

FOR YOUR CONSIDERATION
BEST ORIGINAL SCREENPLAY

REED BIRNEY

ANN DOWD

JASON ISAACS

MARTHA PLIMPTON



WRITTEN AND DIRECTED BY
FRAN KRANZ

“AN EXPLOSIVE SCREENWRITING AND DIRECTING DEBUT.”

DEADLINE

“I KNEW I WAS GOING TO DO IT THE MOMENT I READ IT.”

- ANN DOWD

**“IT WAS UNLIKE ANYTHING I HAD EVER READ BEFORE.
THAT’S EXTREMELY RARE - TO READ A SCRIPT
THAT’S TECHNICALLY PERFECT.”**

- MARTHA PLIMPTON

**“I WAS STRUCK WITH THE INCREDIBLE EMOTIONAL AUTHENTICITY
AND DETAIL OF THE SCRIPT. IT NEVER FEELS WRITTEN.”**

- REED BIRNEY

“WHY BE A STORYTELLER? IT’S TO TELL STORIES LIKE THIS.”

- JASON ISAACS

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MASS

Written & Directed by Fran Kranz

1 EXT. SUBURBAN NEIGHBORHOOD - DAWN 1

It's dawn somewhere in America. The first hint of sunrise glows on the horizon, barely illuminating the otherwise dark suburban street.

Red taillights appear as a garage door opens a few houses down the road. An SUV pulls out onto the street. *

2 EXT. SHOPPING DISTRICT - DAWN 2

The roads are still empty as the sky turns a lighter shade of violet. The SUV passes local malls and businesses, making its way to the interstate.

3 EXT. INTERSTATE - DOWNTOWN - SUNRISE 3

Office lights flicker in the distance as the SUV makes its way out of the city. Sunlight breaks over the horizon, reflecting off buildings' glass facades.

4 EXT. INTERSTATE - COUNTRY - MORNING 4

Later, the sun casts an even heat over farmlands. The SUV speeds through the country on a journey that seems to take several hours.

Eventually, the flat farmlands give way to foothills. Miles ahead, the hills compound themselves into massive mountains. The SUV disappears into the rising landscape.

CUT TO BLACK:

5 EXT. EMMANUEL EPISCOPAL CHURCH - MORNING 5

The modest red brick Gothic revival church sits on the corner of a small town street. Behind it, built much later, are the church offices and meeting halls.

A piano plays inside the church. It's a familiar melody, just unsure of itself. *"Hey diddle diddle, the cat and the fiddle, the cow jumped over the moon..."*

An old beat up Subaru parks out front. JUDY (30's, nervous but well meaning) exits her car, grabs groceries from the back seat and hurries toward the church.

6 INT. EMMANUEL EPISCOPAL CHURCH - NAVE - MORNING 6

A YOUNG STUDENT struggles to read sheet music as his PIANO TEACHER guides him through the notes. They play at an upright piano at the foot of the altar.

Judy enters at the other end of the nave. She waves to the teacher as she takes a seat in the back pew dropping her groceries down beside her.

After praying, she makes a quick sign of the cross. Collecting her things, she waves goodbye to the teacher and makes her way down a set of stairs and into...

7 INT. EMMANUEL EPISCOPAL CHURCH - BASEMENT - MORNING 7

The church basement. It's a large but cluttered space. The walls are covered with community flyers and religious plaques.

In an open kitchen, ANTHONY (a peculiar young man in his late teens) does dishes.

JUDY

I'm late.

(no response)

I know...

Judy drops her things on a table as she rushes across the room and up a small flight of stairs into...

7A INT. EMMANUEL EPISCOPAL CHURCH - OFFICES - MORNING 7A

The church offices. She checks the phone for messages and turns on a desktop computer.

JUDY (CONT'D)

(calling to Anthony)

Has anyone called?

ANTHONY

(calling back)

No.

JUDY

Kendra?

ANTHONY

No. No one.

(CONTINUED)

7A CONTINUED:

7A

JUDY

Okay, good.

Judy crosses back to the basement.

7B INT. EMMANUEL EPISCOPAL CHURCH - BASEMENT - MORNING

7B

Stopping on the stairs, Judy takes a deep breath.

JUDY

My son had a game this morning but he wanted me to wait till his dad got there, then I got stuck in traffic on the way back... Or some accident...

ANTHONY

You got in an accident?

JUDY

No I got... stuck in the traffic of an accident.

(noticing the dishes)

What are you doing?

ANTHONY

Dishes.

JUDY

Okay. Will you help me set up?

ANTHONY

What do we need to set up?

JUDY

The room for the meeting.

(then)

Why are you doing dishes?

ANTHONY

No one cleaned up from this morning.

JUDY

Oh, I'm sorry...

ANTHONY

We got to tell them to clean up after themselves...

JUDY

We did. Was this AA?

(CONTINUED)

ANTHONY

No Al-Anon. AA clean up after themselves.

JUDY

Just leave it for now, okay? I want it all set up when Kendra gets here.

He stops and dries his hands. He leaves the kitchen and makes his way across the basement, brushing past Judy on his way up the stairs.

JUDY

Thank you...

It's a light filled room with an assortment of furniture including a wooden table and chairs placed against a wall featuring the artwork of Sunday School students.

Judy and Anthony enter, turn on the overhead lights, and survey the room.

JUDY

Here... let's pull the table out.

They lift the table and waddle it to the center of the room. Anthony waits for Judy.

JUDY (CONT'D)

Thinking. It's so... exposed.

ANTHONY

Table cloth?

JUDY

Definitely not. It shouldn't be so formal.

ANTHONY

This looks pretty informal to me.

JUDY

Let's grab some chairs. I don't want it to look so prepared for them, you know?

She goes to grab two chairs. He follows.

ANTHONY

Then why are we preparing it for them?

JUDY

Because they asked for the space. It's part of our service.

(remembering)

"Unobserved!" That's what Kendra said. "Unobserved." I think... She had all these requests.

(then)

I just don't want them to feel like we've thought too much about it.

ANTHONY

Little do they know...

Judy looks at the table, suddenly concerned he might be right. In the office, a phone rings.

JUDY

Oh dear... That must be her.

9 EXT. EMMANUEL EPISCOPAL CHURCH - STREET - MORNING

9

KENDRA (early 30's, dressed sharply) closes the door of a rental car. Judy and Anthony walk over from the church to welcome her.

JUDY

Hi!

KENDRA

Good morning. Are you Judy?

JUDY

Yes! I'm Judy! Are you Kendra?

KENDRA

Kendra Carter, pleasure.

*

JUDY

So nice to meet you! I mean, I thought I recognized your voice, but I didn't want to presume... I recognized your voice...

KENDRA

That's okay.

(CONTINUED)

JUDY

And that's okay! Thank you for coming.

Judy goes in for a mildly reciprocated hug.

JUDY

How was your flight?

KENDRA

It was fine.

JUDY

Good.

(beat)

Oh, this is Anthony! I'm sorry.

KENDRA

Nice to meet you.

Kendra shakes Anthony's hand.

JUDY

I think you two have spoken...

KENDRA

Yes. Thank you both for your help.

(looks around)

It's a... very nice church.

JUDY

Oh, thank you. You want to see inside?

(Kendra hesitates)

Yeah, sure, we have a minute. Get out of the cold...

*

Kendra politely follows them inside the church.

Now the piano teacher plays. Another familiar tune, but this one without mistakes. The student watches.

Judy, Anthony, and Kendra enter from the street. Judy stops to allow Kendra a moment to take in the space.

KENDRA

(obligated)

It's nice.

JUDY

Thank you. We think so. Most people drive north to St. Thomas these days, but... we still find plenty to do.

*
*

KENDRA

Where will they be meeting?

JUDY

Oh. Sorry...

KENDRA

I don't mean to be rude, I just...

JUDY

No, it's okay. Good question. Downstairs. Just follow me here.

Judy leads them down the stairs.

Judy, Anthony, and Kendra enter the basement from the church stairwell. The piano can be heard from above. Judy leads them through the basement to the offices.

JUDY

We hold most meetings in here, but Charlotte thought they should have more privacy, so we'll put them in back.

*
*

KENDRA

If you think it's best.

JUDY

Yeah, I think so...
(as if it's a deal)
I mean, it's much nicer. Lots of light.

KENDRA

And Linda approved?

*

JUDY

Oh, well, I haven't actually met Linda before. She's not um... a parishioner.

*

KENDRA

But she's seen it?

11 CONTINUED:

11

JUDY

I assume so, she and Charlotte
have met here privately a few
times, so...

They head up the stairs and into the offices.

11A INT. EMMANUEL EPISCOPAL CHURCH - OFFICES - MORNING

11A

The three of them turn the corner and head back to the
parish hall. Kendra lingers for a moment.

KENDRA

Will we hear the music back here?

Judy and Anthony stop to consider.

JUDY

Oh shoot. Will that be a problem?

KENDRA

It might be can they stop?

JUDY

They're having lessons today...

ANTHONY

Can't we just close the doors?

KENDRA

I just don't want it to be a
distraction.

JUDY

Of course, we'll talk to them.
(back to the room)
You want to see back here?

KENDRA

Thank you.

They head back to the parish hall.

12 INT. EMMANUEL EPISCOPAL CHURCH - PARISH HALL

12

Judy, again, gives Kendra a chance to take in the space.

JUDY

(re: the room)
What do you think?

(CONTINUED)

KENDRA
 (still on the music)
 It's better back here.

JUDY
 Oh right...

Kendra moves to the table. She rearranges the chairs so that there are two on either side facing each other. *
 *

KENDRA
 I was told no one would be in the building is all.

JUDY
 Oh, I'm sorry. Well they normally practice in here but we moved them up to the church...

KENDRA
 Okay, will anyone else be here?

ANTHONY
 The choir's rehearsing for tomorrow.

JUDY
 Oh right... sorry I put the chairs that way... *
 *

KENDRA
 It's fine. They rehearse up in the church though? *
 *
 (Anthony nods)
 That should be fine.

JUDY
 (still saddened by the chairs) *
 *
 I'm sorry, we're all a little disorganized with Charlotte leaving on short notice.

KENDRA
 Yeah, I'm sorry I won't meet her, she said her mother was sick? *

JUDY
 Yes, it's so sad, she has um... early Alzheimers...? *

ANTHONY
 Dementia.

JUDY

Okay, yeah, and um... it's just awful. She started calling here this week, Charlotte's mom, asking for her husband. He passed over ten years ago.

*
*

KENDRA

Oh god.

*

JUDY

I know, right? I mean looking for your dead husband? It's scary.

*

ANTHONY

It'd be scary if she found him.

JUDY

(beat)

Anthony, will you go grab some of the snacks I brought? They're downstairs. Maybe lay them out on the far table?

*
*
*
*

Anthony leaves them alone to get the groceries. Judy mouths "sorry" to Kendra who doesn't seem to mind.

JUDY (CONT'D)

(hopeful)

But the room's okay?

*

KENDRA

I think so...

Kendra starts to look around, inspecting the room.

JUDY

We got some water and bagels.

(remembering)

Oh coffee! I'll brew some coffee.

*

KENDRA

That would be nice.

JUDY

And sorry about the chairs but, how's the table?

*
*

KENDRA

The table?

JUDY

Placement? The placement?

KENDRA
(confused)
It's fine.

JUDY
(proud of herself)
Good. Yeah...

Anthony returns with the groceries.

JUDY
(to Anthony, proudly)
Table's good.

KENDRA
You have some tissue? Tissue
box...?

JUDY
Tissue! Yeah, of course. There
should be some right here... *

Judy crosses to a bookshelf. Anthony lays out food.

JUDY
Good thinking. Alright, we're
getting somewhere...

