

THE RISING

An original screenplay by

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Over black:

The sound of a RINGTONE, followed by:

OPERATOR (V.O.)
9-1-1, what's your emergency?

WOMAN (V.O.)
He's shooting at us! My God, he
just starting shooting at us!

OPERATOR (V.O.)
Can I have your location, ma'am?

WOMAN (V.O.)
Angelica High School! He just... oh
Jesus! He started shooting and...
one got hit in the neck! There's so
much blood, I can't... he shot the
children, he just shot them!

OPERATOR (V.O.)
Okay, ma'am, officers are on the way--

WOMAN (V.O.)
NO! HE'S COMING BACK, PLEASE HELP--

The line disconnects.

DISPATCHER (V.O.)
All units, we have a report of shots
fired at Angelica Senior High School,
thirty-six Main Street. Unknown
number of victims. No other
information at this time.

INT. SQUAD CAR - MOVING - MORNING

The vehicle bolts down Main Street in the village of Angelica,
New York. The siren BLARES, Officer KELLY BOWLAND (late
20s) behind the wheel.

BOWLAND
(into police radio)
Copy. Two-one-nine en route.

DISPATCHER (V.O.)
Copy, two-one-nine. Reports are of
multiple victims on site, unknown
number of assailants.

BOWLAND
Christ.
(into police radio)
Two-one-nine, received.

DISPATCHER (V.O.)
SWAT has been advised. You're to isolate, contain, set up a perimeter and await back-up.

EXT. ANGELICA SENIOR HIGH SCHOOL - MORNING

Bowland's squad car screeches to a halt approximately fifty yards from the school.

SUPER: Friday, May 14th, 1999 -- 11:38:22am. (The seconds tick for the few moments the super remains on screen.)

More squad cars pull up behind Bowland's.

All the OFFICERS emerge from their vehicles.

Screaming and crying STUDENTS rush from various doors. A few try to escape through classroom windows. Some of the students turn toward the flashing lights of the police cars.

GUNFIRE from within the school.

Fellow officer CHRIS TOBIAS (late 20s) crosses from his vehicle to Bowland.

BOWLAND
(into police radio)
Dispatch, two-one-nine. More shots fired from inside the school. Multiple victims on site. Potential mass casualty situation.
(beat)
We have to breach.

DISPATCHER (V.O.)
Negative. Your orders are to isolate, contain, set up a perimeter and await SWAT team.

BOWLAND
(into police radio)
What's the ETA?

DISPATCHER (V.O.)
ETA for SWAT is thirty minutes.

BOWLAND
That's insane.

Bowland reaches for her sidearm.

TOBIAS
What are you doing, Bowland?

BOWLAND
Is Columbine not fresh enough in
your memory?

TOBIAS
Too fresh. And we have orders--

BOWLAND
We wait for SWAT and how many more
lives--

Their debate is interrupted by the sound of more GUNFIRE.

Gun drawn, Bowland races toward the school.

TOBIAS
Bowland! Goddamn it.

Tobias draws his sidearm and follows.

As the flock of terrified students moves farther away from
the school, they are approached by the other officers.

OFFICERS
Hands! We need to see the hands!

The students raise their arms, then continue to the officers
who usher them farther away, toward an ambulance and two
MEDICS that have now arrived on scene.

Bowland and Tobias navigate the mayhem. They dodge scared
and fleeing students as they make their way to the nearest

SIDE DOOR

Bowland and Tobias back up against the wall on both sides of
the door. Tobias reaches for the handle, pulls...

The door only opens about an inch... they see the handles
have been chain-locked from the inside.

More GUNSHOTS. SCREAMS.

Tobias motions to another door approximately fifty feet down
the side of the building. They race toward the

SECOND SIDE DOOR

Tobias tries that handle, the door opens. In cover formation,
they enter...

INT. SCHOOL CORRIDOR - CONTINUOUS

The stench of death burns the air.

A few KIDS lie scattered about the floor, some crying and injured, a couple appear lifeless as pools of blood expand beneath their bodies.

The cries of the wounded can barely be heard over the din of a pulled FIRE ALARM.

Bowland and Tobias stalk down the hallway. Guns drawn. The tension accentuated by the unrelenting ALARM.

More GUNFIRE from far down the hallway, around the corner.

Bowland and Tobias start toward the sound of SEMI-AUTOMATIC GUNFIRE, but are startled by a FEMALE STUDENT stumbling out of a classroom doorway. Blood seeps from her upper thigh.

Tobias helps her into a seated position. Bowland backs up against the wall next to the open classroom doorway. She takes a breath, pivots into the classroom, gun aimed...

She stops dead in her tracks. The look in her eyes says it all. The carnage. The horror. *How could this happen here?*

BOWLAND

Jesus Christ.

CUT TO BLACK

INT. HODGE HOME - BEDROOM - MORNING

A cell phone RINGS on the nightstand beside a king-sized bed. The clock on the nightstand reads: 5:12am.

SUPER: Twenty years later.

STANLEY HODGE (37), the bed's only occupant, jolts awake, reaches for the phone. An apparent light sleeper, as though getting calls at unusual times is customary.

STANLEY

(into phone)

Hodge.

(listens)

Ms. Piedmont, yes.

(listens)

I did, yes. Thank you for calling me back.

Cloaked in a t-shirt and boxer shorts, Stanley launches himself out of bed, reaches for a notebook and pencil resting atop the nightstand.

STANLEY (CONT'D)

(into phone)

No, no. Not too early at all.

Stanley walks out to the

KITCHEN

and takes a seat at the table, the phone wedged between his shoulder and ear. He wastes no time jotting notes.

STANLEY
 (into phone)
 Now, I've spoken to two other patients
 at the home where--

Stanley listens to the reply, scribbles some notes.

STANLEY (CONT'D)
 (into phone)
 Right. Okay, and what did you
 overhear at the time? If you can
 remember exactly what was said, that
 would be a tremendous--

He takes down some more notes.

STANLEY (CONT'D)
 (into phone)
 And what did you take that to mean
 exactly?

INT. HODGE HOME - BATHROOM - SHOWER - LATER

Stanley stands motionless. Allows the hot water to trickle down his slumped shoulders. Steam overwhelms the room.

INT. HODGE HOME - BATHROOM - MOMENTS LATER

Stanley leans forward against the sink, examines his face in the mirror and the years that have taken their toll.

He pulls open the mirror cabinet, pops the cap off of a bottle of aspirin, swallows two pills, then reaches for a bottle of antacids and downs a few tablets. He closes the mirror cabinet, chugs a glass of water.

INT. HODGE HOME - BEDROOM - LATER

Stanley finishes dressing at the closet. Dress shirt, khaki pants. He reaches for his cell phone, keys and wallet atop the dresser.

Stanley turns toward the bed, sees the other side of the bed unoccupied. A realization.

STANLEY
 (under his breath)
 Shit.

Stanley exits, makes his way to the

LIVING ROOM

and sees his wife, MAE (37), asleep on the couch. A small blanket covers her.

He reaches down to touch her, but stops. She stirs, does not wake. Stanley sighs, then turns, exits.

INT. STANLEY'S CAR - MOVING - MORNING

Stanley navigates the morning rush hour traffic. The radio tuned to an NPR station.

EXT. SCHENECTADY DAILY GAZETTE BUILDING - MORNING

Stanley's car pulls into the parking lot.

INT. NEWS ROOM - MORNING

About half of the desks are occupied this early.

Stanley works the computer keyboard on his paperwork-flooded desk. He types at a feverish pace. His cubicle appears more lived in than his home.

KEN (O.S.)

You know, if you had stayed a columnist instead of doing investigative journalism, you wouldn't work ridiculous hours.

KEN PARKER (mid 40s), the kind of coworker afflicted with an excess of personality, has crept up behind Stanley, now stands over him, two store-bought coffees in hand.

Stanley doesn't turn to face Ken. Continues to type.

STANLEY

It's worth it sometimes. Especially when you get the perfect quote for one of the biggest stories you've ever written--

KEN

You got it?

