

TANTRA
"Episode 2"
"Back Catalog"

Written by
Tan Dhingra

Tan.D

HALF-HOUR PREMIUM DRAMEDY
TV-MA
MONTREAL • PRESENT DAY

empire@tan.wiki

COLD OPEN

INT. TANTRA HOLDINGS - EDIT BAY - MORNING

Dark room. Monitors glow like confessionals.

On screen: an explicit scene from the archive – early 2000s, grain, beautiful lighting even then. A woman on top, slow, intentional. Not a joke. Craft.

PRIYA, 40s, editor, coffee, scrubbing the timeline with religious focus. PENELOPE sits rigidly beside her, fully buttoned, as if clothing could be a force field.

PRIYA

You wanted to "understand the product." This is the product. We can stop whenever your soul files a complaint.

PENELOPE

I'm fine.

On screen: the scene escalates. Moans that are performed and then, somehow, not. Priya marks an in-point on a thrust for rhythm.

PRIYA

See that? That's the difference between fucking for the camera and fucking with the camera. Your father paid people who knew the difference. Half the industry still doesn't.

Penelope's face: scientist watching a volcano. To camera, dry:

PENELOPE

(to camera)

I asked to see the back catalog.

(beat)

I thought it would be spreadsheets.

(beat)

It is also a woman having a very competent orgasm in 2003.

PRIYA

You flinched.

PENELOPE

I blinked.

PRIYA

Same crime, softer alibi.

(hits pause – freeze on a
close-up that is frankly
pornographic)

If you're going to own this place,
you have to be able to look at sex
without treating it like a
biohazard. Or you'll make decisions
like a nun with a calculator.

Walt knocks, enters without waiting – the walk of a man who
has interrupted worse.

WALT

We've got a problem from the past.
She's in reception. She used to be
famous for reasons your committee
will not put on a slide.

PENELOPE

Who?

WALT

Celeste Marchand. 1998 to 2009. Top
earner. Then she vanished into
normal life like a magic trick with
better health insurance.

(beat)

She's here about money we allegedly
still owe her body.

PENELOPE

Allegedly.

WALT

In this business, "allegedly" is
how you say "oh shit" in a suit.

On the frozen monitor: Celeste's younger face – we will
recognize her in a second.

END OF COLD OPEN.

ACT ONE

INT. TANTRA HOLDINGS - LOBBY - MORNING

CELESTE MARCHAND, mid-40s. Coat. Perfect posture. Not "mom
jeans retired porn star" cliché – a woman who left and
became someone who could afford good shoes. Holding a folder
like a weapon that went to law school.

Denise clocks her, softens, slightly starstruck in a workplace way.

DENISE

Celeste. Honey. You look like a person who drinks water on purpose.

CELESTE

Denise. You look like this building still hasn't learned daylight.

Penelope approaches. Walt flanks.

PENELOPE

Penelope Natrel. I'm—

CELESTE

Fabian's daughter. The one who inherited the factory. I read the industry Discord like it's scripture and gossip.

(extends hand, firm)

Celeste Marchand. Your father's company still sells my orgasms. I'd like to be paid for the ones after 2014, when the contracts got "updated" in a font that should be illegal.

PENELOPE

I... okay. Come in.

CELESTE

(slight smile)

You blushed. That's cute. Don't. Blushing is how executives get eaten.

INT. CONFERENCE ROOM - CONTINUOUS

Folder open. Old contracts. New distribution statements. Screenshots of Celeste's scenes on three platforms with Tantra watermarks. Explicit thumbnails. Money numbers that are not small.

CELESTE

From '98 to '09 I made this place tasteful enough for men who pretend they have taste. Then I left. Got married. Got divorced. Got a real estate license because selling houses is the same as selling fantasy, just with better parking.

(taps a page)

In 2015 your father relicensed the back catalog to streaming partners. My rider said any new territory, new format, new "technology of dissemination" — which is lawyer for "the internet got horny" — triggers residual renegotiation. Nobody renegotiated. They just uploaded my twenties and cashed out my thirties.

MARGUERITE
 (already reading,
 delighted and doomed)
 She's not wrong. She's
 inconveniently literate.

PENELOPE
 How much?