Judy finds a tissue box. Kendra checks her phone.

ANTHONY
How many people are coming again?

JUDY
Um... why?

KENDRA
There'll be four of them.

ANTHONY
You got like lot of food.

KENDRA
Yeah, I don't think they'll be
eating...

JUDY
Oh, really? I just thought...

Anthony raises a large serving container.

ANTHONY
What is this?

JUDY

(maybe a lie)

That's my lunch... Charlotte said to have food.

KENDRA

And it's a nice thought, but I don't think we need to have all that out. We shouldn't.

JUDY

Okay, well, we'll save it.

*

ANTHONY

So how long have you worked with the families?

JUDY

Anthony...

KENDRA

That's okay. And just the one family, but... six years now.

ANTHONY

Oh wow...

JUDY

Oh wow...

JUDY (CONT'D)

So... were you... working with them before, or...

KENDRA

No. It's why we met.

JUDY

Oh.

ANTHONY

(beat)

Have they done this before?

JUDY

Anthony. That's none of our business.

(getting rid of him)

You want to start printing out for tomorrow?

ANTHONY

I did.

JUDY

Okay, have you folded?

Anthony hasn't. He goes to leave then stops at the door.

ANTHONY

Are we going to ring the bell?

Judy isn't sure. She looks at Kendra.

KENDRA

What time do you do that?

JUDY

We always ring the bell at noon.

KENDRA

(not ideal timing)

That's up to you.

*
*

Anthony leaves. Judy crosses back to the table with a box of tissue.

*

JUDY (CONT'D)

I'm sorry about him.

KENDRA

He's fine.

JUDY

We thought about giving him the day off, but his family... they want him busy.

KENDRA

You don't need to explain.

JUDY

Okay. That's good of you.

(then)

God knows he's not your typical church employee. Then again we are Episcopalian...

(laughs)

Sorry. Christian humor.

Judy places the tissues in the center of the table.

KENDRA

Don't put it in the center.

(off her look)

It's freaky. Put it on the side or maybe...

(MORE)

KENDRA (CONT'D)

(re: the counter)

Back where it was. So they see
it, but not... you know?

JUDY

Oh, okay... sorry.

As Judy puts the tissues away. Kendra pays closer
attention to the artwork in the room - children's art.
In particular, FAUX STAINED GLASS TISSUE PAPER HANGINGS
by the windows.

JUDY (CONT'D)

So where will you be during all of
this? With them?

KENDRA

(still looking)

No. They agreed to be alone.

JUDY

Okay, do you want to wait with us?
We got lots of space. Great wifi.

KENDRA

I actually have some calls to make
so I'll probably work from my car.

JUDY

Oh no, that's sad, stay with us.
Use Charlotte's office.

KENDRA

Okay, we'll figure it out...

(the hangings)

Um... what are these?

JUDY

Oh, aren't those great. That was
a school project. They're
supposed to be, you know, stained
glass...

(then, sensing)

Is something wrong...

Kendra looks at the rest of the artwork around the room,
framed and mounted to the walls. Judy follows her eyes.

JUDY (CONT'D)

(realizing)

Oh...

Rev. mm/dd/yy (Blue)

12 CONTINUED: (7) 15. 12

KENDRA
(beat, then) *
It's fine. I'm going to step out
and make a call, okay?

JUDY *
Okay, sure, yeah... take your *
time. *

Kendra leaves. Judy's left alone, staring sadly at the paper hangings.

13 EXT. EMMANUEL EPISCOPAL CHURCH - STREET - MORNING 13

The SUV from earlier comes to a stop at the church intersection.

14 INT. THE PERRY'S SUV - MORNING 14

JAY and GAIL PERRY (50's) look nervously at the church.

JAY
That must be it...

Gail's eyes are hard, her body unmoving.

GAIL
Keep driving...

JAY
What?

GAIL
Just... keep driving. Not right
now. Not ready yet...

JAY
Where should we go? I don't know
where we are...

GAIL
Anywhere. Just keep driving.
(more urgent)
Just go that way somewhere and
pull over. Just go...

JAY
Okay. Okay.

He drives off, away from the church.

15 EXT. EMMANUEL EPISCOPAL CHURCH - STREET 15

Kendra exits from the office onto the street. Up the road, the SUV drives away. Kendra makes a phone call as she heads towards her car.

KENDRA

Hi Linda... No problem, I'm here.
Take your time.... You spoke with
the reverend? Good. I know she's
sorry to miss you... Well, I've
met the others filling in, yeah.
They're fine. You don't have to
meet them if you don't want...
We'll figure it out.

*
*

Kendra opens the car door and grabs her briefcase.

KENDRA

How are you feeling? It's okay
to be nervous. You're showing up.
How's Richard? Okay. And he's
staying with you? I think that's
nice, Linda. I do. Alright. And
you're walking over now? Okay.
Well, it'll be good to see you
two... Yeah. See you soon.

*

She hangs up, takes a deep breath, and looks around at the mountains surrounding her.

16 OMIT 16*

17 INT. THE PERRY'S SUV - MORNING 17

The SUV is parked at a dirt turn out by a wooden fence that borders a meadow and mountains.

*
*

GAIL

Where the hell are we...?

Across the road, Jay notices a part of the fence is broken. Yellow tape tries to pieces together what's missing, as if some accident happened there.

He turns back to Gail.

JAY

How you doing?

(CONTINUED)

Gail avoids eye contact. She doesn't look well.

JAY (CONT'D)

Honey...

Gail shakes her head.

GAIL

I don't know...

JAY

Okay...

GAIL

No. I don't think I can... I don't think I can do it.

JAY

(pause, considering)

Well. We don't have to, I guess. We can go. We can leave right now if you want. *

GAIL

No, I mean... I don't think I can say it.

JAY

(understanding)

Oh, okay...

(beat)

You don't have to. We can hear what they say, right? But you don't have to do it. *

Gail nods weakly, struggling. Jay looks back across the road, something about the landscape haunts him.

GAIL

If I don't...?

(turning to him)

Would you?

She looks at him now, expectantly. Jay is torn.

GAIL (CONT'D)

I'm sorry. That's not fair.

JAY

It's okay. I don't... No, I wouldn't. *

(beat, an option)

But we can.

17 CONTINUED: (2)

17

He shrugs, almost sweetly, trying to make the best of this.

JAY

(softly)

Are you ready to go back?

Like it's the hardest question she's ever been asked.

GAIL

Okay...

18 EXT. SECLUDED STREET - THE PERRY'S SUV - MORNING 18

The SUV pulls away. The yellow tape blows in the wind.

19 EXT. EMMANUEL EPISCOPAL CHURCH - MORNING 19

The piano music has stopped. Kendra is back inside. The church and street appear to wait in anticipatory silence.

20 INT. EMMANUEL EPISCOPAL CHURCH - PARISH HALL - MORNING 20

The room is empty but prepared, water bottles and tissue placed. The coffee finishes brewing with a soft alarm.

21 INT. EMMANUEL EPISCOPAL CHURCH - OFFICES - MORNING 21

Kendra works in Charlotte's office on her computer. Anthony folds leaflets for Sunday Mass.

Judy enters from the parish hall having tidied up last minute things. As she enters the office she notices the SUV pulling up outside the church.

JUDY

Oh dear...

22 EXT. EMMANUEL EPISCOPAL CHURCH - FRONT ENTRANCE - MORNING 22

Jay and Gail exit their car. They wait for one another and then slowly make their way to the office door.

Gail stops to take in a little garden beside the entrance.

KENDRA (O.C.)

Mr. and Mrs. Perry?

(CONTINUED)

22 CONTINUED:

22

JAY (O.C.)

Hi... yeah, Jay Perry... My wife,
Gail. Are you Kendra?

KENDRA (O.C.)

Yes. So nice to meet you in
person. Come on in...

JAY (O.C.)

Gail...?

Gail turns back and heads inside the church.

23 INT. EMMANUEL EPISCOPAL CHURCH - OFFICES

23

Gail and Jay have met everyone, but still stand
uncomfortably by the door.

*

JAY

Thank you for providing the space.

JUDY

Of course. We're so happy to
help...

*

KENDRA

We have you all set up back here.

*

*

JUDY

Yeah, there's food and water,
coffee. Do you all want
something?

*

*

JAY

(to Gail)

I think we're good for now, right?

GAIL

I'm fine.

JUDY

Okay. Anything you need, you
know, you just... let us know.
Make yourselves at home.

KENDRA

That's right. Thank you, Judy.

JAY

Yeah, thank you.

*

*

(CONTINUED)

JUDY

Sure...

(not taking her cue)

Would you like me to show you the space?

Jay and Gail look to Kendra for further instructions.

KENDRA

I'll show them.

JUDY

Okay...

(taking her cue)

Well, it was nice meeting you.
We'll be here if you need anything.

JAY

Nice meeting you...

JUDY

You too...

ANTHONY

Nice meeting you.

KENDRA

You can follow me.

Kendra leads the Perry's back to the parish hall, leaving Judy and Anthony behind.

Kendra walks Jay and Gail into the room. Now in Judy's role she let's them take in the space.

KENDRA

Is the room okay for you?

JAY

Yeah, it's fine, thanks.

KENDRA

Good. I'm sorry you'll miss the reverend but we're in good hands here. They've been very nice.

(they don't care)

Well, I know we've gotten your signatures on everything and you're all squared away as far as our offices are concerned, but while it's just the three of us is there anything you'd like to ask me?

24

CONTINUED:

24

JAY

I think we're okay.

GAIL

Will they be here soon?

KENDRA

I just spoke with them, and they should be here any minute.

GAIL

Oh.

KENDRA

I can check again. Will you be okay if I leave you alone for a minute?

JAY

Yeah, I think so, yeah, please, go ahead...

KENDRA

I'll be right back.

She leaves the parish hall. Jay and Gail stay standing, afraid to commit to anything beyond that. Jay watches his wife. She cautiously studies the room.

25

EXT. EMMANUEL EPISCOPAL CHURCH

25*

Judy and Anthony sit quietly in the pews.

*

26

EXT. EMMANUEL EPISCOPAL CHURCH - FRONT ENTRANCE - MORNING

26

Kendra stands on the sidewalk, waiting. It looks as if she just wanted to be alone, or away from the Perry's. After a moment her phone buzzes and she answers it.

KENDRA

Hi. I'm outside. Oh...
 (turns up the street)
 I see you...

27

OMIT

27

28

INT. EMMANUEL EPISCOPAL CHURCH - PARISH HALL - MORNING

28

Jay and Gail are as we left them. Waiting.

(CONTINUED)

KENDRA (O.S.)

We're right in here...

Kendra enters with RICHARD and LINDA (50's). Linda carries a small flower display. They have a ghostly quality. A kind of expectation to be disliked precedes them. *

RICHARD

Hello.

KENDRA

Richard, Linda, this is Jay and Gail Perry. *

JAY

Hi...

(to Kendra)

We've met before actually.

KENDRA

Of course, I'm sorry.

JAY

That's alright. It was... a long time ago.

RICHARD

It's nice to meet you again.

LINDA

How are you?

JAY

Fine, thank you.

They greet each other without touching.

KENDRA

I hope this room is comfortable for you all.

RICHARD

Have you been waiting long?

JAY

No, we just got here, haven't even sat down...

(the room)

Is this okay with you guys?

RICHARD

It's fine.

CONTINUED: (2)

He looks at Linda.

LINDA

Yes, I thought so...

*

JAY

Gail...?

GAIL

I'm okay.

KENDRA

Okay, good.

Linda raises the flowers towards Gail.

LINDA

(unsure of herself)

I brought these. For you.

GAIL

Oh...

LINDA

I'm sorry...