Ken crosses to his own cubicle adjacent to Stanley's, places the coffees on his desk. He sits, pivots his chair to face his coworker, eager for the news.

Stanley takes a break, faces Ken.

STANLEY

At five-fifteen in the morning but yeah, I got it. Proof that Briar Hills administration knew Beltrami was abusing patients, yet their idea of discipline meant quietly relocating him from their Newburgh facility to right here in Schenectady. Not even a slap on the wrist.

KEN

Damn. Didn't think you'd ever get that quote. Thought you'd have to pull a Stephen Glass to finish it.

STANLEY

Persistence pays the bills.

Stanley points to the coffees on Ken's desk.

STANLEY (CONT'D)

One of those for me?

KEN

Yeah, you've earned it.

Stanley grasps one of the coffees, sips.

KEN (CONT'D)

You're welcome. Had to make a Powerball run, anyway.

Ken pulls a wad of lottery tickets from his jacket, places them upon the desk.

STANLEY

Shit, how many did you buy?

KEN

Twenty dollars' worth of hope. You don't play?

STANLEY

Eh, only bought one ticket. Trying to cut back on hope.

Chief editor PAUL BANNON (late 50s) approaches the cubicles. A tall, imposing presence belied by a kind face, though a look of consternation indicates a rough morning so far.

BANNON

You guys see the email I sent out? I'm moving the nine o'clock up a half-hour.

KEN

Of course. Always check my emails.

BANNON

If you say so. Don't be late.

Bannon exits. Ken and Stanley exchange befuddled looks.

KEN

He sends out emails?

INT. EDITOR'S OFFICE - MORNING

The morning meeting is in full swing. Bannon conducts said meeting from behind his massive desk.

The office is filled with EDITORS and REPORTERS, including Stanley and Ken. Some are seated in chairs, two on the tattered couch adjacent to the desk, while others stand. Stanley and Ken lean against the far wall.

The METRO EDITOR is in the midst of updating Bannon on a bit of breaking news...

METRO EDITOR

Yeah, the woman was crossing at the corner of Craig and Lincoln when the squad car struck her--

BANNON

Wait a minute, I'm confused, so... the cop was responding to a call and the woman didn't hear the siren?

METRO EDITOR

We don't know all the details yet. Haskins is on his way there now.

BANNON

Yeah, okay.
(scans the room)
Photo, where's Seth? Is he on his way there, too?

METRO EDITOR

No, he's running late. I'll send him when he gets in--

BANNON

No! Get him on the phone, give him the location, and tell him to go right there.

METRO EDITOR

Will do.

BANNON

(exhales sharply)

Moving on. Features. Stanley, you here bright and early, I take it, is good news?

STANLEY

Well, not for Briar Hills Assisted Living. I finally got the quote I needed. Confirmed the cover-up. Just putting the finishing touches on the piece, it'll be ready this afternoon.

Murmurs of approval filter through the gathering of employees.

BANNON

Okay. Why don't you give that over to Erin now. She's working with Gabriela. They can finish it up and get a jump start on the fact check, get Gabriela some extra practice.

STANLEY

I'm sorry?

BANNON

Is there a problem?

STANLEY

You mean other than the fact that I've busted my ass on this for the last couple months?

BANNON

You're not losing the byline. Not even sharing it, so what's the issue--

STANLEY

I'd just like an explanation.

KEN

(raises his hand)

Who the hell's Gabriela?

BANNON

(exasperated)

You miss that email, too?

Bannon points to a young woman standing in the doorway.

BANNON (CONT'D)

She's our new intern.

Ken glances over at GABRIELA NEVAREZ (19). Dressed in a smart pantsuit, she stands at attention, ready for duty.

Ken looks in her direction, offers a smile more derisive than amicable. Gabriela doesn't smile back.

BANNON (CONT'D)

Stanley, I have something else for you, and it's a bit pressing.

STANLEY

I'm listening.

BANNON

As you know, next week is the twentieth anniversary of The Rising.

STANLEY

And?

BANNON

You're gonna make me ask again?

KEN

(gleefully interjects)

Yeah, that's not gonna happen, Paul. He refused at the ten year, faked an illness to get out of it at the fifteen year--

STANLEY

I didn't fake that. I had strep.

KEN

(to Stanley)

Just trying to help. Don't want to see the intern steal your thunder--

GABRIELA

(irked)

I beg your pardon? This isn't a thunder theft, I'm just doing what's assigned.

KEN

My apologies.

GABRIELA

What's The Rising, anyway?

Ken turns to Gabriela, incredulous.

KEN

(re: Stanley)

You don't know who this is?

GABRIELA

You mean that school shooting? The one in, uh--

BANNON

Angelica, yes. Stanley's alma mater. He survived it.

(leans back)

Not long after the incident, this man here, just seventeen-years-old at the time, penned an op-ed about his own experience. More than that, actually. He wrote about the days after. Pain, guilt. But also hope. Possibility.

Stanley appears uncomfortable as Bannon gushes.

BANNON (CONT'D)

I was editor of the local newspaper back then. The Rising was a tremendous piece of writing. The AP picked it up, made Stanley an overnight sensation--

STANLEY

And I've been haunted by the specter of a follow-up ever since.

BANNON

Just because you downplay the importance of that article to those who were affected--

STANLEY

It's not a piece that lends itself to serial storytelling, Paul. Jason Granger killed himself, the victims were mourned, people moved on. Look, if I step away from my investigative work now to write some... nostalgic, philosophical opinion piece when there's no real story, it looks like I'm fishing for attention. Plus, I'm not high on the idea of a career spike off the memory of lost high school friends.

KEN

He's got a point, Paul.

(to Stanley)

That is a humble approach. You used to be so ego-driven.

STANLEY

Amazing how far I've come, isn't it?

Ken manages to half-stifle a cackle.

Bannon raises his arms behind his head and interlocks his fingers. Never takes his eyes off Stanley as he does this.

BANNON

That'll be all, everyone. We'll meet back here at three o'clock.

The reporters and editors begin to file out of the office.

BANNON (CONT'D)

Stanley, you want to stick around for a second?

The attendees exit, leaving only Stanley and his editor. Bannon motions for Stanley to have a seat on the couch. Stanley complies.

Bannon stands, pulls open his desk's top drawer, removes a bottle of prescription medication, pops two pills into his mouth, washes them down.

BANNON (CONT'D)

How are things at home? How's Mae holding up?

STANLEY

(shrugs)

Mae's Mae, you know... she's hanging in there.

BANNON

Look, I don't mean to pry, but you've been a little despondent lately. You sure everything is--

STANLEY

Could we get back on topic?

BANNON

Okay. You want to tell me the real reason you don't want to do this?

STANLEY

You want to tell me the real reason you do?

BANNON

Tell you what. Take a walk with me.

STANLEY

Where?

BANNON

Just down to the park and back. My sciatica's acting up, and I need to get out of this damn office.

EXT. SIDEWALK - MORNING

Stanley and Paul Bannon stroll down a sidewalk that connects the Daily Gazette Building to Steinmetz Park. Neither speaks for several seconds. Finally...

BANNON

You're awfully quiet.

STANLEY

I'm just bracing for the indignation--

BANNON

Oh, for crying out loud, look... I'm not gonna apologize for thinking this is a good idea.

(scoffs)

You know, being your boss, I could just be a prick and make you do it.

STANLEY

Yeah, but we both know you won't.

BANNON

Listen, we've known each other for twenty years and I do think of you more as a son than a subordinate, but don't abuse that.

They continue down the sidewalk. The conversation has temporarily halted. A gentle breeze caresses the treetops.

BANNON (CONT'D)

Someone with your kind of talent wasn't meant to end up writing local investigative pieces in Schenectady. Shit, you were on the national stage twenty years ago. You make impressions on people. Hell, I remember the first time Marjoree and I had you over for dinner. Seconds after you left, my wife went on and on about you.

STANLEY

You said she went on about what a pretentious asshole I was--

BANNON

And that's my point, you made an impression on her.

They approach

STEINMETZ PARK

Bannon points to an empty park bench.