CELESTE
 Don't do the number first. Do the
 principle first. The number is how
 you make principle feel negotiable.
 (beat)
 But since you asked like a human:
 low six figures if you're decent.
 High six if you want me to go
 public about "legacy ethical porn"
 while your stepmother's lawyer is
 googling valuation.

Walt's jaw tightens. Penelope notices.

PENELOPE
 Walt.

WALT
 Fabian always meant to clean the
 back catalog. Meaning to is his
 whole brand of morality.

CELESTE
 I liked Fabian. He paid on time
 when cameras were rolling. Ghosts
 are worse at accounting.

PENELOPE
 Give me forty-eight hours. Full
 audit. No "wait and see."

CELESTE

Forty-eight. After that I call a journalist who thinks porn is only interesting when a woman is suffering. I'd rather not feed her. Don't make me.

She leaves. The room exhales sex-and-money air.

BARNABÉ

(entering mid-exit,
missing everything, still
loud)

Why does the lobby smell like 2004
and litigation?

PENELOPE

Back catalog. Residuals. A woman
who used to come for a living and
would like to get paid for the
reruns.

BARNABÉ

Ah. The eternal sequel: Capitalism
2: Same Body, New Platform.

INT. NATREL HOUSE - KITCHEN - DAY

Beatrice on a call, velvet-adjacent loungewear, laptop open
to a spreadsheet that has Tantra's name in a cell like a
disease she's monetizing.

BEATRICE

(into phone)

I'm not saying it's dirty money.
I'm saying it's money that prefers
not to be introduced at dinner.
Yes, I want a quiet valuation. No,
I don't want a LinkedIn post.

(sees Penelope enter)

I'll call you back.

PENELOPE

Valuation.

BEATRICE

Someone has to know what he left
before you donate it to your
feelings.

PENELOPE

I'm running it.

BEATRICE

You're cosplaying competence in a building full of genitals. That is not the same as running it.

(softer, worse)

I married him. I get the house energy. You got the company. If the company is worth more than grief, I will not pretend I don't notice.

PENELOPE

You noticed at the funeral.

BEATRICE

I notice for a living. It's ugly. It's also how widows don't become anecdotes.

Cody appears, backpack.

CODY

Are you fighting about Dad's porn again? Because if you are, can you fight quieter? I have a math test and an erection I don't want to psychologically attach to family conflict.

PENELOPE

Cody—

CODY

I'm joking. Mostly. See you.

He's gone. Beatrice almost laughs. Hates that she almost laughed.

BEATRICE

He gets the honesty from your mother. The timing from hell.

INT. MCGILL - LAB / HALLWAY - DAY

Penelope trying to be a student for twelve minutes. Tasha blocks her path with the energy of academic bloodsport.

TASHA

You missed the reading group. Aldous noticed. I noticed. The yeast did not notice, which is the only mature organism in this department.

PENELOPE

Family stuff.

TASHA

Your dad died. That's not "stuff."
That's a plot. Are you okay or are
you doing the Penelope thing where
okay means "still producing
output"?

PENELOPE

Still producing output.

TASHA

Sexy. In a terrifying way.

Zoe texts: need you at the office. Barnabé is directing
something that looks illegal in three religions and one gym.

Penelope to camera:

PENELOPE

(to camera)

I used to think the hardest part of
grad school was impostor syndrome.

(beat)

Impostor syndrome does not have a
craft services table.

ACT TWO

INT. SOUNDSTAGE A - DAY

Mid-shoot. Amara and Jules again — different scene, same
professionalism. Jules on his back. Amara controlling pace.
Barnabé mid-ecstasy about a camera move.

BARNABÉ

Yes — yes — hold the eye contact
through the climax, Jules, you are
not finishing into the void, you
are finishing into a person — cut!

(to crew)

Reset. Towels. Hydration. Someone
tell props the toy's battery died
like a marriage.

Penelope enters with Marguerite and a banker's box of
contracts. Tries not to look. Looks. Human. Then looks like
a CEO.

AMARA
 (robe, water, to
 Penelope)
 Boss energy. Careful. Boss energy
 makes people horny and unionized.

PENELOPE
 I'm auditing residual language from
 2004. Please don't make me more
 interesting than I am.

JULES
 Too late. You're the girl who
 blushed at a money shot and then
 scheduled justice. That's a whole
 OnlyFans personality.

PENELOPE
 Please never put me on OnlyFans.