*

GAIL

No. They're...

LINDA

Small...

GAIL

(not taking them)

No. Thank you. They're... very nice.

Linda cradles the flowers again, embarrassed.

RICHARD

Should we sit?

JAY

Yeah, let's have a seat.

The couples take a seat at the table. Linda places the flowers down in front of her.

Kendra pulls up a chair to sit with the couples.

*

(CONTINUED)

KENDRA

Alright...
(to the Perry's)
We've spoken.]

JAY

I think we're set, yeah...

KENDRA

We are, yes.
(to the group)
Well, I'm really grateful to
finally see you all together. May
I say that? And I hope, we all
feel this was the right thing to
do once we've left here today. Is
that okay?

RICHARD

Yes.

JAY

Thank you, Kendra.

KENDRA

Alright. I'll leave you alone
then, but if you need anything,
let me know.

(to Richard and
Linda)

I'll be staying right in there.
(to the Perry's)
Nice meeting you both.

*
*

JAY

You too.

She exits to the offices. Her absence, and the silence
that comes with it, is devastating.

Gail inspects the flowers.

GAIL

These are nice.

LINDA

(still embarrassed)
Oh, thank you. They... caught my
eye I wanted to bring something.

Jay smiles tightly, not sure what to make of them. Gail
spins them around and then places them out of her way.

(CONTINUED)

LINDA

I can take them...

Linda places the flowers out of the way.

RICHARD

(pushing forward)

How was your... trip out here...? *

JAY

Drive? We drove. It was fine.

(to Richard) *

Did you...? Or...? *

RICHARD *

I flew in last night. I'm staying
with Linda. *

JAY *

Right, okay... *

Richard and Linda's separation creates some awkwardness
for the four of them. Linda pushes on.

LINDA

Will you be driving back or...?

JAY

We're not sure. We have a room, a
hotel arranged, but we may not...

LINDA

Head back?

JAY

Want to stay, yeah, right. But...
Thank you for agreeing to meet us.
And together.

LINDA

You're welcome. I appreciate
you...

She looks to Richard, him having made a trip also.

LINDA

All of you, making the journey. I
know I'm not easy to get to...

RICHARD

We're happy to come to you, Linda.

(CONTINUED)

JAY

Yes. I mean, it wasn't easy...
for any of us, I'm sure, to be
here. No matter where...

LINDA

Thank you.

JAY

Yeah. And I know... we regret
some things we've said.

LINDA

Don't be. Regretful.

RICHARD

We wish we didn't have to rely so
much on our attorneys, but...

JAY

I understand better now than I
did.

RICHARD

We've already given so much, at
this point it's really to protect
our son.

The Perry's shift slightly at the mention of a "son."
Richard clarifies.

RICHARD (CONT'D)

Stephen.

JAY

Yeah. How is he...?

RICHARD

He's doing well, thank you for
asking. They're in Maryland now.
Not far from me. They have a boy
on the way.

JAY

Oh, that's great...

LINDA

Thank you.

(beat)

And how is your daughter? Sophie?

GAIL

Yes.

(CONTINUED)

JAY

She's...

GAIL

She's doing fine.

JAY

Yeah... Much better. She's made real progress in the last year. She says she's ready to apply for schools. College.

LINDA

That's wonderful...

JAY

For the fall.

RICHARD

That's great.

JAY

Thank you. Yeah.

More silence. This is hard. Jay looks at Gail for some support, she's staying silent.

JAY (CONT'D)

Do we have...?

(to Richard and
Linda)

Did you all bring photos?

LINDA

Yes...

JAY

I know we talked about sharing some... Gail? You want to...?

RICHARD

Alright. Linda, you...?

LINDA

I brought some other things as well.

JAY

Oh yeah, that's right, Kendra told us you might.

LINDA

Okay, good.

(CONTINUED)

JAY

(beat)
Well, should we...?
(off Gail)
Or do you want to wait?

GAIL

I'm okay. We agreed. Here.

Gail searches her purse for photographs.

GAIL (CONT'D)

(offers one photo)
Here's Sophie.

LINDA

(taking it)
Oh. She's beautiful.

RICHARD

(glancing over)
She's a young lady now.

JAY

Yeah. She's grown up a lot.

GAIL

(more photos)
Here are some of...

Gail stops, unable to go through with it.

LINDA

I'd like to see them.

GAIL

Okay.

Even if they agreed to it, this is hard.

GAIL (CONT'D)

This is Evan. When he was
three...

Gail hands over a worn photograph. Linda takes it respectfully. She and Richard look at it somberly.

LINDA

Oh dear...

RICHARD

What's he got there?

(CONTINUED)

LINDA

So sweet...

JAY

(looking)

Oh that was this roller toy, with
the balls that bounce... Or pop?
They popped, right?

RICHARD

I remember those.

JAY

(to Gail)

Where's the catcher, the catcher
outfit?

GAIL

(he's asked before)

It's here. We brought it...

(producing a photo)

Here. I think he was twelve.
Little league...

JAY

Love that photo...

Linda smiles sadly at the boy in the picture.

RICHARD

He was a good athlete, wasn't he?

JAY

He was, he was... loved sports. I
mean, he... had lots of interests,
but, yes he was a very good
athlete.

(then)

He actually didn't want to play
catcher, but then loved the gear
so...

Jay laughs, then stops, uncomfortable sharing.

JAY (CONT'D)

(back to Gail)

Do we have one of all of us?

GAIL

(her mood is
darkening)

Of course. Lots.

(CONTINUED)

She sorts through her collection.

JAY

Okay.

(to the others)

We had to print some out. Don't have many real photographs anymore, you know?

LINDA

Yes.

JAY

It's nice to hold them, you know, not...?

He lazily motions swiping a phone.

LINDA

It is.

Gail slides a photo across the table.

GAIL

This was us...

JAY

Oh that's...

GAIL

The last Christmas...

JAY

Yeah... okay.

Richard and Linda look at the photo.

JAY (CONT'D)

We'd dress up. Cheesy, right? That's what we'd say. Instead of "cheese." "Cheesy..." Kids thought these were, you know... silly.

Linda cries. She isn't consoled. It's as if they all expected this.

LINDA

I'm sorry...

RICHARD

Don't be.

(CONTINUED)

JAY

Yeah...

GAIL

(taking the photo
back)

Here.

JAY

Maybe we should...

LINDA

No, I'm sorry...

RICHARD

It's fine, Linda.

LINDA

No, I wanted to share too...

RICHARD

Okay.

LINDA

I wanted to share ours, but...

JAY

It's hard.

LINDA

It is...

JAY

(beat, aside to Gail)
How are you doing?
(off her silence)
Maybe later?

Gail doesn't look well. She gets up from the table. The others react, but she only grabs the tissue box from the book shelf and gives it to Linda.

LINDA

Thank you.
(wiping, then)
If I could just show you...

RICHARD

We don't have to.

LINDA

No...

(CONTINUED)

RICHARD

Maybe it wasn't a good idea.

LINDA

No, I want to.

(to the Perry's)

I brought something. It was
easier to... Not a photo if...
Is that okay?

JAY

Yeah, sure, you said. Right?

LINDA

Gail?

(she nods)

Okay...

Linda pulls out a mason jar filled with colored paper cut
outs, like little origami animals.

LINDA (CONT'D)

So this is...

JAY

Oh wow...

LINDA

Yes. Something he used to carry
around all the time...

RICHARD

Couple of years...

LINDA

When he was in fourth and fifth
grade...?

RICHARD

Younger than that...

JAY

Okay. What am I looking at?

LINDA

Well, he used to love collecting
snails...

JAY

Really...

LINDA

And he would...

(CONTINUED)

RICHARD

All kinds of things... bugs,
spiders, things outside...

LINDA

Yes, that's true... he loved
collecting things outside.
(taking over)
But snails...

RICHARD

Yes.

LINDA

He was just really fascinated by
snails. And he'd collect them in
this jar and carry them around
wherever he went. To school even,
which caused problems...

RICHARD

The teachers didn't want... there
was a rule.

LINDA

You weren't supposed to have
animals in class, but they weren't
really...

JAY

(helping)
Sure, yeah...

LINDA

And kids thought it was weird,
but...

RICHARD

It was, a little.

LINDA

He just loved them. But, yes,
kids thought it was...
(conceding)
And they were messy...

RICHARD

Stephen would, his brother,
would... torment them... various
ways...

(CONTINUED)

LINDA

There were problems with keeping them this way, and he would get so upset. When snails... break it's...

(brightening)

So one day. He showed up with this...

She holds the jar up proudly for the Perry's to see, displaying the objects inside more clearly.

RICHARD

Paper snails.

LINDA

(a rare laugh)

Paper snails, yes. And some leaves and a flower. And I think that's a rock. It's a garden. For the snails. And he said, "This way, they won't die." And... I think it's... we thought it was so... clever.

JAY

That is... yeah...

LINDA

Or sweet.

JAY

(smiles tightly,
shaking his head)

God...

LINDA

I thought it was...

(then)

Well, at the time I had some concerns...

GAIL

You did?

LINDA

Not like... only about his sensitivity. Really I was just happy for him to....

RICHARD

Find a solution. He was always determined to find a solution.

(CONTINUED)

LINDA

Yes. I was happy that he was.

They fall silent for a beat, staring at the jar. Linda, a little ashamed, puts it away.

LINDA (CONT'D)

Well, thank you...

JAY

No, thank you for sharing.

LINDA

I wanted to... show you something.

She looks to Richard for support. He nods.

LINDA (CONT'D)

(changing the
subject)

So your daughter? She's doing
well?

GAIL

She's doing well. Yes.

JAY

Yeah... she's going to be fine.
She's so much more social,
sociable now, it's...

(to Gail, laughs)

We miss her now. She's going out
too much...

LINDA

That's nice.

GAIL

She's dating.

JAY

Well, I don't know...

GAIL

(definitive)

She's dating.

JAY

Okay.

(then)

She's really been herself again.

(CONTINUED)

LINDA

Good.

GAIL

She's made a lot of progress.

LINDA

That's wonderful.

RICHARD

(beat, to Gail)

You mentioned, to Linda, you had made some progress yourself?

(to Linda)

In your letters? A therapist?

LINDA

Oh, that's right, I'm sorry, I told him...

RICHARD

(reassuring)

She just mentioned...

LINDA

You said you've found someone who's been...

GAIL

Yes, she's been very helpful. That's right.

LINDA

That's good.

GAIL

Yes... She was, is, a big reason we're here...

JAY

I see her as well...

LINDA

Oh...

GAIL

To meet. This way. Or to talk.

LINDA

Okay. You both see her?

JAY

Well we...

(CONTINUED)

Jay and Gail look at one another, unsure of how much to divulge and not in total agreement about it either.

GAIL

We do.

JAY

Yes, um... we've... it doesn't matter. Yeah, she really encouraged us to just express ourselves, not interrogate.
(as if instructed)
We don't want to interrogate...

Richard and Linda nod, but know this is impossible.

JAY (CONT'D)

"Curious but not defensive."

GAIL

(to Jay)
"Vindictive."

JAY

What?

GAIL

She said "vindictive."

JAY

I thought "defensive..."

GAIL

(quietly, explaining)
No. If we are vindictive then...

JAY

(remembering)
Oh, right.
(shrugs)
Sorry.
(then)
It doesn't matter, we aren't here to attack. We've promised that. But we've meant everything...
(correcting himself)
I mean, we've *felt* everything we've said. We can't apologize for our feelings.

RICHARD

Thank you for your honesty.

(CONTINUED)

GAIL

We want to listen, and... we want
to heal.

*
*

RICHARD

(a short pause)
Of course.