BANNON

Let's sit down a sec.

They sit. About twenty yards away, two MOTHERS push their CHILDREN on swings.

STANLEY

So, your wife still thinks I'm a pretentious asshole, huh?

BANNON

She thinks you're brilliant. She also thinks you're work obsessed, ego-maniacal, and yes, pretentious.

STANLEY

That's nice and blistering.

BANNON

But those are qualities that make the best journalists.

(beat)

Let me ask you something. That article, The Rising... why do you hate it so much?

Stanley considers the question for a second or two.

STANLEY

I can tell you what I love about investigative journalism. It's honest. It's true--

BANNON

And writing about hope, that's B.S. You ever stop to consider how many people were touched by that piece?

Stanley shifts his body to face his boss, to better address him directly. A means to accentuate his next point...

STANLEY

Okay, you want to consider that article, let's consider it.

(MORE)

STANLEY (CONT'D)

I wrote it when I was seventeen. Now, I wasn't speaking out or demonstrating. Not working to change things like these Parkland kids are doing now. All I did was write one article. And the only reason it got the attention it did was because it was written by a school shooting survivor--

BANNON

Oh, stop it, will ya?

STANLEY

It was a shameless attempt to put a positive spin on a tragic event. That's why I do what I do now. I want truth. If there's one thing that irritates me more than anything, it's embellishment for some glossy, rose-colored effect.

BANNON

So, why did you write it?

STANLEY

I dunno. I don't... I mean, I was having trouble adjusting after the shooting, so a teacher suggested I put my thoughts on paper. Had no idea she'd submit it to the Herald--

BANNON

No, see, that's bullshit.

A frustrated Stanley scoffs and looks away. After a few seconds of silence, he turns back to his editor.

STANLEY

Can I speak bluntly?

BANNON

You've been holding back so far?

STANLEY

What do you hope a follow-up will accomplish?

The two men stare at one another.

BANNON

That's rhetorical, right?

STANLEY

Yes, it's rhetorical, what you want is lightning in a bottle. You want the same kind of response, am I right?

Bannon doesn't respond. Grants Stanley his full attention as the reporter orates from atop his metaphorical soapbox.

STANLEY (CONT'D)

The problem is, this isn't Hollywood. There's no happy ending here. What do you think, the Grangers had another kid, only instead of a shooter, they had an honor student? You think all's forgiven, that the parents of those killed forgave and forgot, and everyone lived happily ever after? I'm telling you, I am telling you, this is a bad idea. Nobody in that town is gonna want to rehash what happened, and certainly not to some journalist trying to help his employer sell a few papers.

BANNON

So, what does that make the people who embraced that article and took it to heart? Saps, suckers, what?

STANLEY

I don't know, that's not my concern--

BANNON

That was rhetorical, too. Let me tell you a quick story.

Stanley looks off into the distance. Undeterred, Bannon continues...

BANNON (CONT'D)

You know how sensitive my wife is, right? How these kinds of stories affect her?

Bannon takes a moment, leans back, runs his fingers through his gray hair, collects his thoughts before continuing.

BANNON (CONT'D)

The worst for her was Sandy Hook. The ages of those kids... it devastated her. She was a shell of herself in the weeks after that. Barely spoke. For weeks.

Bannon takes a moment, looks toward the sky.

BANNON (CONT'D)

I thought I was losing her. So, one night, after another shitty day at work, I come home to find my wife sitting at the kitchen table.

He turns back to Stanley.

BANNON (CONT'D)

Reading your article. She pulled it from my home office files.

(a soft smile)

When she was done, she turned, looked me in the eye for the first time in what seemed like forever.

Bannon leans in closer to his protege.

BANNON (CONT'D)

It was your words that brought my wife back to me.

Stanley continues to stare straight ahead, doesn't meet his his editor's gaze.

BANNON (CONT'D)

She set your article aside, wiped the tears from her face, took me by the hand, smiled, looked at me and said... "at the very least, that asshole does have a way with words."

Stanley attempts to conceal a wry smile.

BANNON (CONT'D)

If it helps, I didn't embellish that for glossy, rose-colored effect--

The two men share a quick burst of laughter.

BANNON (CONT'D)

Just take a few days. Go on back, reach out to people, whoever is willing to talk. You still feel there's no story, so be it.

Bannon pats Stanley on the shoulder.

BANNON (CONT'D)

But I think there's something there.

Bannon stands, starts for the sidewalk. Stanley remains on the bench, entrenched in thought.

EXT. HODGE HOME - PORCH - NIGHT

Mae sits on the porch of their small, modest one-story house. A cigarette in one hand, ash tray in the other. Attractive, but appears worn. Tired. The look of a woman run through the wringer by life. She stares into the distance.

Stanley's car pulls into the driveway. Upon seeing his vehicle, Mae puts out her cigarette and enters the house.

INT. HODGE HOME - LIVING ROOM - MOMENTS LATER

Mae sits on the couch. The television is off. The room is quiet, dark. Illuminated only by a wan pool of light from an end table lamp.

From the kitchen area, the sounds of Stanley entering, followed by that of keys being tossed onto the counter.

Stanley enters. Mae doesn't acknowledge him, just stares into the shadows. An uneasiness hangs in the air.

STANLEY

Rough day, huh.

MAE

You asking me about mine? Or telling me about yours.

STANLEY

You know I'm asking.

MAE

Rough day.

STANLEY

Something happen at your meeting?

MAE

I haven't slipped up in months, you don't need to keep asking how my meeting was.

STANLEY

I didn't say you slipped up, I wasn't even thinking that. What's going on? I've been here two-and-a-half seconds and I'm already the bad guy--

MAE

It's eight-thirty.

STANLEY

Am I late for something?

MAE

No, you're not late. I thought you were gonna go tonight.

STANLEY

What, the Al-Anon thing? I went to one of those already.

MAE

That was three months ago.

STANLEY

Yeah...

MAE

It's not the fucking G20 Summit, the point is to keep going back.

STANLEY

Ah, shit. I don't know, I... look, I'll go to the next one, alright?

Mae stands, exits. Stanley follows her into the

KITCHEN

Mae stands before the counter, keeps her back to her husband. Stanley remains a few feet behind, watches her.

STANLEY

What happened today?

Mae doesn't turn to face him.

MAE

Nothing.

STANLEY

A friend fall off the wagon?

MAE

Nothing happened, Stanley. I'm just having a bad day.

STANLEY

That makes a hell of a lot of sense--

Mae turns to him. A quick burst of frustration.

MAE

You know, I know how much you love your job and everything, but could you not project your Lois Lane fantasies onto me tonight? I don't need rescuing.

Stanley raises his hands in an "I give up" gesture. Mae crosses to the sink, begins washing the dishes.

MAE (CONT'D)

You want to talk, why don't you tell me about your day. I'll listen, that's the best I can do tonight.

Stanley crosses to the sink, takes a hand towel. He dries and puts the dishes away.

Silence for several seconds as they work. Finally...

STANLEY

Well, I got the quote I needed for the Briar Hills piece. It's done. And then, not wasting any time, Paul asked me again to do a follow-up to The Rising.

MAE

What did you tell him this time?

STANLEY

I agreed to do it.

Mae turns to Stanley, astonished. She stops working. A smile lights up her face.

Stanley faces her, admires the change in expression.

STANLEY (CONT'D)

That certainly turned things around.

MAE

No, I just... God, I never would have guessed that one.

STANLEY

So you think it's a good idea?

MAE

Yes. I loved that piece, just thought you were dead set against going back.

Mae and Stanley resume doing the dishes.

MAE (CONT'D)

Your grandmother will be thrilled. You gonna stay with her?

STANLEY

I'm sure she's got my old bedroom exactly as I left it.

MAE

Who are you meeting with?

STANLEY

I've already reached out to Raymond Thompson.

MAE

Oh, yeah? He's still teaching?

STANLEY

Still going strong. I hear Scott Billuck is still in town. Might try to contact Marilyn Granger, also.

MAE

You know, I think this is gonna be really good for you.