AMARA
 No one is offering. Yet. The
 algorithm loves grief and glasses.
 Barnabé waves her over to the monitor — playback of the last
 take. Explicit. Beautiful. Unavoidable.

BARNABÉ
 You need to understand what we
 sell. Not "content." Not "assets."
 This. The moment a person stops
 performing and starts meaning it.
 If you only chase policy, you will
 protect bodies and kill the thing
 that makes the bodies worth
 protecting. Balance. Like lube. Too
 little: pain. Too much: farce.

PENELOPE
 That is the worst and best metaphor
 I've heard this week.

BARNABÉ
 I am French-Canadian. Metaphor is
 how we survive winter and
 Catholicism.

INT. LEGAL OFFICE - DAY

Contracts everywhere. Marguerite, Penelope, Walt.
 Highlighters. Sexual history as accounting.

MARGUERITE

Celeste's 2004 rider is a poem
written by a woman who saw the
future and hated it correctly.
Streaming, download, "any digital
transmission now known or hereafter
devised" – that's the magic phrase.
Your father signed it when he was
trying to keep her from leaving to
a rival in Toronto who promised
"artistic freedom," which meant
"we'll film your ass in better
hotels."

PENELOPE

So we owe her.

WALT

We owe her if the 2015 relicensing
counts as new technology of
dissemination. Our old counsel
argued DVDs-to-streaming was "same
territory, different plastic." That
argument is held together by spit
and misogyny.

PENELOPE

Then we pay her.

MARGUERITE

If we pay Celeste clean, we invite
every back-catalog performer with a
pulse and a PDF to form a line.
That's not a reason not to pay.
It's a reason to build a process so
you don't die of fairness.

PENELOPE

Build the process. Start with her.
Full amount, principle first.

(beat)

Also find me every name in the same
boat. I want the iceberg, not the
anecdote.

Walt looks at her – Fabian's eyes, less evasion.

WALT

You're going to empty a vault your
father kept full by not looking in
it.

PENELOPE

He left me the vault. Looking is
the job.

INT. GREEN ROOM - DAY

Celeste has returned early – not scheduled, just present,
like unfinished business. She's watching a young performer,
RIVER, oil up for a scene. Not predatory. Ancestral.

CELESTE

Your hip angle is going to destroy
you by thirty. Rotate from the knee
more. Trust me. My left labrum is a
concept album about regret.

RIVER

Are you Celeste Marchand?

CELESTE

In the flesh that paid for this
building's HVAC.

RIVER

Holy shit. You're why I thought
this job could be art and not just
algorithms edging a nation.

CELESTE

It can be art. Art still needs a
wire transfer.

Penelope in doorway. Sees this: generations of the same
industry, sexy and practical, tenderness without soft focus.

PENELOPE

We're running your numbers. You're
not wrong.

CELESTE

I know I'm not wrong. I want to
know if you're brave. Wrong is
easy. Brave costs.

INT. NATREL HOUSE - CODY'S ROOM - EVENING

Penelope trying the honest conversation. Sitting on the
floor. Cody with a pillow like a shield.

PENELOPE

You asked me to say it. So. Dad's
company makes adult films. Porn.
People have sex on camera, get
paid, and other people watch. Some
of it is... actually carefully

made. That doesn't make the conversation less weird.

CODY

I know what porn is. I'm twelve, not Amish.

(beat)

Did Dad... do it? On camera?

PENELOPE

No. He ran it. Like a boss. A boss who lied to us about software.

CODY

Is that why Beatrice is being a weapon?

PENELOPE

Beatrice is being Beatrice. The company made it louder.

CODY

Are you okay?

PENELOPE

(almost breaks, then)

I'm producing output.

CODY

That's not an emotion.

PENELOPE

It's the only one I trust.

Cody nods, accepts this like a truce.

CODY

If kids at school say shit, I'm going to say my sister runs a studio and their dads pay for it. Is that allowed?

PENELOPE

Maybe don't lead with that in math class.

CODY

Fine. I'll lead with it in gym. Gym is already humiliation.

ACT THREE

INT. TANTRA HOLDINGS - CONFERENCE ROOM - NIGHT

Celeste. Penelope. Marguerite. Walt. A check isn't a prop — it's a commitment. Also a schedule of payments and a draft Back Catalog Remediation Policy with teeth.