*

LINDA

(to Gail)
You know, your letters... while
they've been very... difficult for
all of us, I'm sure, they've meant
so much to me. Even the hard
ones. I really... appreciate
them.

*

RICHARD

(off their silence)
We can tell you've done a lot of
work. Continue to.
(then)
And I don't mean what you've done
publicly. But it is admirable.
How you put yourself out there.
We've actually, Linda and I, have
followed your work over the years.

LINDA

Everyone's...

RICHARD

Yes, everyone's, but...

JAY

Oh, well... I don't know. Thank
you. I don't get pleasure from
it.

RICHARD

It can be defeating. That kind of
activism.

JAY

Yeah, it can, but... I don't even
like that word. I'm a... I
wouldn't know what else to do.

RICHARD

Your persistence is admirable.

Gail gives Jay a pointed look. He feels it.

(CONTINUED)

JAY

Thank you, but I'm not sure that's
what we need to talk about today.

Richard notices but continues anyway.

RICHARD

I don't think it's not relevant.
You don't think, as a country,
we're meeting our obligations.

JAY

Well, that was... I was quoting
Obama, but no, I don't. I think
we're killing each other. We are.

RICHARD

(beat)
I don't disagree. There's just so
many factors...

JAY

Okay...

RICHARD

It's hard to know...

JAY

And I'm not saying it's one or the
other, see that's...
(looks to Gail)
Sorry...

GAIL

Go ahead...

JAY

I'm sorry...
(to Richard and
Linda)
I promised I wouldn't talk about
this today.

RICHARD

We don't have to.

LINDA

No.

JAY

(beat, can't help it)
I'm not saying it's one or the
other.

(MORE)

(CONTINUED)

JAY (CONT'D)

That's their defense, it's a fallacy. It's a distraction. "Don't look over here by guns, it's over there my mental health." As if we can't address both? It's insulting.

RICHARD

Well exactly, yes, we can, but if your child...

(regretting the word)

If your child wanted to hurt himself, would you only remove the dangerous items in your home? No. You'd want to help him. You'd want to know why he was upset and you'd want to change that...

JAY

Are the dangerous items things nobody needs?

RICHARD

I guess my point is, I worry that certain legislation is its own distraction.

JAY

It's fetishistic at this point. In today's world. It's a fetish.

GAIL

Okay, Jay...

JAY

Alright, sorry. I'm done. That's it. I'm done.

LINDA

It's alright. I think we need to be able to listen to each other. We don't seem to anymore, do we?

(then)

I wish we were having more of a conversation.

JAY

Yeah, well...

LINDA

Or at least, I'm sorry, we might be able to hear who is asking for help.

*
*
*
*
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*
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*
*

JAY

Not everyone knows how to ask for help. Or wants to.

*
*

LINDA

That's true. But you know, there's a crisis center, not far from here. I've thought about volunteering, and when you walk in, anyone, you're asked to check in. Anxiety, fear, sadness... and they do this every day. I thought... how could you not be honest?

*
*
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JAY

I can't imagine giving a kid a chart every day.

RICHARD

What about mental health examinations alongside yearly physicals? You see your health physician, why not see a mental health expert as well.

JAY

Mandatory brain scans...

RICHARD

Why not? Most people in this country can't distinguish mental health from mental illness.

JAY

Who's paying for all this?

(then)

Sorry. Look, I agree, we need to change how it's monitored. We've politicized threats so much we don't have resources where we need them...

GAIL

(sotto)

Why are we talking about this...?

JAY

Sorry...?

GAIL

Why are we talking about this? I
didn't come here to listen to
this.

JAY

Okay... I'm sorry...

RICHARD

I didn't mean to offend.

(then)

I think we find through blame our
means to change, and I want to
question that. I want to look at
everything. Because I blame
myself but I can't change that.

The Perry's react to this seeming admission.

GAIL

What do you mean? When you say
that... What do you mean?

RICHARD

That I can't change what I've
done.

GAIL

So you blame yourself?
(no response)
I'm asking. You blame yourself?

*
*

JAY

Hey...

GAIL

(trying restraint)

No. I want to know. I don't want
to talk about... fucking politics.
I want to know.

JAY

(control)

I know, but we don't want to
interrogate, right?

GAIL

I can imagine it's so hard to live
with his actions...

RICHARD

It is.

(CONTINUED)

GAIL

But *our* loss...

(control)

Please tell me what you mean by that.

RICHARD

I think, all of us, would give our lives to prevent another tragedy like it. I would.

LINDA

I would too.

GAIL

Yes.

JAY

(keeping the peace)

We all would. Gladly.

GAIL

But when you talk about blame, on your part, I'd like to know what you're referring to.

RICHARD

There's nothing that wasn't covered in the depositions.

GAIL

But I want to hear it *now*. We never filed against you, we never took part in that...

JAY

Maybe a better way, so as not to interrogate, we can learn by what we remember? Right?

GAIL

Fine. Tell me what you remember... Tell me about your son.

LINDA

What would you like to know?

GAIL

Everything. I want to know everything.

(CONTINUED)

RICHARD

Why?

GAIL

Why? Why do I want to know about
your son? Because he killed mine.

This stops the four of them cold.

LINDA

(beat, kindly)

How far back would you like to go?

GAIL

Wherever you need.

LINDA

(mother to mother)

Because... I can tell you
everything, but there's still so
much no one will ever know.

Gail, understanding, nods.

LINDA

And there's so much no one will
ever know.

(she thinks)

He was shy. Always. Even as a
baby. We watched him. But I
never worried. I saw things no
one else did. But he was shy. He
didn't play well with others. Not
that he was mean, he just...
didn't seem to know how to.

(then, brighter)

Once he was a little older he
would only want to be outside. He
loved the outdoors...

GAIL

I know this.

JAY

Gail...

GAIL

No, I know that. He was shy, he
loved animals... I read
everything.

(CONTINUED)

LINDA

I don't know what you want me to say.

GAIL

What did worry you? You said you never worried, but what scared you?

LINDA

My son didn't scare me as a child.
(then)
The photographs I have. The ones we don't want to look at. They're of a boy. That's all you'll see.

GAIL

I don't need to see him. Okay?

JAY

(to Gail, quiet)
That's not why we...

GAIL

(to Jay)
I don't need to see him.

Jay nods, choosing solidarity.

GAIL (CONT'D)

(back to Linda)
What changed? I want to know. When he's thirteen he starts going online, or he starts that gaming profile, the account...

RICHARD

They were not violent games then...

GAIL

I know, but that was...

LINDA

They were fantasy games, role play...

GAIL

(let's not go there)
I know. But it was the same account he used later, so...

(recovering)
I'm asking, what changed?
(MORE)

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED: (25)

GAIL (CONT'D)

There's this boy who plays outside, who supposedly loves nature, but now he's indoors all day online. What changed?

Linda and Richard share a look.

LINDA

That's very hard to answer.

GAIL

Please try.

RICHARD

There isn't just one thing...

GAIL

Then tell me more than one.

JAY

Gail, please. Let's not do it this way.

Gail looks at her husband, then down. She takes a deep breath. *

GAIL

I'm sorry. You're right. We're not interrogating. *

LINDA

What are you doing? I say that as compassionately as I can. What are we doing? You say you want to heal? We all do. Is this how? *

Gail stares at Linda unsure. Jay tries to help her. *

JAY

We want to know why... how this happened? Right? I mean, I...

Jay chooses his words carefully. *

JAY

We want to hear that. We need your help with that.

LINDA

I'm willing to help.

(waits, then) *

We moved. You asked what changed? We moved.

(CONTINUED)

RICHARD

(this is sensitive)

We did, but, we can't be certain
which changes affected him most.

LINDA

The new school, or environment,
was hard for him.

RICHARD

Hayden... He didn't have close
friends growing up, as I'm sure
you know, but by middle school
that mattered more and it affected
him.

(then)

A lot of things changed around
that age. I had a new job,
Stephen was applying for colleges,
so we were looking at tuition
costs, private schools... We
moved.

LINDA

Our older house had more space...

RICHARD

(clarifying)

Outdoors. Where we moved to was
actually a bigger home...

LINDA

(a point of
contention)

Yes, that's true, but where we
were had a great back yard...

RICHARD

The new neighborhood was very nice
it was just more suburban.

LINDA

Plots. There wasn't the...
freedom he loved.

RICHARD

(to Linda)

But it was nice.

LINDA

It was, Richard.

(CONTINUED)

RICHARD

The new school was hard for him.
Seventh grade in particular,
bullying...

LINDA

It was very bad...

RICHARD

Yes. And the boys were a few
years apart so that Stephen, who
was really thriving in high
school, well, he didn't have a lot
to give Hayden at that time
unfortunately.

(then)

Sometimes I wish they had been
closer, closer in age, so they
could have shared friends...

(a loaded past)

We didn't plan to... or expect to
have another.

LINDA

(painful past)

We thought we might be too old,
but... we weren't.

(beat)

He was lonely, and I think missed
his... how things were. That's
when he started spending more time
on the computer.

(sincere)

But the games, we thought, were
creative... we encouraged them at
first. They let him make choices,
or... he got to be whatever he
wanted to be. And we could hear
him, playing with others. He'd
laugh... that made me...

(then)

And he did well, in school, which
was confusing, or... misleading.

RICHARD

He always had very good grades.
He was very smart.

GAIL

(without thinking)

I know...

(catching herself)

I'm sorry, I just...

(CONTINUED)

RICHARD

That's fine.

(then)

We had nothing to do with
publishing his grades or scores.
Any of that.

JAY

We know you didn't speak...

RICHARD

(hearing resentment)

I was only saying...

LINDA

We mistakenly thought his grades
were a sign that things were okay.

RICHARD

That's not all...

LINDA

We did, Richard. We thought
that's what mattered.

RICHARD

(beat, a defense)

He wasn't fitting in. That hurt.
But the grades made us look past
some of it.

JAY

Did the school say anything?

RICHARD

This was middle school not...

JAY

I know, I know, but...

LINDA

(some bitterness)

The school couldn't be bothered.
He was quiet with good grades, so
he didn't require attention.

(something she can't
let go of)

There was a math teacher though in
eighth grade...

RICHARD

Linda...

(CONTINUED)

LINDA

No. Hayden loved him. And... I don't know what their connection was, or why it was so great, but he made Hayden feel confident when... he didn't. I wish I would have...

(a missed opportunity)

When he was really struggling later on I tried to see if he could... talk to him. But he'd left for another school and I didn't... I gave up trying to reach him.

(catching herself)

I'm sorry...

GAIL

That's okay...

RICHARD

(trying to sum up)

He was teased because he had other interests, and I think that made him embarrassed to have those interests. I think he saw being different as a deficit. He did. But we didn't know or realize it until he showed signs of depression...

GAIL

He didn't strike you as sad before?

LINDA

He was quiet, but... no.

GAIL

Violent?

RICHARD

No. Not then. When we grew concerned we got help.

GAIL

When was that?

RICHARD

(not defensive)

His medical history was made public...

(CONTINUED)

GAIL

But was there something specifically?

RICHARD

No, it was his unwillingness to do things. Once Stephen left for college he became angry with our attention for him.

JAY

Why? What would be wrong with that?

LINDA

I think he resented our concern. He wouldn't even let us touch him.

GAIL

And that's when you got help?

LINDA

Eventually. He didn't want to...

RICHARD

He never did. But we finally forced him to see someone.

LINDA

I felt like we had no choice, but he would beg to stop. He pleaded with us to let him be normal. Or that he didn't need it anymore, or that... the sessions made him feel not...

GAIL

What?

LINDA

That they made him feel "not human."

GAIL

He said that?

The Perry's process this.

JAY

So what did the therapist say? I mean, to you.