STANLEY

(frowns)

Yeah. Well...

Upon seeing his face, Mae frowns as well. The air has again left the room. Mae stops washing the dishes, dries her hands, crosses to the kitchen table and takes a seat.

MAE

You gonna talk to me? Or do I have to decrypt your brooding like it's a Nazi Enigma machine.

STANLEY

I don't think you'd understand.

MAE

Because I wasn't in the classroom with you when the first shots were fired, right? What do I know, I was being evacuated at the other end of the school--

STANLEY

Come on, you know that's not it.

Stanley drapes the hand towel over his shoulder, leans against the counter.

STANLEY (CONT'D)

Paul was going on about The Rising. All the good it did.

MAE

Paul's right.

Stanley takes a moment to gather his next thought.

STANLEY

After the Associated Press got the piece, people would always ask me how I was able to convey such complex emotions so clearly.

(scoffs)

I didn't know. I was seventeen at the time, had just survived the inexplicable and I was scribbling down thoughts. Feelings, dreams I still had, I... shit, I put less thought into that article than the people who read it did. I could never understand why everyone was so affected by it.

MAE

Does that really matter?

STANLEY

Come on. I didn't make a difference, not a real one. There was no wisdom in those words, no answers.

Mae rolls her eyes, glances away for a second.

STANLEY (CONT'D)

Mae, look... these kids surviving today, they're testifying before Congress, they're challenging the NRA. I wrote a few random thoughts after scoring a brush with fame just for being the quickest to duck.

MAE

What's the real reason, Stanley?
What are you so afraid of?

Stanley turns, begins drying dishes.

MAE (CONT'D)

Yeah, maybe you're right. Maybe it was fake because, God knows, you never opened up about what it was like to be one of the few survivors in a classroom of kids--

STANLEY

Don't do that. Don't head-shrink me. I'm not the one with the...

Stanley catches himself before finishing the sentence. Too late. It lassoes Mae's attention.

She stands, crosses to her husband.

MAE

The one with the what? The problem?
Right, 'cause I'm looking at a
perfectly well-adjusted man right in
front of me. Not on edge at all--

Stanley turns to his wife, his face starts to redden.

STANLEY

Yeah, maybe the reason I'm edgy is
because I'm trying to help my wife
adjust to her home life, and all I
get is kicked in the teeth for it!

Mae stands toe-to-toe with him. Never looks away.

STANLEY (CONT'D)

Okay, you know why I never go to
those Al-Anon meetings? They're
filled with people in pain. Nice
people, good people, but people I
can't help. You know why? Because
they're not my wife. It's pointless
to be there when I should be here!
But I can't fix things here because
every time I ask you what's wrong,
I'm told to go away!

Mae shakes her head, turns back to the remaining dishes.

STANLEY (CONT'D)

(sighs)

Look, I didn't mean to raise my voice--

Mae turns to him again, frustration bubbling over.

MAE

Fuck raising your voice, Stanley!
That doesn't bother me nearly as
much as the fact that you can't even
detect what it is about that little
diatribe that's killing us! You
know, it might help, when you're at
these meetings, to sit there and
listen to these people, hear their
stories, and let it sink in! Instead
of wishing you were at home, fixing
your wife!

Stanley glowers at Mae, then does an about face, takes a
glass and begins to dry it, his back to her. Silence commands
the room for several seconds.

MAE (CONT'D)

If you really feel that way, then maybe this assignment is for the best. Give us some time apart. See if what we have is even worth saving--

Stanley throws the glass against the wall, SMASHING it. Mae recoils, shakes. Both face each other, tremble slightly.

Each combatant ready to blow. Stanley takes a moment to calm himself, then speaks through deep, exasperated breaths.

STANLEY

You know what? You're right. It is my fault. I'm trying too goddamned hard. You don't want my help. I get it, I do. But I can't stop trying. Never letting on how empty I feel when I know you just want me out of sight. Or when you can't sleep next to me. Or look at me like your skin is crawling whenever I reach out to touch you.

(beat)

None of this is on you. You just stay broken. And I'll take the blame.

Mae's jaw trembles slightly. Steels herself before speaking.

MAE

Are you done?

STANLEY

(a whisper)

I'm done.

Stanley crosses to the kitchen closet, pulls out a broom and dustpan, proceeds to sweep up the broken glass.

Mae starts to exit, then turns back to him, tears forming.

MAE

I am sorry that my recovery is not what you hoped it'd be. All I want is five minutes where I feel good. Where I'm not angry or sad or scared or confused. But it's not that simple. I'm seeing things in a new light and despite how that sounds, it's not always exhilarating. Sometimes it's downright scary. And just so you know, that emptiness you feel? I can empathize like a motherfucker.

(MORE)

MAE (CONT'D)
(a tear falls)
Have a good trip.

Mae exits. Stanley leans against the counter. Defeated.

INT. HODGE HOME - OFFICE - MOMENTS LATER

Stanley enters his home office, plops down on his desk chair.

The desk is littered... not just with paperwork, but with empty take-out containers and cans of soda. Various articles and other bits of research are pinned to the cork boards lining the walls.

It's clear this is where he spends the lion's share of his time at home.

After a few seconds of quiet contemplation, Stanley stands, crosses to the adjacent filing cabinet. He opens the top drawer, rifles through it, pulls out a thick file.

Stanley returns to his desk, places the file atop it, sits, opens the file and examines the contents...

Inside is a surfeit of heartbreak; a compilation of news clippings and photos from the Angelica High School Massacre.

Stanley sifts through the articles, the tributes to those lost. He then comes across a photo of the shooter, Jason Granger. He stares at the photo, zeroes in on the eyes of the boy...

INT. JASON GRANGER'S BEDROOM - NIGHT - TWENTY YEARS AGO

Jason lies still in bed. Appears asleep.

The bedroom is illuminated by the moonlight through the window. It gives the abode a ghostlike feel.

It's the room of a typical teenage boy; movie posters adorn the walls, the desk is home to half-completed homework, and the furniture is decorated with dirty laundry.

The sound of FOOTSTEPS is heard approaching the closed door. The knob turns, the door inches open, revealing the shadow of Jason's FATHER.

He stares at his son for a few seconds, then inches the door closed. FOOTSTEPS are heard as his father moves away from the bedroom.

As the footsteps recede, Jason's eyes open. He rises out of bed, crosses to the far wall where a footlocker sits. He unlocks it, opens...

It contains a cache of weapons. Jason reaches in, takes hold of a .357 double-action revolver. Gun in hand, he crosses to a full-length mirror in the corner.

Cloaked in only pajama bottoms, the boy stares at his thin, scrawny reflection, the gun resting in his right hand.

Jason runs his left hand across his bare chest, then lowers his arm to his side.

He raises the gun to his temple, holds that position for a few seconds. Jason then takes the gun in both hands and points it up his chin.

His face reflects no emotion.

After several seconds in that position, he lowers the gun, then crosses back to the footlocker, returns the revolver and locks it.

INT. STANLEY'S CAR - MOVING - DAY - BACK TO PRESENT

Stanley steers his car down a country road. Stares straight ahead, sunglasses mask his eyes.

EXT. ANGELICA TOWN LINE - DAY

Stanley's car passes a sign that reads: Welcome! Town of Angelica, New York. Where History Lives!

EXT. ANGELICA - MAIN STRIP - MOMENTS LATER

The car cruises down the main road that bisects the town.

INT. STANLEY'S CAR - MOVING - CONTINUOUS

Stanley glances left and right, takes in the quaintness of his hometown. A general store. Church. Post office. Gas station. Quintessential small town America.

EXT. RURAL HOME - DAY

Stanley's car pulls into the driveway of a pleasant, well-maintained home.

INT. RURAL HOME - LIVING ROOM - MOMENTS LATER

Stanley meanders through the house, a travel bag dangles from his shoulder.

STANLEY
(calls out)
Hello!

No reply. He glances around, crosses to the fireplace where a collection of framed photographs adorns the mantel.

The photos are of Stanley at various stages of adolescence, his loving grandparents at his side every step of the way. Stanley smiles as he takes in the memories.

