

BELOVED CHILDE SERIES

THE GATHERING

PILOT EPISODE

TEASER

SOUTH AFRICA, PRETORIA - 1986

EXT. SUBURBAN AREA – DAY

The setting sun casts long shadows, clouds on the horizon a glorious orange.

From above a row of middle class houses, back yards facing a narrow forested strip along a small stream. Through over hanging branches the hint of an over-grown two-wheel track.

The scurrying figure of a woman. The sounds of frogs and crickets increase as we close in on the figure. The soft murmuring of a small stream joins the chorus.

MARTHA ROBINSON, 45, out of breath, stumbles over fallen branches and scattered rocks, ducks under a low-hanging branch, pauses, peers ahead.

The path is deserted, then suddenly a fleeting moving shadow, then it is gone, the flash of a red coat flaps in a breeze.

MARTHA

(mutters)

... shadows? Something I want to see... is it really her?

Martha lifts her feet high to avoid tripping over scattered debris.

She cups her hands around her mouth...

MARTHA

(despairing)

Jeanne! Jeanne!

(beat, mutters)

Please, don't leave, not like this. Let me make it up to you.

Frogs and crickets fall silent at her cry.

She runs, hits a hard gnarled stump, falls, tries to get up, slips, falls again, pushes herself up with both hands pressing on the log she has tripped over. She holds her knee, grunts, sits down on the log.

MARTHA

Oh Jeanne! I'm so sorry.

VIEW SLOWLY MOVES AWAY FROM MARTHA TO THE STREAM

Ten meters from Martha, behind the shrubbery and out of her sight, the pale, almost translucent body of a woman lies face down in the water, which dams up behind her and spills over her waist and arms.

It is eerily quiet, then a lone bird chirps close by.

Martha takes a tentative step, stops, looks at her knee.

Blood oozes down from a deep cut, leaving a trail in the mud on her leg.

Stooped she limps back in the direction she came from.

END OF TEASER

INT. BELOVED'S APARTMENT – DAY

A double bed and a dressing table with a large full length mirror takes up most of the space. A built-in wardrobe dominates one wall.

BELOVED CHILDE, 30, striking good looks, blond, coke bottle slender, in underwear, examines her reflection in the mirror.

Reflected in the mirror next to her on the dressing table the back of a FRAMED A4 PHOTOGRAPH.

She holds one outfit after another against her body, turns to examine her reflection from all angles then throws the discarded outfit on the bed and tries another.

She discards three outfits before dressing in a light blue trouser suit that gives the impression of a gentle feminine but business-like appearance. She adds dangling ear rings, tilts her head, smiles her satisfaction.

She picks up the photograph, gazes at it.

From the photograph a young man smiles at her.

INT. BOOK SHOP - DAY

Beloved at a table, a pile of books and a sign on the desk proclaims: "AUTHOR"

Next to it a poster with the cover of her book. Eight people, each holding a copy of her book, wait for her signature.

She smiles, talks briefly to each one and signs the book.

C.O. the title of the book on top of the pile: "INSIDE FOR LIFE" and below in large letters "Beloved Childe"

A woman holds out a book to her.

WOMAN

A gift for my friend, Belinda. I read mine last week and couldn't put it down. You work in prisons?

BELOVED

(nods)

On contract only, research for my thesis.

WOMAN

And now you're here? More research?

BELOVED

Yeah, on rehabilitation programs in the Developing World.

Smiles hands the book back.

BELOVED

Researching my doctoral thesis and--

(beat)

-- I have unfinished business in South Africa.

KNOX, 45, smartly dressed, exceptionally broad shoulders, greying at the temples, at the end of an aisle, pretends to browse but surreptitiously keeps an eye on Beloved.

BYRON EVERS, 29, sandy haired good looks, a winning smile with eyes that belie his friendliness, holds out his copy for Beloved to sign.

Knox, stops paging, his interest in Beloved intensifies.

BYRON

Fascinating talk, loved it.

BELOVED
(while signing)
Glad you enjoyed it.

BYRON
How about exploring the subject in greater
depth, perhaps over coffee?

BELOVED
So, tell me, what would we be exploring?

BYRON
Whatever you like.

Beloved chuckles.

BELOVED
You come at a bad time. I'm very busy at the
moment. Perhaps some other time--
(beat, hands book back)
-- some other year.

BYRON
(teases)
Oh, Ms Childe, you're breaking my heart.

BELOVED
I have an idea your heart is the often broken
and rapidly healing kind.

Byron shrugs, smiles and starts to browse the shelves.

Beloved signs two more books.

At the end of an aisle a man stands with his back towards Beloved's table, his
jacket over his arm.

Knox moves closer to him, takes a book from the shelf, opens it, turns the pages,
pretends to read, avoids looking at him, his lips move in inaudibly speech.

The angle moves and we see that Knox is talking to Byron.

BYRON
Why are we here?

KNOX
This woman came to our attention recently.
(beat)

KNOX (CONT'D)

Stick close without letting her know, see who she hobnobs with, who she visits and who visits her, get as much intel as you can.

BYRON

You wan' me to bring her in?

KNOX

In a few days perhaps, first find out everything.

Beloved's telephone rings, she glances at the screen, smiles an apology to the woman whose book she is signing.

BELOVED (ON PHONE)

I can't talk now.

(listens)

Yes, I understand, but I can't talk right now. I'll call you back.

She puts the phone down, signs the book and gives it back.

BELOVED

(to the woman)

Sorry.

EXT. STREET OUTSIDE BOOKSHOP - NIGHT

Dark clouds, soft drizzle, Beloved gets into her car, an OSTENTATIOUS PINK CABRIOLET, and drives off.

From the book store's entrance Byron watches her go, runs to a dark BMW parked across the street and makes a sharp U-ie. He follows the cabriolet, keeping his distance.

INT. BELOVED'S APARTMENT – DAY

The late afternoon sun through the window bathes the lounge in a warm mellow light. Beloved, a glass of wine and her cellphone on the side table, gazes at a framed photograph.

On the photograph, it is the one from her dressing table.

A heavy sigh and her head drops onto the back rest, she drifts off to sleep.

The photograph slips out of her hand and falls face-up on the carpet.