(CONTINUED)

RICHARD

He needs to stop isolating, it's reinforcing his negative expectations. All the time online isn't enhancing his relationships it's making him lonelier.

GAIL

So you stopped? Or you let him stop going?

RICHARD

For a while. Then things would get worse or something would happen...

JAY

Like the pipe bomb?

RICHARD

And we'd go through it again... Yes. That certainly had consequences.

JAY

Consequences? Jesus...

RICHARD

At the time it did. He was arrested...

JAY

There was no consequence.

LINDA

I know how that sounds. But we were devastated. And we tried everything. But was the doctor good? Would they get the prescriptions right? Or take insurance? And of course, we'd pay anything but it was expensive.
(pleading)

I'm just saying, this was the reality of how it was, how defeating... and even with all the professional advice, it was really just us facing these choices alone... But we did try, over and over. You can see.

*

(CONTINUED)

RICHARD

(letting her rest)

It's true. There is no new information regarding his medical or criminal records. You have access to everything.

GAIL

Why didn't you say anything to the school? This was high school now right?

Richard and Linda look at one another. This was critical to the lawsuits.

RICHARD

We didn't have to.

LINDA

He had just started there. We didn't want it to reflect badly on him. *

GAIL

God... *

LINDA

I'm sorry... *

RICHARD

As long as he completed his program his record...

JAY

Jesus Christ. That program was a joke.

RICHARD

They missed things. We all did.

LINDA

But he was lying.

GAIL

Did you know that?

LINDA

I suspected he was holding things back. But I never could have believed...

(CONTINUED)

RICHARD

(protecting Linda)

I understand not speaking publicly
made us look like we had secrets.

GAIL

It's not secrets that I have
doubts about, or facts, it's...
knowing. A parent's intuition...
(at a loss)

It's your child. You feel it. It
should hurt you...

LINDA

It did. And we got him help.

RICHARD

Everything that happened
afterwards, the lawsuits, the
media, the hate that flooded into
our lives... never once did we
feel ready or prepared for any of
it. We just tried our best to
survive. In fact, many days,
dying ourselves seemed a better
alternative.

(to Gail)

Why not speak? Because I don't
have an answer. Why not help
prevent this from happening again?
Because I don't know how.

JAY

But you must have thought about...

RICHARD

Every interaction I ever had with
him. Yes. Just... understand
that until the civil statutes ran
out we were rarely given
permission to speak. Even our
apologies had to be worded. Linda
couldn't join a mother's support
group because they worried she'd
put the other women at risk.

GAIL

At risk?

RICHARD

Of being deposed.

GAIL

I didn't know that.

They fall silent, seeming to reach a dead end.

JAY

(remaining hopeful)

Well, look... I think much of what happened in the aftermath was wrong. We know now how many mistakes were made even from the beginning, just institutionally. We're all victims. It's why we never filed suit. Why we were happy to sign waivers for today. We..

(plainly)

We didn't want anything.

GAIL

(also plainly)

We wanted Evan back.

JAY

Yes. And that was impossible. And from what we could gather you didn't have answers, like you say, but...

RICHARD

In hindsight we would have done things differently. The authorities would have too.

(flat)

There was negligence. That was the basis of all the settlements.

*

JAY

But this is what I want to know. What do you regret? Where is your regret?

*

*

RICHARD

(confused, of course)

I regret everything. The worst imaginable outcome happened. Any change I might have made could have resulted in a different outcome. I regret everything.

JAY

(beat)

How can you be so matter of fact?

(CONTINUED)

RICHARD

How else can I be? *

JAY

No, no, the way you... the way you
can speak about it. We decided
against litigation, but it doesn't
mean we didn't, or we don't... *

(giving up)

Want to see you punished. I'm
sorry, but want to see you hurt.
Want to see...

RICHARD

Like everyone else?

JAY

Yes, like everyone else.

RICHARD

Like you?

JAY

Yes! Like me. Like us. Like my
daughter who doesn't sleep...

RICHARD

(waits)

Of course, we hurt.

JAY

Transparency. I think that is
what we want. I think we are owed
that. Today.

RICHARD

Then please ask what you need, but
that is exactly what you've been
given.

Jay pushes forward despite the feeling of going in
circles.

JAY

Alright... He made a pipe bomb, a
pipe bomb, and was arrested. He
had probation, or the *program*...

LINDA

I was scared.

Jay stops in his tracks.

(CONTINUED)

GAIL

What?

LINDA

Richard, we were scared. I was scared.

GAIL

You were...?

LINDA

I was.

RICHARD

I know. Linda, I... *

(trying transparency)

He told us before he had contemplated suicide, but only on this test did he mention thoughts of homicide. We were scared, but I was trying to see the best possible outcome...

LINDA

We should have done something then. We should have... *

RICHARD

Now. Of course, now. But what? And I couldn't accept he would throw away his future because of a homemade bomb. Linda, please...

GAIL

When did, or *where* did this interest in bombs come from? Weren't you surprised or...?

LINDA

Yes...

RICHARD

We don't know. Anywhere. And yes we were surprised. Shocked.

LINDA

He said he read it online. He said he was bored.

RICHARD

He said it was just something to do...

(CONTINUED)

LINDA

"I'm not the only one."

GAIL

What...?

RICHARD

Yes... That's what he said. And once he made it, he figured he'd set it off. He went back to the woods...

LINDA

Where we used to live...

RICHARD

No one was around. He wasn't trying to hurt anyone...

(catching himself)

Or... he didn't... we believed, we hoped, it was what he said it was.

(before they can ask)

Later on, when we found more plans in his room he said there was good money in artillery engineering. Working in the defense department. That was his excuse.

JAY

How could you believe that?

RICHARD

We knew nothing about it...

JAY

But after everything else? *How could you believe that?*

RICHARD

Because I wanted to! Because I... I had to. But I know now it was just a way of making us think he had bigger plans...

(catching again,
defeated)

Other plans. I'm sorry... I thought he wanted to do something with his life... Something that he was good at, or made him happy. Because otherwise he seemed to have stopped caring.

(vulnerable)

(MORE)

(CONTINUED)

RICHARD (CONT'D)

We tell our kids they can be anything, right? We teach them that because we believe it... I did. He told me things. I thought he confided in me. I know now some of what he said was purposefully deceitful. To keep me away.

LINDA

(to rescue Richard)

We really thought he was turning things around. We had plans for the summer, college...

(then)

We were told...

(choosing her words)

Once someone decides their fate, they do find some happiness. They can even appear euphoric. The last few months we were happy.

GAIL

(beat, disbelief)

He checked off homicidal thoughts.

RICHARD

His therapist said it's normal.

GAIL

Normal?

RICHARD

For a young man to be angry.

GAIL

Why have the question if you choose to ignore it?

LINDA

I'm sorry.

GAIL

(beat)

What about the anger? Your neighbor called the police?

RICHARD

They called us. Not the police. About a year before. It was a bad night.

(then)

We would try to calm him down.

(MORE)

*

(CONTINUED)

RICHARD (CONT'D)

Minimize whatever it was that was bothering him. I understand now that may have only intensified his feelings.

LINDA

He could be frightening.

Linda conspicuously has little to say.

RICHARD

He would get frustrated. Easily. Frustrated with things he couldn't figure out. It would...

*

LINDA

Embarrass him...

RICHARD

Yes. And it was always hard for him to ask for help, but eventually he just stopped asking entirely.

(painful)

Maybe my expectations were too high. I'd let it go, thinking not to bother him, but then I'd be...

(then)

I've done my accounting. There is no criticism I haven't already heard or placed upon myself...

(to Jay)

We are not "impassive" as you said.

JAY

I've taken that back...

RICHARD

"Indifferent..."

JAY

It was because you wouldn't speak! You never really spoke out...

RICHARD

We released a statement.

*

*

JAY

Not that! That was nothing. Why couldn't you say more!

*

*

*

(CONTINUED)

RICHARD

We weren't allowed to...

JAY

No, it's been years...!

RICHARD

When we asked for privacy we were
accused of hiding something...

JAY

No, you could have said...

LINDA

What could we say?! Please, tell
me? What... What should I say?

JAY

The signs...

LINDA

But we didn't know...

JAY

After everything? You couldn't
have been surprised...

LINDA

(pleading)

But we were! We didn't know what
had happened! I still don't... I
just came home from work and the
phone rang...

JAY

What?

LINDA

(still with urgency)

A friend of his called the house,
asking if he was there, I said,
"Aren't you both at school...?" I
didn't...

JAY

Wait...

LINDA

He said Hayden hadn't been there
all day and that "something
happened." "Something's
happening." I...

(then firm)

(MORE)

(CONTINUED)

LINDA (CONT'D)

I had no idea. Even after turning on the television, seeing the school, from above, what he could be talking about. I didn't... We really didn't know...

Linda falters, unable to shake the trauma.

JAY

(can't resist)

This was Alex? The friend who called?

RICHARD

(Linda can't answer)

Yes.

JAY

Who *knew*.

RICHARD

No. He suspected...

JAY

They were his father's guns.

RICHARD

He didn't know Hayden had taken them...

JAY

He asked you to look for them. If you can ask then you must have thought before...

RICHARD

He asked because it had happened. He was there. None of us knew yet.

JAY

But he asked you to check his room, right? Or the closet?

LINDA

Yes. It was Alex. He said he wasn't answering his phone, and that he hadn't seen him. "Can you check..." Yes.

(then)

But I didn't understand what I was even looking for. I thought he would tell me, but...

(MORE)

(CONTINUED)

LINDA (CONT'D)

he just kept crying and saying he was sorry. I thought *he* did something.

GAIL

We all did.

RICHARD

We never knew Alex's family had guns, or that Hayden had used them. We learned all of this after.

GAIL

Where were you? When...?

RICHARD

I was working. I... I have events out of order apparently. I can't remember all of it.

(then)

A friend, colleague, had called me out of my office... the television was on. Everyone was watching...

(to Linda)

You called me...

LINDA

Yes..

RICHARD

Once I was driving. I'd run to my car, and...

JAY

Wait. I'm sorry, but...

Jay stops story time, showing some frustration.

JAY

Why are you...?

(to all of them)

Why... I don't need to hear this. I don't want to...

LINDA

I'm sorry?

JAY

No, I... I believe you. I believe you didn't know. I don't want to hear this. I want to know why you didn't do something.

(MORE)

*

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED: (43)

28

JAY (CONT'D)

And why you never said anything.
 Jesus. *I want to know why you
 didn't stop him!*

*

*

GAIL

I want to.

JAY

(surprised)

What?

GAIL

I want to hear.

JAY

But... I just...

*

GAIL

I know. But I want to hear.

Gail looks at Richard and Linda, asking them to continue.
 They look at one another finding their place.

*

LINDA

I called you.

RICHARD

Yes. But... It was hard for us
 to speak.

LINDA

I couldn't. I tried.

RICHARD

Yes, I could tell... So I feared
 the worst. But...

(still amazed)

I hadn't.

(to Linda)

You said... "He was never here..."

LINDA

(haunting)

His room. It was... His bed was
 made. And there was this...
 notebook. On his pillow. I'd
 never seen it before, but it was
 worn, and marked. I was so
 scared. It must have been there
 all day. All night...

The Perry's sicken hearing this.

(CONTINUED)

RICHARD

I didn't know what she had seen yet, I was just trying to get home. But at some point I thought, "Why am I going home? I need to get to the school..."

(recovers)

But then I got a call from my sister. She kept telling me to "pull over." I said I would not. "I will not stop driving." And then... we were both crying.

(beat)

So I just... I don't remember. I pulled onto our street. I guess that's where I wanted to go. But I was too late.