EXT. RURAL HOME - BACKYARD - MOMENTS LATER

The beauty and tranquility of the day is underscored by the warble of nearby birds. In the corner of the backyard sits a small greenhouse. Stanley approaches, enters the

GREENHOUSE

At the far end, GRANDMA RUTH (early 80s) prunes a couple plants. With long, flowing white hair, bright eyes, and surrounded by an array of enchanting flora, the woman is a sight that could assuage the most cynical of hearts.

Ruth glances up, sees her grandson...

STANLEY

Hi, Grandma.

A wide, warm, inviting smile graces Ruth's face. She sets the pruning shears down and covers her mouth with both hands, though the gesture is no match for her unbridled joy.

RUTH

My beautiful grandson.

She crosses to Stanley and wraps him in a tender embrace.

INT. RURAL HOME - KITCHEN - LATER

Stanley is seated at the table. Ruth stands before the stove, stirs the contents of a pot.

RUTH

Why didn't you call me and tell me you were coming back?

STANLEY

To be honest, I like seeing your face when you don't know I'm coming. The place looks great.

RUTH

I get a lot of help. The Jones boy from down the street mows the lawn and does a lot of the landscaping. How long are you in town for?

STANLEY

Just a few days. Mae says hi.

RUTH

I adore that girl. You picked a good one.

Ruth pours the contents of the pot into a couple of bowls, brings the bowls to the table, sets them down. She crosses to the counter, removes two spoons from the top drawer, returns to the table, sits.

Stanley takes a spoon, stirs his soup.

STANLEY

She wanted to come and see you. There's just a lot... you know.

RUTH

I know. Is she okay?

STANLEY

She will be, yeah.

Ruth takes her grandson's hand.

RUTH

And you?

STANLEY

Yeah, I'm great. Couldn't be better.

Ruth keeps her eyes locked onto Stanley. He returns her gaze, smiles. Then looks away. Ruth maintains her inquisitive stare. Her grandson again glances at her. They make eye contact. He gives what passes as a reassuring nod.

RUTH

Okay then.

A serene silence descends upon the kitchen as they consume their meals.

INT. RETAIL WAREHOUSE - DAY

Rows and rows of merchandise line the shelves, await purchase.

A forklift inches down one of the aisles. Its haggard operator, SCOTT BILLUCK (late 30s), has the face of a man losing a bare-knuckle street fight to a merciless hangover.

DEVIN BROOKS (late 30s) approaches the forklift. Bespectacled with thick lenses and quite overweight, Devin's status as warehouse supervisor is illustrated by his dress slacks, button down shirt and clean-shaven face.

Devin's attire and overall appearance runs in contrast to Scott's ragged denim and scruffy facial hair.

DEVIN
Yo, Billuck!

The forklift comes to a halt. The motor shuts off.

DEVIN (CONT'D)
One of your dipshit high school friends is here to see you.

Scott's facial expression remains unchanged.

SCOTT
Yeah? Why is it none of your dipshit high school friends ever visits? That's right, you never had any.

DEVIN
Yeah, well...

Devin reaches for Scott's walking cane, attached to the forklift with Velcro. He undoes the binding, takes the cane.

DEVIN (CONT'D)
If you're gonna be traveling without a forklift, you're gonna need this...

He tosses the cane up to Scott, who snags it out of the air with one hand. Devin snickers, turns, walks away.

INT. RETAIL WAREHOUSE - OFFICE - LATER

Stanley waits near the door.

Devin is seated at his work station. His office chair emits a nettling squeak as he leans back and forth. He keeps his eyes focused on Stanley, arms folded over his protruding belly. Under Devin's gaze, Stanley appears uncomfortable.

STANLEY
Long time, Devin. How you been?

Devin shrugs.

STANLEY (CONT'D)
He on his way?

DEVIN
(smirks)
Yeah. Not as quick as he was.

Scott enters from the back warehouse door. He moves with a noticeable limp, relies heavily on the cane.

Stanley smiles immediately. Scott remains stone-faced for a second or two, then offers a half-smile.

Scott crosses to Stanley, they shake hands. Devin watches.

SCOTT
Never thought I'd see this face again.
Was surprised to get your call.

STANLEY
Yeah? You look different.

Scott looks down, takes in his disheveled appearance.

SCOTT
Well... then one day, life happened.

DEVIN
As touching as this is, you wanna
take this somewhere else? Some of
us actually have work to do.

SCOTT
(to Stanley)
Truth is, this is all from working
here. This place has a way of taking
someone you knew as happy and turning
them into a miserable ass-wipe.
(turns to Devin)
Ain't that right, Devin?

DEVIN
Yeah, bite me.

Devin stands, exits through the warehouse door.

STANLEY
Actually, he's like I remember him.

INT. STANLEY'S CAR - MOVING - DAY

From behind the wheel, Stanley glances over at his friend, takes in the changes engendered by tragic events and the passage of time. Scott cranks down the passenger-side window.

SCOTT
Where we doing lunch?

STANLEY
Your turf, you call it.

SCOTT
Don't matter to me. So, what's the
real reason you're back?

STANLEY

Eh, my editor's been hounding me about a follow-up.

SCOTT

Knew it.

STANLEY

There probably won't be a story, anyway. He just wants me to look into the possibility--

SCOTT

There has to be a story. You're Angelica's little angel.

An uncomfortable silence corrodes the air between them.

STANLEY

Look, I get it. I never contacted you after... I never came to visit you in the hospital. I'm sorry.

Scott remains silent. Cold.

STANLEY (CONT'D)

Scott, I just wanted to disappear. The weeks turned into months--

SCOTT

Twenty fuckin' years, bud. Ah, I don't blame you. I'd have run away, too.

Scott stretches his hand out the window, feels the wind.

SCOTT (CONT'D)

You sure there won't be a story? Gotta add something to the shrine.

STANLEY

The what?

EXT. ANGELICA SENIOR HIGH SCHOOL - MASSACRE MEMORIAL - DAY

Stanley and Scott are seated on a bench before a sincere yet ostentatious memorial paying tribute to the victims of the Angelica Shooting Massacre.

Said memorial consists of a large statue. It depicts two traumatized students consoling each other. At each side are smaller monuments...

One has photos of the victims embedded into it, along with a plaque for each with a short biography on it.

Stanley's attention is focused on the third monument, which has a giant plaque plastered to the front, Stanley's entire article etched on it.

STANLEY

Thought the public had forgotten me.

He notices the title at the bottom of the large statue. It reads: NEVER FORGET.

STANLEY (CONT'D)

Never forget?

SCOTT

Yeah, they just want to make sure. You know, one of those things that slips the mind... where you left your car keys, when your next dentist appointment is, that you were shot a couple times.

A varied array of paraphernalia surrounds the memorial. Yearbooks, flowers, teddy bears, photos, candles, and so on.

STANLEY

(re: the paraphernalia)

These things aren't here all the time, are they?

SCOTT

Nah. People put 'em here around this time every year.

(grins)

Hey, you remember Richie Trinkett? Used to spend like six periods out of an eight period day smoking under the bleachers? Every year, couple of his friends leave cigarettes right here. Kind of touching, really.

Scott stands, hobbles toward the memorial, scans the collection of items. He locates a pack of cigarettes, takes them, returns to the bench, lights up.

Stanley looks at Scott, aghast.

SCOTT (CONT'D)

What? You know what cigarettes cost?

Scott takes a drag, blows smoke into the gentle breeze.

SCOTT (CONT'D)

So, what do you need for this article of yours? Tales of my heroics?

(MORE)

SCOTT (CONT'D)

Details of my surgeries? You bring along a photographer? I can drop my pants, give you some tasty close-ups of the scars--

STANLEY

I think the Gazette readers will pass on that one, thanks.

Stanley glances over at Scott, smiles.

STANLEY (CONT'D)

Just thought you and I could catch up. I missed you.

Scott looks askance at Stanley's suggestion. Then offers a sardonic chuckle.

SCOTT

Alright, then. We can meet up at Trudy's some night. I'm a better storyteller with a few beers in me.