PENELOPE

Full residual catch-up as calculated. Interest. And you're first in a formal review of everyone in your contract class. Public-facing summary when legal clears — not for PR clout. For not doing this in the dark again.

CELESTE

(reads, slow)

Your father would have taken six months and a kayak.

PENELOPE

I'm aware.

CELESTE

(looks up)

You're not him. That's not an insult.

(signs)

If you fuck this remediation up, I will still burn you. Affectionately.

PENELOPE

Noted.

Celeste stands, then pauses at the door.

CELESTE

One more thing. In '03 I shot a scene in Soundstage B — the one with the green headboard. Your father stopped the camera because I looked "gone" for half a second. Not performance-gone. Actually gone. He sent me home. Paid the day. Didn't ask me to smile about it.

(beat)

That man could be decent in a room and a coward at a kitchen table. Both true. Don't simplify him just because you're angry. Anger deserves accuracy.

She's gone.

Penelope sits with that. To camera:

PENELOPE

(to camera)

I wanted him to be one thing so I
could hate him efficiently.

(beat)

He refuses. Even dead. Rude.

INT. SOUNDSTAGE B - NIGHT

Empty. Green headboard still there — reupholstered, same bones. Penelope alone. She touches the wood. Not mystical. Historical.

Barnabé finds her with two coffees. Hands her one. They sit on the empty bed like coworkers, not a bit.

BARNABÉ

Celeste was the first person who
made me understand sex on camera
could have grammar. Subject. Verb.
Moan. Consequence.

PENELOPE

Did you sleep with her?

BARNABÉ

(grins)

Everyone asks that. No. I was too
busy worshipping her timing. Desire
isn't always a door you open with
your dick. Sometimes it's a
director's chair and
self-knowledge.

PENELOPE

That's almost wise.

BARNABÉ

Don't tell anyone. I'll lose my
brand.

A beat. Sexy without sex — two people in a room built for
fucking, talking about ethics. The show's engine.

PENELOPE

Beatrice is valuing the company.

BARNABÉ

Of course she is. Death is an
appraisal with flowers.

PENELOPE

If she tries to take it—

BARNABÉ

Then you do what Celeste did. Know your worth. Say it without blushing.

(stands)

Also tomorrow I need approval on a scene involving impact play and a contract addendum the size of Leviticus. Wear something you can spill coffee on. Morality is messy.

He leaves. Penelope on the green bed. Fully clothed. Ridiculous. Powerful.

INT. NATREL HOUSE - PENELOPE'S ROOM - NIGHT

Laptop. Spreadsheet of names from the back catalog — performers, years, estimated exposure. A map of bodies and money.

Zoe FaceTimes in, mid-skincare, face shiny.

ZOE

You look like you're about to declare war on PDF.

PENELOPE

I paid a woman for her orgasms from 2015 to now. In a good way.

ZOE

That's the most romantic sentence in capitalism.

(beat)

Beatrice called my mom voice — her lawyer. They're building a board argument. "Emergency stewardship." You need allies who aren't grief.

PENELOPE

I have Walt.

ZOE

Walt is a cathedral. You need a knife. I'm the knife. Also Leo, accidentally.

PENELOPE

Tomorrow.

ZOE
 Tomorrow we make the software
 company look like it belongs to
 someone alive.

Call ends.

Penelope opens one archive file – Celeste, 2003, green
 headboard. She presses play for three seconds. Sex, skill, a
 human face. Stops it. Not shame. Respect.

PENELOPE
 (to camera)
 Back catalog.
 (beat)
 Turns out the past doesn't stream
 for free.
 (beat)
 Neither do I.

FADE OUT.

TAG

INT. BEATRICE'S STUDY - NIGHT

Beatrice with a sleek deck: TANTRA HOLDINGS – PRELIMINARY
 VALUE RANGE. Photos blurred. Numbers sharp. A lawyer on
 speaker.

LAWYER (V.O.)
 If she keeps writing checks to
 "correct history," the asset
 becomes a charity with better
 lighting.

BEATRICE
 Then we stop her before history
 becomes a habit.
 (looks at Fabian's photo
 on the shelf –
 complicated)
 He left her the company because he
 thought she was clean.
 (beat)
 Clean doesn't run a sex business.
 Hungry does.
 (closes laptop)
 Let's see which one she is.

FADE OUT.

END OF EPISODE 2.