LINDA

(surreal)

There were hundreds. So sudden. All in black. Helicopters.

RICHARD

I couldn't get near the driveway. I just left the car. I still don't know who moved it back... They kept us apart. They made me wait outside. While they searched the house.

LINDA

They put me in the backyard. I kept saying it was a mistake, that it was...

(it's own story)

There was a young policeman. Watching me. To make sure I didn't, I learned this later, hurt myself. I finally asked him... "Is my son dead?" He said, not unkindly, "Yes. But that's all I can tell you..." As if...

Anything else mattered. This drops like a heavy stone into all their hearts. Linda cries softly.

RICHARD

It was wrong what they did. Keeping us apart. It was wrong.

LINDA

It's okay, Richard.

(CONTINUED)

RICHARD

No. They didn't have to... I kept asking, demanding to see my wife.

(to Linda)

I begged, Linda.

Something irreparable happened during that separation.

LINDA

That wasn't our fault.

RICHARD

It was wrong.

LINDA

(for his sake)

It was.

(then)

Many times I wished he had killed me too, but... He loved us. He told us. He said he was sorry for what we would go through.

RICHARD

(clarifying)

In the notebook.

Jay and Gail are appalled.

JAY

He destroyed your lives. All of our lives.

LINDA

He did. But the love we had, it was real. The truth is we believed we were good parents. And in this awful, confusing way we still do.

(off Gail's look)

Isn't it worse that I thought I was a good mother? I loved my children. Other parents... I wasn't so different. What did I do so differently? It's very hard to trust anything anymore. I raised a murderer.

(beat)

And sometimes I don't know if I'm still grieving or if I ever really have. His service was in secret.

(MORE)

(CONTINUED)

LINDA (CONT'D)

No local church would memorialize him.

(humiliating)

Richard had to beg. To bury his son. And when we found... a place... I was so ashamed... their kindness.

(then)

You're supposed to tell happy stories... we hid. So many friends didn't know what to say, didn't come...

RICHARD

(sees it differently)

We had our closest relatives with us. Good friends.

LINDA

I remember checking the clock. We were so overwhelmed with blame. Our financial situation was impossible.

(making her point)

Grief felt like something... out of reach.

(to Jay, sadly)

I didn't stop him because I didn't know. And I didn't speak because I didn't know how. And I'm sorry, but I never thought I had enough good to say...

(then)

I want answers. I do. I have to reconcile his actions with the child I loved and raised. But there may be none. And maybe we're the last people to ask...

For the Perry's, this is a devastating thought. Jay shakes his head, remembering something.

JAY

"We know the hate."

The others look at him. He stands and walks towards the table with food and drinks.

JAY (CONT'D)

Joy Murphy's parents would say that. Their church? Remember?

"

(MORE)

(CONTINUED)

JAY (CONT'D)

We need not know *why* the hate, for we *know* the hate." Or something like that. So stupid...

He grabs a water bottle, opens it and drinks.

JAY (CONT'D)

These are for us, right?

LINDA

I'm sure it's okay.

JAY

(re: bottle)

Anyone want a...?

(nothing)

No?

(drinking more)

But that whole church movement afterwards? It made me so angry. What? The Devil? So meaningless. And leave it to the Catholic church to have the most bankrupt reaction of all...

(looking up)

Sorry.

LINDA

This is an Episcopalian church.

JAY

Oh, right, well, Christian, or... sorry, I'm... not religious.

He finishes his water bottle and looks for the trash.

JAY (CONT'D)

They recycle?

GAIL

Just leave it.

JAY

Alright...

(then)

But they found acceptance first, you know? Or at least... understood it for what it might always be. But for the rest of us, who need reason, what was he?

(CONTINUED)

RICHARD

(looking back to Jay)
We knew he was troubled, just not
how capable.

JAY

What about the diagnoses? Early
on? At fifteen antisocial
personality disorder?

RICHARD

We were told he exhibited signs of
antisocial and bipolar personality
disorder, but nothing that would
suggest...

Jay crosses back to his side of the table but stays
standing.

JAY

No, no, no, I'm not trying to... I
believe you didn't... I'm just...
I'm asking because a psychiatrist
told us, afterwards, that he never
would have shared his real
problems. Or that he couldn't.
That...

LINDA

We thought he might with his
friends. We asked him to.

RICHARD

He finally started making friends
again in high school. He found a
good group...

JAY

I'm sorry, a good group? Alex
showed him the guns...

RICHARD

Hayden stole them. His friends
had nothing to do with it.

JAY

I'm just saying, it's hard to hear
you call them "a good group."
These were the kids going to gun
ranges, playing *Call of Duty* all
day and night, right? Isn't that
where that started?

(CONTINUED)

RICHARD

It's a video game.

JAY

It's *simulation*. And the visits to the shooting range? How many?

RICHARD

Only two.

JAY

That we know about it. And you don't even need to go with those games now.

RICHARD

If you'd allow me to finish. Addressing *your* point. I was saying, by the end of... his life, despite whatever was going on inside, he seemed popular, for him, in his circle.

Jay sits back down to focus his thoughts for them.

JAY

Okay, but what I'm talking about is different...

RICHARD

And I'm saying we couldn't see how isolated he was because he was popular, or not... That's not the right word, I know, but we couldn't really know the level of intimacy in his social life. From where he had been we were just happy to see him *have* a social life.

*

JAY

Okay, so that isolation...

GAIL

But he was bullied in high school.

LINDA

Not by his friends...

*

GAIL

But still. They told the police how often he talked about killing certain students.

*

*

(CONTINUED)

LINDA

He said they all talked that way.
His group of friends experienced a
lot of bullying.

JAY

And that's fine, now, I don't
care, I'm sorry, if I could
just... get this out. That
isolation, even around friends,
that... detachment, is sometimes
indicative of a lack of feeling.
Or empathy. Add to that the
thousands of hours online?
Without any real human contact?
(off their looks)
This is just how the psychiatrist
explained it.

RICHARD

We understand the psychology.

JAY

Okay. I'm just... Look, what I
learned, is there are studies,
based on fMRI's, brain scans...
They say they can see the
responses or lack of response in
the brain. That there are
actually less connections, less
matter, in the prefrontal cortex
and amygdala...

GAIL

Jay...

JAY

No, wait, please... Have you
heard of mirror neurons?

GAIL

Jesus, Jay, we're qualified...

JAY

I know I'm not an expert, I'm just
trying to...

(to Richard and
Linda)

I thought this was helpful. The
basic idea. I mean, you brought
up brain scans. Mental health
evaluations.

(MORE)

(CONTINUED)

JAY (CONT'D)

If we could have seen, or been able to predict something. Because in these tests, the doctors, they'll see...

RICHARD

I know. They show certain words or pictures that should generate a response, some emotion or feeling, but they don't.

JAY

Right. The people diagnosed with psychopathy.

RICHARD

My son was empathetic. He felt a great deal.

JAY

But... I'm just saying, I'm saying this to help you. That it might be helpful...

RICHARD

My son was not a psychopath. He was in terrible pain...

JAY

But maybe not treatable. Because did anything ever work? How many different medications? Drugs? If it's the actual structure of the brain, I mean, that it is not just pathological... it's physical.

RICHARD

I understand what you want to say.

JAY

So that it wasn't just high school, or middle school, it was his him.

LINDA

Do you remember Evan as a baby?

GAIL

(beat, am I
offended?)

Of course.

(CONTINUED)

LINDA

I remember. I feel Hayden as my baby, every day. His helplessness, his crying, then his smile.

(then)

I don't believe in what you're saying...

Jay audibly scoffs at Linda's sanctimony.

GAIL

(gently)

Then Linda. Something must have happened.

RICHARD

There was no abuse.

GAIL

(she's wanted to ask)

Not just abuse...

RICHARD

Neglect? We were there. As much as we could be.

GAIL

And we can't always be, I know, but we have to... correct their course when we do have them.

RICHARD

So we failed. I failed. I know that. I tried everything to *correct* it. And I would have given anything to be there with him...

*
*

GAIL

But you were.

RICHARD

If I could have known...

JAY

Maybe no one could get through to him. That he wasn't capable...

RICHARD

No...

(CONTINUED)

JAY

"Possible schizoaffective disorder, bipolar disorder, depression, mania, ADHD..."

RICHARD

None of which are psychopathy. You don't know what you're talking about...

JAY

Take those medical records with the criminal report. I mean, we finally have the full report of what happened. Don't you have to weigh the evidence, the facts of what he did, against the relationship, or history you had with him?

LINDA

He became them, he wasn't always them...

JAY

We can trace how far back he planned this. We can trace his *footsteps* for Christ's sake...

RICHARD

I don't believe the timeline definitively proves anything about his mental state...

JAY

How can you say that?

*

LINDA

We're not denying what he did or who he became...

JAY

But I can't help but hear you blame a not abnormal childhood.

RICHARD

He's my son. I can't remove my feelings from our history, or his records...

JAY

I'm not asking for that, but what he did, his capacity for murder was potentially there long before anyone could have known...

RICHARD

You think you can attach one word to something in order to understand it? To make you feel safe. Well, I won't say it. I don't believe it. It's not simple. It's everything you cannot see... and it left him helpless. He was helpless...

GAIL

But it's our job to help. That's our job. At some point it doesn't matter whether or not you see the signs, it's still our obligation.

RICHARD

I said. I failed.

JAY

And what I'm saying is that maybe you had very little choice. The report speaks for itself...

*
*
*

LINDA

He was gone by then, he was...

JAY

I mean the deliberate choices...

*

RICHARD

He did not target.

JAY

What? How can you say that?

GAIL

Why does that matter?

*

RICHARD

He would have said so.

JAY

No, he murdered people...

GAIL

Or why is one better?

JAY

What do you mean he didn't target?

LINDA

I don't believe he looked for any one person...

(CONTINUED)

JAY
Jesus Christ...

GAIL
Wait, it doesn't matter...

*

RICHARD
He'd never met any of them.

JAY
It was his school! They were his students!

RICHARD
He'd never been in that classroom before...

JAY
He wanted to kill them...

RICHARD
Those students, they weren't his grade. Evan...

JAY
Don't.

RICHARD
I'm just saying...

JAY
(quietly)
No, no, just don't..

RICHARD
He didn't know them...

JAY
He wanted them to suffer...

GAIL
Jay...

*

*

RICHARD
But not...

JAY
(reeling on Richard)
What? Not intentionally? What were you going to say?

RICHARD
He didn't seek out to make any one individual suffer.

JAY

But my son did! Evan suffered!
So much. And he let him...

RICHARD

I'm sorry. Both of you...

JAY

No...

RICHARD

I know what happened...

JAY

No you don't...

GAIL

Wait...

*

RICHARD

He did the most awful thing I've
ever known, but I know the
report...

JAY

(erupting)

*No you don't! You don't know how
my son died!*

Jay slams his fist down on the table.

JAY (CONT'D)

He entered Evan's classroom at
1:29 PM. He threw a bomb in the
center of the desks and stayed
there shooting for a half a
minute. He could have killed
everyone in that time. He *chose*
not to. He watched them. They
saw his face. They saw the way
he... looked. He knew Evan was
still alive. He knew exactly who
was hurt and who wasn't when he
left.

RICHARD

We could never see into the
classroom...

GAIL

Please...

*

JAY

No! He suffered! The first
gunshots happened at 1:29. When
the attack began. He left them
bleeding, dying... Six minutes!
Six minutes later. He comes back.
Your son. To retrace his steps.
He's in the hallway. Again. At
1:35. He came back to... finish.

*

(MORE)

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED: (57)

JAY (CONT'D)

And Evan was there... The last
gunshot, 1:36, the bullet hit his
neck, his artery...

*

GAIL

Jay...