Scott grasps his cane, stands and heads for the car. Stanley eyes the monuments one last time, then stands and leaves.

An abrupt, sharp burst of wind wafts through the memorial, causes the surrounding flowers to shiver.

MAE (V.O.)

Hi, I'm Mae, and I'm an alcoholic.

AA MEMBERS (V.O.)

Hi, Mae.

INT. CHURCH BASEMENT - AFTERNOON

A covey of the recovering are gathered here in the belly of spiritual convalescence.

Mae sits surrounded by other alcoholics. She leans forward in her chair as she speaks.

MAE

I've been sober for one-hundred eighty-one days.

The attendees applaud. Mae half-suppresses a smile.

MAE (CONT'D)

I like coming here. I, uh... I wanted to share something today that I never brought up before.

(MORE)

MAE (CONT'D)

I've talked about a lot of stuff, what happened when I hit rock bottom and everything. This, though, um... about twenty years ago, both my husband and I were survivors of the Angelica School Shooting. Not sure why I never mentioned it before.

(beat)

For the longest time, I never liked to think of myself as a survivor. What I mean is, I didn't think I was really affected. I wasn't shot at, I was in a science class at the opposite end of the school, we were evacuated safely. I did know several of those killed, but I can't say I was close to them. I always considered myself an outsider to the tragedy.

Mae shifts in her seat, collects her thoughts before continuing...

MAE (CONT'D)

Looking back on it, I did become much more aware of loud noises after that. Couldn't go to a restaurant and sit at a table with my back to the door. Even movies, I prefer to watch at home. Sitting in a dark, crowded theatre still makes me nervous. Guess it did affect me after all. But lately, I've come to realize that I have no idea how it affected my husband.

EXT. RETAIL WAREHOUSE - AFTERNOON

Stanley's car pulls up to the employee entrance. Scott disembarks the vehicle, starts for the building.

MAE (V.O.)

He wasn't at the other end of the school with me. He was in the first classroom where the gunman opened fire. Miracle he didn't get hit.

Stanley watches as Scott hobbles to the door, a rueful expression on his face.

INT. CHURCH BASEMENT - AFTERNOON

Mae takes a moment, glances around at the troubled faces watching her.

MAE

Now if, at this point, you're thinking to yourself, what the hell was that traumatized woman thinking, marrying a guy who suffered the same trauma, well... that's yet another thing you and I have in common.

Gentle laughter from the attendees spills into the air.

MAE (CONT'D)

Seemed like a good idea at the time.
It felt like he understood me.

INT. STANLEY'S CAR - MOVING - AFTERNOON

Stanley steers his car down one of Angelica's side streets. His face a mask of concentration.

MAE (V.O.)

The thing about my husband is, he got a bit of fame. He got this by revealing a little to the public about the experience.

Stanley reaches into the armrest, retrieves a note pad, opens it with one hand, looks at an address.

MAE (V.O.) (CONT'D)

The effect this had on him, it... it really pushed him back into hiding. He didn't want to talk about it. Not to anyone, not even me.

EXT. HOUSE - AFTERNOON

Stanley's car pulls into the driveway of a large home on one of Angelica's side streets. He exits the car, approaches the front porch, climbs a few steps, knocks on the door.

MAE (V.O.)

In the years after, with all my anxiety, I needed to talk about it. But he couldn't. So, I turned to alcohol, and... well, you know how that played out.

The front door opens, a middle-aged COUPLE invites Stanley inside.

INT. HOUSE - LIVING ROOM - MOMENTS LATER

Stanley and the mother are seated on a couch. They converse, though we don't hear the words. The father looks on from the recliner opposite the couch.

MAE (V.O.)

Through everything, my relapses, he never left my side. A lesser man would have retreated long ago. But all that time, we never talked about what he experienced in that classroom.

The mother dries her eyes with a tissue as Stanley thumbs through a photo album. The pictures are of a TEENAGE GIRL during happy times.

MAE (V.O.) (CONT'D)

I'd ask about it, but he said he wanted to spare me the details. At the time, I bought that he was protecting me. Now I know I wasn't the one he was protecting.

Stanley closes the album. He glances up at the mother. They exchange a sad smile.

INT. CHURCH BASEMENT - AFTERNOON

Mae's eyes have become glassy during the confession.

MAE

These past one-hundred eighty-one days, this is the longest I've been sober since I took my first drink. I'm proud of that. And I was hoping that if he and I were on equal footing, if I was no longer this, like... wounded soul that needed tending to, maybe he could finally open up about what happened, about how he feels. I think he needs to do that. But that hasn't happened.

(beat)

We're drifting apart. We fight constantly. Seems the better, more independent I get, the worse we get. I don't know if we're gonna make it.

Mae hesitates a moment, gathers her thoughts...

MAE (CONT'D)

There's a, uh... a saying that, I think, pretty much sums up my addiction. "It's hard to get enough of something that almost works."

Sporadic sighs and nods of empathy ripple through the assembly of recovering addicts.

MAE (CONT'D)

For me, it was the alcohol. That's what almost worked for me, why I couldn't control it. But for my husband, I think the thing that almost works for him is me. Taking care of me. That's what's keeping him from dealing with this, from confronting what happened that day. That's what I'm afraid is gonna kill him. Me.

Mae takes a moment to wipe her eyes.

MAE (CONT'D)

Thanks for letting me share.

EXT. ANGELICA - MAIN STRIP - AFTERNOON

Stanley's car cruises down Main Street.

INT. STANLEY'S CAR - MOVING

Stanley rolls down his window, sticks his arm out, allows the breeze to tickle his fingers.

He stops at a red light, glances out the driver's side window. His eyes catch sight of a YOUNG BOY (9) wielding a toy machine gun. The child points the gun in Stanley's direction.

Stanley remains transfixed on the boy. On the gun.

EXT. ANGELICA HIGH SCHOOL - MORNING - TWENTY YEARS AGO

Jason Granger drifts toward the school's front door among a throng of STUDENTS. He keeps his head down, doesn't speak to anyone and no one seems eager to speak to him.

The hood of his sweatshirt envelopes his head, a filled backpack slows his gait.

INT. SCHOOL HALLWAY - MORNING

Jason stands before his locker, opens the backpack, places a couple items from the pack into the locker. His face is a mask of focus and concentration; it betrays no emotion, regardless of the trigger.

The PRINCIPAL walks by, pulls Jason's hood down off his head gently, then continues on his way. Jason doesn't react.

Down the hall, Jason's attention is collared by the sight of a group of BULLIES shoving a weak OUTCAST against the wall. He doesn't react, just closes his locker and walks away.

INT. CLASSROOM - DAY

Jason is seated in the far right corner, near the window.

As a TEACHER slogs through a rather spiritless lecture, Jason looks at a pretty GIRL three rows over. Every few seconds, he steals another glance. She doesn't notice.

INT. SCHOOL HALLWAY - DAY

Jason back at his locker, retrieves books for his next class. He sees the same pretty girl about twenty feet away. She stands alone, places items into her own locker.

He closes his locker, crosses the hall, approaches the girl...

She looks up at him, startled. She backs up a couple steps. The look in her eyes is not one of contempt. Not the look of one who feels superior, but something else. Unease. The intensity Jason carries with him seems to unsettle her.

She turns and walks away. After a few steps, the girl glances back but continues walking. Jason watches. He doesn't react.

INT. SCHOOL CAFETERIA - DAY

Three-quarters full with students, the room is a cacophony of varied, indecipherable conversations.

Jason sits alone at a table next to the exit as he eats. Four tables away, that same girl eats alone as well.

Upon finishing her meal, the girl stands, takes her tray to the garbage can, disposes of the contents.

Jason watches her every step...

She walks toward the exit, notices him on the way out. They make eye contact again. She still carries a look of apprehension. She looks away, exits.

INT. SCHOOL HALLWAY - DAY

Jason walks toward a classroom. Behind him, he hears a commotion. He turns, sees that same outcast kid being pushed into the wall by the very same bullies.

