-real bad shit, I mean, he's the guy the DA should've gone after. I had an alibi. I was at work, selling flip-phones at RJs, meanwhile those two are funneling Brownings to the Philippines, but who's the bitch serving time? This bitch.

Beth is madly trying to scribble down notes.

BETH

Wait, can you slow down? So his name is Cody, and you were working, where did you say you were working the night of? And I'm sure I can google it, but what's a Browning?

Beat. Toni stands up.

TONI

Nope. Sorry. I don't have time to walk you through it all, to tell you how to do your job. I have a kid. She'd be three right now. I had her in here. After they cut her out of me, I couldn't even hold her cause my hands were in cuffs. I gave birth in handcuffs.

(MORE)

TONI (CONT'D)

(then)

I've never touched her, never felt her skin, never held her little hands. I don't know what she sounds like or looks like. The courts took her from me and gave her to some other woman. But she's out there and she's mine.

Tears stream down Toni's cheeks. Beth's too.

BETH

I can't have children.

Toni freezes: what?! Beth continues.

BETH (CONT'D)

And I never wanted them, but now that I can't have them I feel so--
(Beth breaks down)
--jesus. What's wrong with me?
Fuck!

Beth is overcome with emotion. Toni watches, inscrutable.

Beth looks up and locks eyes with Toni, realizing her selfishness. Toni's guard, Jimmy, opens the door. *

BETH (CONT'D)

I'm sorry, I'm really, really sorry-

JIMMY *

This meeting of the itty-bitty titty committee is adjourned.

Jimmy takes hold of Toni and jerks her roughly out the door. Toni looks over her shoulder at Beth. They lock eyes. *

Then SLAM. Toni's gone.

INT. CSP - FOYER - DAY

An ANCIENT GUARD hands Beth back her purse. Beth is depleted. Ashamed. A female voice rings out from the waiting area.

FEMALE VOICE (O.S.)

Beth?!

It's TESSA YOUNG, the blonde reporter from the TV news.

BETH

Tessa?

TESSA

Jesus, Beth. Look at you! You look--
have you been sleeping? And how's
Marco?

BETH

He's okay, the same.

TESSA

My god, you're the last person I
thought I'd bump into today.

Beth notices that Tessa holds a bundle of papers. A teal-blue envelope rests on top (same one Toni sent Beth).

BETH

What's that...?

TESSA

This amazing inmate, wrongfully
convicted inmate, wrote me the most
amazing letter, here-- "Ms. Young,
you are a genius and the last real
journalist working in this country.
I know you can find the truth, and
the truth will set us both free."
Isn't it beautiful?

BETH

It's almost as beautiful as mine--

Beth pulls out her own teal-blue envelope.

BETH (CONT'D)

Except I'm the genius in this one.

TESSA

That sneaky little twat. She's
auditioning us.

The Ancient Guard emerges from a door and calls out:

ANCIENT GUARD

Tessa Young!

TESSA

Ah, I'm up! Good luck, Beth. I really
hope things turn around for you.
(they hug, Tessa whispers)
But you're not getting this fucking story.

Tessa flashes Beth an evil smile, turns on her heel and
bounces off into the prison. BANG! The door slams shut.

Beth spins around, looks at the Ancient Guard. There's a flicker, nay a flame, alight in Beth's eye.

BETH

I will get this fucking story.

Beth beelines out the door and into the cold, clear night.

ANCIENT GUARD

My money's on the blonde.

EXT. RUNDOWN HOUSE - FRONT YARD/PORCH - NIGHT

Beth stands in front of a dilapidated house. A few doors down, she sees some shady-looking young men on their porch, smoking and drinking. She takes a deep breath. She opens the gate. From inside a VICIOUS DOG BARKS!

Beth scampers back outside the gate, breathing heavily. She hears laughter come from the neighboring porch. She collects herself. She opens the gate again and walks up to the front door, grinning and bearing the BARK BARK BARKING!

INT. RUNDOWN HOUSE - KITCHEN - CONTINUOUS

TIGHT ON the word "CODY" inked in ornate font on the chest of a young white man, CODY PLIMPTON (24). He cooks an egg. His doorbell rings. His dog barks. He walks out of his kitchen and we see that the walls are covered in the very same MUSTARD YELLOW FLORAL WALLPAPER that was splattered with Wallace Plimpton's blood.

INT. CODY'S HOUSE - LIVING ROOM - CONTINUOUS

Cody peers out his window. He sees Beth on the porch. He opens a chest near the door - a dozen guns inside. He slides one down the back of his pants, then swings the door open.

Beth flashes Cody an inviting smile.

BETH

Cody Plimpton?

END OF EPISODE