JAY

Six minutes... He was *alive*...
He was trying to get out, the
blood... trails showed he was
trying to...

GAIL

Please, stop...

JAY

No, no. Then it was methodical,
he was looking... he came back and
Evan was still alive...

RICHARD

I know...

JAY

*No, you don't! You don't know! I
know! I know the streaks... On
the floor. The way he crawled.
For his life. The wounds in what
order. How he fought. And how he
died...*

GAIL

Jay...

JAY

(childlike)
No....How he died...

GAIL

(softly, sadly)
Okay...
(waits)
Now stop. Please.

Jay is finished. He wipes away a tear, incensed by its
timing, and slumps back into his seat. Gail steps away
from the table, needing to be alone. She sits in an
armchair by the window. They all need some time.

*

*

(CONTINUED)

RICHARD

(condemned to repeat)

Caroline, Jonathan, and Tori were killed instantly by the blast. Daniel. Shot three times in the chest. Twice in the lungs, once in the heart. He died, seated at his desk. Julianna. Shot twice in the leg. Once in the knee and once in thigh, the femoral artery.

JAY

What are you doing...?

RICHARD

She lost her vision because of the glass in her eyes. She tried to crawl out of the classroom but she died before finding the way...

JAY

Okay...

RICHARD

Vanessa. Shot four times. Twice in the abdomen and twice in the head...

GAIL

We understand. You know.

Linda looks to ground, stricken.

RICHARD

The victims and the wounded. I'm sorry... but I know. All of them. I know Evan. His story that day. And I know Hayden's.

(accepting)

He did go back. He was going to the library. Where he wanted to die. Where he told us, wrote to us, in his notebook, "That's where you'll find me. Where it's quiet for me." Where...

(to Jay)

Respectfully, the last shot, was at 1:41. In the library.

(then)

He passed the classroom on his way back. He saw Evan. In the hallway.

(beat)

(MORE)

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED: (59)

RICHARD (CONT'D)

He didn't go back inside. I don't believe he ever intended to. Planned to. It doesn't negate what he did plan. What he did do.

Silence. Jay, totally depleted, still can't let go.

JAY

(stuck)

But people saw... the kids saw...

(then)

Christopher?

RICHARD

Shot in the head. I know. My son.

JAY

The face. Hiding.

*

RICHARD

Underneath his desk.

JAY

Begging for his life...

Linda gets up from the table and sits on a chair against the wall.

*

*

RICHARD

We don't know what they were saying...

JAY

Witnesses... They were facing each other, he was on his knees...

RICHARD

That is what they said...

JAY

That is not feeling...

RICHARD

That is hate...

JAY

No. That is...

RICHARD

Disturbed, hate, rage, hopelessness...

(CONTINUED)

JAY

No, no, no, apathy, indifference,
cold, callous...

RICHARD

Evil? Do you want to say?
Because I... I won't. I won't. *

GAIL *

(beat, softly) *
It doesn't matter... *

He gets up and goes to get a water bottle for himself. *
He takes small sips. He sits down on a bench in the *
corner of the room. *

RICHARD *

(still defending, but *
for himself) *
No... I've heard all the *
theories. Was he a terrorist? *
Was he a white nationalist? He *
didn't target any race. He threw *
pipe bombs into classrooms he'd *
never stepped foot into before. *
He wanted to hurt the world. And *
he did. *

(then) *

We went to the school. Did you *
know that? That was supposed to *
be for the victims's families. *
Hayden would not be counted as a *
victim, but... we fought for that. *
And we saw. We saw the damage. *
The windows, the black stains... *
We saw his hate... *

LINDA

The lines...

RICHARD

What he did...
(to Linda, softly)
What?

LINDA

The lines. Or tape. The outlines
of the children. And Mr. Moore.

Gail winces at the memory. *

(CONTINUED)

JAY

(understanding)
Of the bodies... that was...
(then)

I didn't know you were allowed in.

LINDA

It was kept secret. They didn't want...

RICHARD

More outrage.

(solemn)

The world mourned ten. We mourned eleven. There were no memorials for eleven, no concerts reading eleven names. And I understood that but... I wasn't going to be excluded from that too.

(making his case)

The damage though... how much? He was in pain. It was the pain that brought him there.

(then)

I didn't want another child. But once he was born... I loved Hayden so much. He was my best friend. We had so much fun. But... maybe he should never have been born...

LINDA

No...

(pushing it away)

Maybe we should never have gone to the school. I just remember this terrible feeling of... awe. Just awe for what my boy had done. And then this long skinny frame outlined on the carpet. All alone.

(strange)

I knew it was him. Not because of where it was or... I just knew it was him.

JAY

I recognized Evan too. Just like... Not because of the lines, but the number? The number markers? For the report...?

LINDA

Yes...

JAY

He was number one. He was the first they found, I guess. But he was... he was my... he was mine...

(composing, to Linda)

Sorry... That was hard.

Linda nods sadly, finding comfort in their shared pain.

LINDA

It was. But you know, and please forgive me, it made me feel like the rest of you.

Gail reacts in the corner with a soft cry. Jay looks at his wife, then to Linda. *

JAY

Some parent, I can't remember who, said early on, in a mean way, meant to be mean, that you were "the loneliest people in the world." As if that was justice. As if... *

LINDA

Well we were.

RICHARD

We still receive mail. At least I do. Some hateful, some sympathetic, most just strange.

LINDA

Yes. I never understood it's purpose.

(beat)

It only reminded me of what he did, when I just wanted to heal, or... restore my memory of who he was. *

(then)

And that's what I have to do, you understand? You said he destroyed our lives. Yes, he did. But while I know the world would have been better without him... *

(so hard for her)

I can't say I would have been... *

(CONTINUED)

GAIL
(something
unraveling)
Oh god...

LINDA
I'm sorry. I know that's...

GAIL
No...

Linda stands sensing Gail's pain and moves towards her.

LINDA
I shouldn't have said that. I
just... I thought I had to
believe my son's life had no value
because of what he did before he
died. I don't have to believe
that. Do I? *
(to both of them)
Or is that hard for you to hear? *

JAY
I guess. Yes, it is. But... I
won't tell you how to keep your
son.

They look at Gail.

GAIL
I don't know. I'm sorry. It's
hard, but... No. I think that's
right...
(struggling)
God, I don't know...

LINDA
It's okay. I wouldn't ever expect
you to feel that way...

GAIL
No. No, that's not it. Not your
son. Him. It's *value*. It's all
of their values. It's...
(vulnerable)
See. I made a promise. I made a
promise to him...
(breaking)
That I can't keep...

JAY
(reaching for her)
Hey...

GAIL
(let me do this)
No, please.

Linda takes Gail's chair and brings it over to sit by her. The two woman face one another near the window.

LINDA
What did you promise him?

GAIL
I... I promised him that his life would mean something. That it wouldn't be in vain. That because of him, all of them, there would be change.

She looks at Jay, broken, crying.

GAIL (CONT'D)
But nothing has changed. Nothing. The only difference is that they're gone. And that's all I hear. Still. I hear all those parents... The last of us left in that fire house. The loneliest people in the world. Asking, "What do you mean, 'They're gone?' Gone where? Where have they gone...?"
(lost)
So you talk about value. Their lives having value. That's all that I want. I just want it to mean something. I want it to change.

LINDA
Why does it have to?

GAIL
What?

LINDA
Tell me a story about Evan.

GAIL
What...?

LINDA

Please. Tell me a story about him.

GAIL

Now...?

LINDA

Yes...

GAIL

I can't... There's too many...

LINDA

That's okay, don't think, just speak...

GAIL

(looks to her husband)

Jay...

JAY

(granting permission)

It's okay... go.

GAIL

No, come here...

*
*

She beckons him closer, to be with her for this.

*

GAIL

(through tears)

Okay. Okay. Okay...

(she finds him)

I see... I think he's twelve? Sixth grade? I don't know. He's young... It's fall. He's playing football with his friends. They would play in the park by our home. Sundays. Just a few blocks from our home. But we had a dinner to go to that night. Jay's parents were visiting. I said, "Don't get too dirty we're leaving the house by five." And he said, "Mom, the dirtier you are the better you are."

*

(MORE)

(CONTINUED)

GAIL (CONT'D)

That's how you spot the best players on the team, they have the grass and stains on their jerseys." I said, he was so funny, I said, "Shouldn't the good players not be tackled and fall on the ground so much?" "No, mom, the best players are the dirtiest." Okay. He was like that about everything. He'd have these strong opinions, didn't matter if he knew anything about what he was talking about...

She laughs through tears. Richard joins the others with the tissue box.

*
*

GAIL

So, of course, it's five, or almost five and he's not back yet. And I'm all ready to just go down there and grab him. Drag him back. When Sophie comes in the door. She followed Evan everywhere back then. She loved watching the boys play and goof around. So she bursts in the house and says, "Oh my gosh, mom, look at Evan." I come around the corner and he is, like, head to toe, covered in mud.

*

JAY

It was absurd.

GAIL

It was. He must have tried to, like, cover himself, like a mud bath. It didn't really make any sense even. So, I lost it. "Evan, what did you do?"

JAY

He was totally unfazed...

GAIL

Yeah, right? He played it cool. He said, "Mom, I told you. The best players...", you know? I was so mad. And then... I was laughing...

(back to sadness, but
it's different)

(MORE)

(CONTINUED)

GAIL (CONT'D)

And then hugging him. And the dirt, the grass, that smell. Wet leaves. The child on him. I could feel so much life... We let him go to dinner that way...

JAY

(come on)
He washed his face...

GAIL

Yeah, but... he was so proud.

LINDA

(beat)
That's what his life meant. Let him rest. Evan doesn't have to change the world.

GAIL

But I still miss him.

LINDA

Do you remember what you wrote me?

GAIL

Oh God, I wrote you way too much.

LINDA

(laughs)
You wrote me that you wanted me "to know your son. Know his name."

But this breaks through. Gail looks at Linda, amazed.

LINDA (CONT'D)

(beat, to Jay)
Do you have a story?

JAY

(shaking his head)
Oh God... All of them, but...
(to Gail)
Let's just preserve them, okay?

Gail has gone somewhere else.

GAIL

(scared)
Jay...

(CONTINUED)

JAY

Yeah...?

GAIL

I think I need to...

JAY

What?

GAIL

I think I'm ready.

JAY

(beat, understanding)

Okay...

GAIL

(to Richard and
Linda)

I need to tell you... I wanted so
badly for you to be... an example,
or punished... I came here hoping
for that.

(to Linda,
vulnerable)

But... something's died in all of
us. All of us. And I'm so scared
that what I wanted... or what I
need... isn't what I thought...

LINDA

What did you think?

GAIL

That if I forgave you I'd lose
him...

LINDA

No...

GAIL

Yes... But maybe... I just...
needed to be with you... because I
know... I forgive you...

Linda cries.

GAIL

(letting go)

I have. I forgive you.

(pushing through)

And I want you to know...

(not turning back)

(MORE)

(CONTINUED)

GAIL (CONT'D)

I want you to know... That I also
forgive Hayden. For what he did.
For taking my baby's life. Because
I know, in my heart, he was lost.
And because...

(to Jay)

I can't live this way anymore...

*

JAY

Sweetheart...

GAIL

(shaking her head)

I can't. We can't...

*

JAY

Hey...

GAIL

No. We don't sleep. We don't
breathe. We don't see each other
anymore. We don't. And I want us
to again...

JAY

Okay...

GAIL

I want us to.

He nods, crying.

GAIL

Okay... Because I can't hold on
to this. It's not him. It's
not... it's this... just terrible
pain from wishing for a different
past. And I can't let it control
my life. Because if I do, I'm
afraid I really won't ever see
Evan again... And I know, I know,
I will be with him again. I will
feel him against me, if I can
forgive... and if I can love
again. And so I do. I do.