This time, one of the bullies notices Jason watching them. The bully gets the attention of his cohorts. They all stare, sneer at their potential new prey.

Jason doesn't react.

He turns away, enters the classroom...

INT. CLASSROOM - AFTERNOON - BACK TO PRESENT DAY

Stanley peers in...

The room is equipped with a custom-made handicap ramp that leads to an elevated platform lining the front.

The platform gives the wheelchair-bound teacher, RAYMOND THOMPSON (late 50s) a greater ability to write on the blackboard. A handsome African-American who carries himself with a quiet dignity.

There is no class in session. There is only Raymond who, from atop the platform, writes some biographical facts about William Shakespeare on the blackboard.

STANLEY

Schools will never learn.

Raymond turns his head. A broad smile commandeers his face.

STANLEY (CONT'D)

Shakespeare? I'm surprised student bodies haven't collectively rioted by now.

RAYMOND

What are you talking about? You loved Shakespeare.

STANLEY

Yeah, that's why I was engulfed with friends in school.

RAYMOND

Well, fortunately, your love of classical literature outweighed your need to be popular.

Raymond taps the blackboard...

RAYMOND (CONT'D)

Now, this assignment I have for tomorrow's class, this is on one of his lesser known. Might even stump the likes of you.

Stanley grins, crosses to one of the desks, sits.

Stanley and Raymond exchange piercing looks. The gauntlet has been thrown down.

RAYMOND (CONT'D)

"Love all, trust a few, do wrong to none; be able for thine enemy rather in power than in use, and keep thy friend under thy own life's key; be cheque'd for silence, but never tax'd for speech."

Stanley ponders. Raymond grins. Then...

STANLEY

"Moderate lamentation is the right of the dead, excessive grief the enemy to the living."

RAYMOND

(a hearty laugh)
You are good.

STANLEY

Yes, well, I actually prefer his tragedies to his comedies.

Raymond turns, wheels the chair toward the ramp.

RAYMOND

That's because you've always had a bit of a cloud over your head.

STANLEY

Or it could be because I've spent the afternoon meeting with families about their lost loved ones.

Raymond wheels down the ramp, to Stanley's side.

RAYMOND

Yes, of course. This can't be an easy trip. So good to see you.

They shake hands.

STANLEY

Thanks for meeting with me.

RAYMOND

Absolutely. My wife's got dinner for us. That is, if you don't mind giving me a lift home.

EXT. THOMPSON HOME - DRIVEWAY - EVENING

Raymond's wife, CASSANDRA (late 50s), waits expectantly at the front door.

Stanley's car pulls into the driveway. Stanley exits, pops the trunk, pulls out Raymond's wheelchair and brings it to the passenger's side door.

INT. THOMPSON HOME - DINING ROOM - LATER

Stanley, Raymond, and Cassandra are seated at the dining room table. Atop the table are remnants of a savory meal.

Stanley and Raymond are in the midst of a discussion. Cassandra listens, though appears a bit uncomfortable with the subject matter.

RAYMOND

Actually, no, I didn't really know Jason all that well. I did have him in an Intro to Lit class. Not much of an impression. Nothing that would have led me to think he was volatile--

CASSANDRA

(interrupts)

You won't forget to take your medicine, right? And the new prescription, don't forget that--

RAYMOND

Yeah, I got it, babe. Eight o'clock.

There's an uncomfortable pause in the conversation. Stanley smiles at Raymond and Cassandra. She smiles back politely.

STANLEY

(to Raymond)

What about that day? I often have a hard time piecing it together.

This line of inquiry vexes Cassandra even more. Stanley glances at her, notices this.

RAYMOND

Yeah, sometimes I do, too, I... you know, it's odd, but little things I remember. The door was ajar. Normally, I close it all the way.

As Raymond reminisces, Cassandra keeps her eyes focused on a particular spot on the table. Clearly troubled.

RAYMOND (CONT'D)

And it's not the guns that stick in my mind. It's his face. He didn't have any real expression at all.

(MORE)

RAYMOND (CONT'D)

Just looked like some guy walking
down the street. His damn face looked
so innocent that the weapons didn't
even register at first--

The discussion is interrupted by the sound of Cassandra's
chair legs scraping against the hardwood floor. She rises
from the table...

CASSANDRA

(upset)

Please excuse me. It was good to
see you again, Stanley.

She crosses to the kitchen.

STANLEY

(rises)

I'm sorry, Mrs. Thompson.

Stanley looks to Raymond, who offers a reassuring expression.

RAYMOND

No, it's fine. Just give me a second.

Raymond wheels his way into the kitchen after her.

Stanley sits back down, buries his face in his hands. He
then glances toward the kitchen, overhears indistinct arguing.

Stanley stands, crosses to the wall next to the kitchen area
where several photos are hung. The real reason, of course,
is to try and listen in on the fight...

CASSANDRA (O.S.)

You should never have agreed to this.

RAYMOND (O.S.)

He's a nice young man, Cass--

CASSANDRA (O.S.)

I know, but that's not the point!
These questions are not doing you or
me any good! I need him out now!

STANLEY

(under his breath)

Fuck.

Stanley glances around the room. Unsure. Then exits.

EXT. THOMPSON HOME - DRIVEWAY - MOMENTS LATER

Stanley fumbles with his keys as he crosses to his car.
Raymond wheels up to the house's screen door. Calls out...

RAYMOND

Stanley!

Stanley stops, turns, and walks a few paces back.

STANLEY

Mr. Thompson, I'm sorry. I shouldn't
have come here.

RAYMOND

It's not about you. Please.

Stanley remains frozen in place under his former teacher's
pleading gaze.

EXT. THOMPSON HOME - PORCH - NIGHT

Raymond and Stanley are perched on the front porch, Stanley
on the porch swing. Raymond nurses a beer while Stanley
holds a bottle of spring water.

RAYMOND

This is kind of personal, so none of
this gets written about, okay?

Stanley nods.

RAYMOND (CONT'D)

We moved here from Boston. Roxbury,
actually. Fairly rough neighborhood.
Cassandra was worried about our son
growing up in that.

STANLEY

How is Shaun?

RAYMOND

Good. Lives up in Rochester now.
Anyway, back in Boston, I was teaching
in the city. Worked with a lot of
great kids. Cass had a good job,
too. But she was scared for Shaun.
Because of gang activity mostly.

STANLEY

MS-13?

RAYMOND

(nods)

My sister-in-law was living over in
Hornell. Cass insisted we move.

Stanley unscrews the cap from the bottle, takes a drink.

RAYMOND (CONT'D)

I understood the need. But I didn't
want to leave those kids I thought
still needed me. I asked if we could
look around for another place in
Boston, but she wouldn't budge.

Raymond takes a swig of beer.

RAYMOND (CONT'D)

Overall, it's been fine here. The
first couple years, though, I was
bitter. One morning, we had a really
bad fight. I was on about having to
sacrifice a career I loved and the
kids I left behind. She looked at
me, raging, finally said "You don't
really care about the kids you teach.
It's all about your ego."

Raymond shakes his head at the memory... too vivid.

RAYMOND (CONT'D)

That cut deep. I was mad, I mean...
how could she think that? I knew
right away she wanted to take it
back. I didn't give her the chance.
Just left, headed for school.

The frown on Raymond's face subtly morphs into a soft smile.

RAYMOND (CONT'D)

But as I was driving, I realized she
only said it 'cause she was scared
for Shaun. And I remembered why I
married her.

(takes a swig)

By the time I got to school, I wasn't
angry anymore. I knew exactly what
would happen when I got home. We'd
look at each other, forgive without
having to say a word.

The teacher glances at his former student. Stanley notices
the glassiness in the eyes. It hits him.

STANLEY

But that was the morning.

RAYMOND

Yeah. My life was turned upside down in a split second. Took a long time to fight my way back. But that moment upended her world, too.

Raymond glances out into the darkness. Reflects...

