MASS

Written & Directed by Fran Kranz
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.

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.

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.

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.

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.
INT. EMMANUEL EPISCOPAL CHURCH - NAUE - MORNING

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...

INT. EMMANUEL EPISCOPAL CHURCH - BASEMENT - MORNING

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...

INT. EMMANUEL EPISCOPAL CHURCH - OFFICES - MORNING

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)
CONTINUED:

JUDY

Okay, good.

Judy crosses back to the basement.

INT. EMMANUEL EPISCOPAL CHURCH - BASEMENT - MORNING

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...

INT. EMMANUEL EPISCOPAL CHURCH - PARISH HALL - MORNING

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.

( continud )
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.

EXT. EMMANUEL EPISCOPAL CHURCH - STREET - MORNING

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.
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.

INT. EMMANUEL EPISCOPAL CHURCH – NAVE

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.

(CONTINUED)
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.

INT. EMMANUEL EPISCOPAL CHURCH – BASEMENT – MORNING

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?
CONTINUED:

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

They head up the stairs and into the offices.

INT. EMMANUEL EPISCOPAL CHURCH - OFFICES - MORNING

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.

INT. EMMANUEL EPISCOPAL CHURCH - PARISH HALL

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.

(CONTINUED)
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?

(continues)
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?

((CONTINUED)
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...

(CONTINUED)
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.

EXT. EMMANUEL EPISCOPAL CHURCH - STREET - MORNING

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

INT. THE PERRY’S SUV - MORNING

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.
EXT. EMMANUEL EPISCOPAL CHURCH - STREET

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.

INT. THE PERRY’S SUV - MORNING

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?
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.

          (CONTINUED)
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...

EXT. SECLUDED STREET - THE PERRY’S SUV - MORNING

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

EXT. EMMANUEL EPISCOPAL CHURCH - MORNING

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

INT. EMMANUEL EPISCOPAL CHURCH - PARISH HALL - MORNING

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

INT. EMMANUEL EPISCOPAL CHURCH - OFFICES - MORNING

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...

EXT. EMMANUEL EPISCOPAL CHURCH - FRONT ENTRANCE - MORNING

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)
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.

INT. EMMANUEL EPISCOPAL CHURCH - OFFICES

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.

INT. EMMANUEL EPISCOPAL CHURCH – PARISH HALL

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?

(CONTINUED)
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.

EXT. EMMANUEL EPISCOPAL CHURCH
Judy and Anthony sit quietly in the pews.

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

OMIT

INT. EMMANUEL EPISCOPAL CHURCH - PARISH HALL - MORNING
Jay and Gail are as we left them. Waiting.
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)
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.
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...

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?

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.
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.
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...

Okay.

LINDA

I wanted to share ours, but...

JAY

It’s hard.

LINDA

It is...

JAY

(beat, aside to Gail)

How are you doing?

(beat, 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...
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.
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)
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.

(CONTINUED)
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?

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...?

(CONTINUED)
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.
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.
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.
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)
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.
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...
RICHARD
That’s fine.
(them)
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.
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.
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.

(continued)
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.
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)
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)
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)
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.

(to 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)
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.
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.
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)
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 *
   (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)
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.
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...

(CONTINUED)
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
GAIL
Why does that matter?
that?

RICHARD
He would have said so.

JAY
No, he murdered people... Or why is one better?

GAIL

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.

(Continued)
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... 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...

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.

JAY
Your son. To retrace his steps. He’s in the hallway. Again. At 1:35. He came back to... finish. (MORE)
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.
RICHARD
(contended 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)
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
 stil 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.

(continues)
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.

(them)
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...

(continuad)
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)
REV. MM/DD/YY (BLUE) 87.

CONTINUED: (66)

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)
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...

What?

JAY
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.
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.


LINDA
Thank you so much for bringing
your pictures...

GAIL
Oh, of course, thank you too...

LINDA
Okay...

(continues)
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.
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.
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?
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...

(CONTINUED)
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.
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.

INT. EMMANUEL EPISCOPAL CHURCH - BASEMENT - DAY

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.
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)
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.
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)
CONTINUED: (6)

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
The church in evening quiet...

32  INT. EMMANUEL EPISCOPAL CHURCH - PARISH HALL - NIGHT
The room filled with moonlight...

33  EXT. SECLUDED STREET - NIGHT
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