*

*

*

*

*

Empty of tears, she breathes..

*

The four of them fall into a deep exhausted silence.
After a while, Linda offers a way out.

(CONTINUED)

LINDA

Maybe this is right?

(sheepishly)

A moment of silence? Maybe this
the way to say goodbye.

JAY

Sure. That's... I like that.
Should we...?

LINDA

You're fine.

They attempt eye contact, like a clumsy toast, and then go quiet. Heads bow slightly and they do their best to say goodbye - say a prayer.

Richard breaks first, raising his head with a confident exhale. The others eventually come up for air.

RICHARD

Well... Thank you again. I hope
we were able to help.

A formality has returned.

JAY

Yeah... is that it?

Jay, surprising himself, doesn't want to leave.

GAIL

I think so.
(then)
I'm exhausted.

JAY

(looking for help)
Okay, well, if we feel like... I
guess we can always speak again.

Richard and Linda smile politely. Richard stands. *

LINDA

Thank you so much for bringing
your pictures...

GAIL

Oh, of course, thank you too...

LINDA

Okay...

GAIL

Thank you for the flowers.

LINDA

You're welcome.

RICHARD

Will they travel? The flowers? I don't want you to...

GAIL

Oh, we'll manage.

JAY

Yeah, sure...

RICHARD

Maybe Kendra can get you a box or something to put them in?

LINDA

I should have thought of that...

GAIL

No it's, okay. We can hold them right...?

JAY

Well, there was the woman who worked here. They might have something...

RICHARD

I don't think we met her, but let me go see.

Richard exits purposefully to the offices. The others aren't sure what to do next.

JAY

Oh, is that coffee? I could use some coffee. Anyone want...?

GAIL

Just some water maybe.

JAY

Linda?

LINDA

I'm okay.

(CONTINUED)

JAY

Bottle for the road, no?

LINDA

Okay.

Jay crosses to the food table.

Richard and Kendra can be heard speaking in the office.
Judy's voice joins in having been included in the search.

Jay returns handing Linda and Gail each a water bottle.

GAIL

You don't want coffee?

JAY

Nah, it's too late... bad idea.

He stays standing awkwardly. Linda looks for an exit.

LINDA

Maybe I'll go see if I can help...

JAY

Okay, yeah, should we...?

GAIL

Yeah...

Gail nods, not moving. Linda collects her purse and leaves the room.

Jay and Gail are alone again. *

GAIL *

I'll be right there. *

JAY *

Okay. *

Jay leaves. *

Only Gail remains. She slowly gets up to collect her purse. Before leaving she stops to look at the artwork on the wall.

She closes the door behind her.

29

INT. EMMANUEL EPISCOPAL CHURCH - OFFICES - MORNING

29

Moments later... Everyone is looking for a way to protect the flowers. Linda and Richard stand by the front door. Gail and Jay stay further inside allowing the others space to look.

*

JUDY

Let me see what we have...

RICHARD

Whatever you can find.

JUDY

Yeah, no, so you can put them on the floor and not worry about it, I get...

KENDRA

But nothing too big, right?

JUDY

And we have more stuff downstairs.

GAIL

Are you sure...?

KENDRA

You have newspaper?

JAY

Yeah, please don't trouble yourselves...

LINDA

I'm sorry, I should have thought of that...

RICHARD

It's fine, they'll find something.

ANTHONY

What about bubble wrap?

JUDY

I don't think we have bubble wrap.

ANTHONY

Yeah we do...

KENDRA

Something to stuff it right?

(CONTINUED)

JAY

Is this too much trouble?

JUDY

How is this? It's too big isn't?

ANTHONY

They brought the new hymnal books
in a box...

JUDY

Oh yeah, good idea, go check...

KENDRA

Thank you, guys.

RICHARD

Yes, thank you.

JUDY

Of course, and let me see what
else is down here. One second...

Anthony and Judy leave.

LINDA

Well...

JAY

(gesturing off)
Should we wait for...?

Linda looks at Richard. He cannot stay with this.

RICHARD

If you don't mind... I should
go...

JAY

Oh, no go ahead...

RICHARD

Linda, I have to get back...

LINDA

Okay...

He searches for words.

RICHARD

I can walk back without you...

LINDA

No, Richard...

RICHARD

If you want to... Okay.

LINDA

I can come with you.

RICHARD

Alright.

LINDA

(to Jay and Gail)

We walked over here together...

Linda wants to say something more.

RICHARD

(to Jay and Gail)

It was... please take good care
of yourselves.

GAIL

Thank you...

JAY

Of course, yeah, take care.

Richard leaves. He doesn't walk far before turning back
to wait for Linda.

The women think to hug but something keeps them apart for
now.

JAY

(to Linda and Kendra)

Well, thank you. And you, Kendra.

KENDRA

It was my pleasure.

JAY

(to Gail)

We'll stay here?

GAIL

Yeah...

(reaching, confused)

We're always here. I mean, to
stay in touch.

(CONTINUED)

LINDA

Good. I'm... It was nice to see you again.

KENDRA

Take good care of yourselves.

Kendra smiles at the Perry's and escorts Linda out.

Linda and Richard walk away, with Kendra following behind.

The Perry's are alone again. Judy calls out from the basement steps.

JUDY (O.S.)

You all want to just come down here and take a look? With the flowers? Sorry it just might be easier...

JAY

Yeah, that's fine. Thank you...

Jay heads down the stairs. Gail takes one last look outside before heading down herself.

Judy heads back to the kitchen. Jay and Gail follow.

JUDY

I mean, it's not great but maybe if we stuff it with newspaper...

JAY

Anything's fine, don't trouble yourself.

JUDY

Here...

Judy, stepping out of the kitchen with a box, notices the others are gone.

JUDY

Oh... I'm sorry, did they... did they leave?

GAIL

Yes, they left, but thank you...
(re: flowers)
They're ours, a gift, so...

JUDY

Oh, okay... Did Kendra leave?

GAIL

She walked them out, but maybe
she'll come back. Did you...?

JUDY

(disappointed)
No, no, I just thought to... say
goodbye is all...
(realizing)
I didn't even introduce myself to
them, did I? Shoot...

GAIL

That's okay. I'm sure...

JAY

Oh, yeah, don't worry...

JUDY

(taking it hard)
No, I should have. Shoot...
(then)
I'm Judy. I know we met already,
but...

GAIL

(laughs)
Hi, Judy. Thank you for having
us. Giving us the space. It's
very...

JUDY

It's healing here.
(afraid to overstep)
It's just safe. It is. Wherever
you come from. So...
(re: the box)
How about this? We could stuff it
with some newspaper or...

Anthony comes down the stairs from the church.

ANTHONY

Judy...

(CONTINUED)

JUDY

Yeah...

ANTHONY

(to the Perry's)

Pardon me.

(then)

They're bringing the rest of the books to St. Thomas, so they need the boxes...

JUDY

Oh, okay, well this should work with some newspaper...

GAIL

Oh, I think we're fine, really...

ANTHONY

I would use bubble wrap.

JUDY

Okay, well... you want to get this bubble wrap?

GAIL

I don't want you to bother...

ANTHONY

(taking the box)

I'll pack it. It's easy.

Anthony goes into the kitchen to find bubble wrap.

JUDY

Can't we just stuff it with newspaper?

ANTHONY

How much newspaper do you have?

GAIL

(ending it)

You know what? I'm just going to hold on to them. I want to.

JUDY

You sure?

GAIL

I am. I think it will be nice.

She tucks the flowers into her chest confidently.

(CONTINUED)

JUDY

Okay. Sorry...

GAIL

That's okay.

JAY

(beat, to get out)
Well...

GAIL

I guess...
(to Anthony and Judy)
It was nice meeting you all.
Thank you for your...

Gail stops when she sees the look on their faces. She turns to see Linda, at the landing of the office stairs.

Linda steps forward, unsure of herself. In the office, Richard peers down from behind the corner.

RICHARD

Linda...

Linda steps towards Gail.

LINDA

I have a story. I wanted to tell you...

GAIL

Oh... I want to hear it.

LINDA

He was sixteen. He'd had such a bad week. I felt so badly for him. How cruel kids could be. But I couldn't just let him fall apart?

GAIL

No...

LINDA

We were alone. Richard was working late. I made him dinner but he wouldn't eat. I asked him to talk but he wouldn't talk. Finally I went to his room. He was on the computer. I yelled at him, "You have to start working.

(MORE)

(CONTINUED)

LINDA (CONT'D)

If you can't be happy, at least you can do well." But he screamed at me, "I don't want to be happy. I don't want to do well." "Why?" I cried. "Why?" Then we were screaming at each other. We were both so hurt. And scared. I know it. It happened so fast, but he said, "Get out before I hit you. Get out before I beat the shit out of you, I swear to god..." He was terrifying.

(ashamed)

I went to my room and I locked the door...

(her burden, her wisdom)

Gail. I wish I had let him. I wish I had said, "Okay. Hit me. You hit me, sweetheart. Hit me as long as you'll ever need." Because then I would have know him. I would have known who he really was.

Gail doesn't know what to say at first.

GAIL

It's okay. You can have me.

She hugs Linda, deeply. Their words are private, maybe inaudible.

LINDA

(maybe a laugh)

My story's a little different, isn't it?

GAIL

No... We miss them.

LINDA

I wanted to tell you a story too.

GAIL

I'm sorry I didn't ask.

The women stay embraced. The rest watch. Finally, Gail and Linda disentangle.

Linda look at the others in the room, slightly embarrassed, before walking back up the stairs.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED: (5)

Richard and Kendra follow her out.

*

No one speaks. Finally...

JAY

Should we...?

GAIL

I just thought we'd...

JAY

Right...

GAIL

Let them go.

JAY

Good idea.

They wait. In the church, a small choir begins to sing.

JAY (CONT'D)

(hearing)

Is that?

JUDY

Oh, I'm sorry...

JAY

Singing?

JUDY

Yeah, they have... they rehearse for tomorrow... I forgot...

JAY

No, it's nice... it's...

JUDY

(to Anthony)

Did we tell them?

ANTHONY

I told you this morning they had rehearsal...

JUDY

Did you?

(to Jay)

Sorry...

(CONTINUED)

JAY

No, no, don't be. It's...
They're singing?

JUDY

Yeah. I guess practicing for the
choir. For tomorrow.

JAY

It's nice...

JUDY

(smiles, relieved)
It is, isn't it?
(then)
Would you like to see?

Judy gestures to the stairs and the church above them.
Jay looks up.

JAY

(still looking)
No, that's okay, I'm... I...

Jay can't find the words, overwhelmed.

Gail, still facing where Linda was, waits for the right
time to leave.

They listen. *"Blessed be the tie that binds..."*

Eventually Gail turns to Jay. She gently takes his face
in her hand and pulls him away from the music. She looks
into his eyes. She smiles at him. She embraces him.
The flowers caught between them.

CUT TO BLACK:

- | | | |
|----|---|----|
| 31 | EXT. EMMANUEL EPISCOPAL CHURCH - NIGHT | 31 |
| | The church in evening quiet... | |
| 32 | INT. EMMANUEL EPISCOPAL CHURCH - PARISH HALL - NIGHT | 32 |
| | The room filled with moonlight... | |
| 33 | EXT. SECLUDED STREET - NIGHT | 33 |
| | The broken fence bordering the meadow. The tape blows in
the wind. | |

(CONTINUED)

Illuminated now, not noticeable before, the lights from a high school football field shine in the distance...

FADE TO BLACK.

LIGHTS FADE LAST