RAYMOND (CONT'D)

Amazing how so much can hinge on timing. A wife tells her teacher husband that he doesn't care about his students, only his ego. That's the last thing she says to him until hours later, when she gets a call, is told her husband's spine has been severed by a bullet. That he'll never walk again, never be the same. And it happened because he jumped in front of a gunman for his students.

(beat)

I didn't do it because of what she said. Don't know why I did it, everything happened so damn fast.

Stanley leans back on the swing, a pained expression.

RAYMOND (CONT'D)

Cass came into my hospital room, did not shed a tear. Said we're gonna deal with this. Helped me through all the rehab. Day after day. But she won't talk about that morning.

Stanley starts to speak, but stops. The painful reminiscence too acute for any comforting words he could impart.

RAYMOND (CONT'D)

Every day... whenever she helps me in and out of bed, in and out of the car, when she cooks, cleans, takes me to the doctor, every time it's another reminder.

(a sad smile)

She's strong. But that's not always a blessing. If she doesn't want to put down that burden, no one's gonna make her.

Stanley nods. They sit silently. Raymond begins to chuckle.

RAYMOND (CONT'D)

I had this... grand romantic plan once. We used to love to go dancing.

(MORE)

RAYMOND (CONT'D)

Both big Etta James fans. I have this old forty-five of "At Last."

Raymond and Stanley both smile.

RAYMOND (CONT'D)

Once, when she was in the kitchen cooking, I put the record on. When she came out, I was sitting here, holding a rose, had my hand out...

(gestures)

Like this, asking her to dance. I was just hoping she'd sit on my lap and we could wheel around. Sort of a handicap slow dance, right?

(beat)

She wasn't having it. The look on her face, hooo boy. Daggers. Never bothered to try that again.

They sit in an awkward silence for a few seconds.

STANLEY

Maybe the rose was a bit much--

RAYMOND

(laughs)

Yeah, I think it was. I know it was a strange thing to do, I just...

Both sit in contemplative silence, absorb the sentiment.

STANLEY

I should probably get going.

Raymond wipes his eyes, then looks at Stanley, smiles. They shake hands. Stanley stands, crosses to his car. As he opens the door, Raymond call out...

RAYMOND

Stanley?

STANLEY

Yeah?

RAYMOND

Do you really have a hard time remembering that morning?

STANLEY

I do. I blocked a lot of it out. Sometimes I'll read The Rising again, and it's like I'm reading someone else's story.

RAYMOND

That's not good.

STANLEY

I know. But I don't know if it's fixable.

Stanley enters his car, starts the engine, pulls out and drives off. Raymond watches, concerned.

INT. GRANDMA RUTH'S HOUSE - STANLEY'S BEDROOM - NIGHT

Stanley stands before the window, gazes out onto the calm, quiescent neighborhood. Deep in thought.

His laptop sits opened atop a small desk opposite the bed, the light from its screen beckons. He pays it no mind.

Stanley reaches into his pocket, retrieves his cell phone. Dials a number, holds it to his ear. Voice mail...

MAE (V.O.)

Hey, it's me. Leave a message, that's what it's for.

After a couple seconds, the voice mail BEEPS. Stanley keeps the phone pressed to his ear. Doesn't respond. Seconds tick. He waits... waits... then hangs up.

Stanley pockets the phone, crosses to the desk, sits before the laptop, stares at the blank screen.

INT. JASON GRANGER'S BEDROOM - NIGHT - TWENTY YEARS AGO

The door opens, Jason enters. Backpack slung over his shoulder, a bag of fast food cradled in his hand. He closes the door, twists the dead bolt, seals himself in. Tosses the backpack onto his bed, the food onto his desk.

The room has a gloomy air. The only illumination comes from an unobtrusive floor lamp situated in the corner.

Jason leans against the wall, removes his sneakers, then crosses to the full length mirror. He pulls off his Windbreaker, then his shirt...

Bruises pepper various parts of his body. Remnants of an unfortunate altercation.

Jason studies his body wounds in the mirror. As always, his face betrays no emotion.

He turns, crosses to his desk, sits, fires up the desktop computer. The bag of fast food awaits beside the monitor.

Jason types. A web browser appears on screen. On the browser, a web community page pops up entitled "The Cat Cave: Life and Laughs with the Angelica High School Jaguars."

He opens his desk drawer, removes headphones and a portable CD player. He places the headphones on, activates the player from which Johann Sebastian Bach's Suite #3 emanates.

Jason scrolls through a cluster of photographs of his high school classmates. He reaches for the bag of fast food, removes a cheeseburger, unwraps, takes a bite, chews, continues to scroll...

Dances, parties, sporting events, artistic celebrations, even hallway hijinks are included in the digital collage.

As always, Jason remains stone-faced. No betrayal of emotion.

He clicks on a link. The photo array vanishes and a message board pops up. Some of the topics include "Ideas for This Year's Prom Theme", "Your Post-High School Plans", "Seniors, Share Your Favorite Memories", and so forth.

Jason stares, chews his burger, takes a sip of soda.

He selects another link. The screen switches to a menu of chat rooms. One by one, Jason clicks on a few of the rooms...

One room has some perpetual partygoers talking about this weekend's "totally awesome" kegger. Another has a couple students discussing homework. He clicks on a third...

There is only one person in this chat room, screen name is *lonely_n_lost*. Jason's screen name is *Phoenix_Sire_82*.

Jason stares at the monitor. No emotion on his face.

On the screen, the word "hey" appears. Followed by "u hate life 2?"

Jason stares. Doesn't type a response.

After a few seconds, "*nobody understands*" appears. A few more seconds pass, then "u there?"

Jason continues to stare. No reaction, no emotion.

On the screen: "*don't wanna be on this earth anymore*" followed by "*will u talk 2 me?*" Then: "*lonely*".

A few seconds after that: "*please*".

Jason doesn't respond, watches the screen a few more seconds, then clicks the chat room window closed, takes the last remaining bite of the burger, types again...

The screen changes to a website selling a variegated array of assault rifles and ammunition. He scrolls through the inventory.

After a few seconds, he clicks out of that window, leans back. With the music still playing, Jason slips the portable CD player into the waistband of his jeans, stands, crosses to the footlocker, unlocks, opens, removes the revolver.

Jason steps up to the full-length mirror. The room's delimited light from the floor lamp casts dark facial shadows, gives him a somewhat minatory presence.

This time, Jason points the revolver toward the mirror, as if he were gunning down the reflection.

INT. GRANDMA RUTH'S HOUSE - BEDROOM - MORNING - PRESENT DAY

Stanley jolts awake to the sound of his cell phone ringing. He reaches over, answers...

STANLEY
(into phone)
Hodge.
(listens)
I'm sorry?
(listens)
Uh, yeah. I know him, of course.

Stanley looks bewildered.

STANLEY (CONT'D)
(into phone)
Yeah, I can definitely do that.
Just let me--

He scrambles out of bed, crosses to the desk, grasps his note pad and pencil.

STANLEY (CONT'D)
(into phone)
Let me get some information here.

INT. GRANDMA RUTH'S HOUSE - KITCHEN - MORNING

With the dexterity of a seasoned chef and the confidence of a coxswain, Ruth moves about the kitchen, prepares breakfast.

Stanley enters. Surprised.

STANLEY
You haven't lost a step.

RUTH

I will not let the Winter of Life
bring me down.

STANLEY

Don't think you've hit that season
quite yet.

He sits at the table.

STANLEY (CONT'D)

Do you remember Henry Pickering?
Lost his daughter in the shooting?
Went on a news blitz tirade against
Jason's parents? Trashed their house
a few times, screaming about how God
would judge them.

Ruth takes a quick break from preparations, turns to Stanley.

RUTH

I do. Poor man. I remember he wasn't
a fan of your article.

(beat)

Was a nice man, but losing his girl,
that sent him a bit over the edge. I
always felt a little uncomfortable
seeing him after that.

Ruth turns back to the stove, tends to the scrambled eggs.

RUTH (CONT'D)

He sure wouldn't like what you're
doing now. Glad you don't have to
run into him--

STANLEY

He wants to meet me.

Ruth pinwheels back to Stanley. Flabbergasted.

STANLEY (CONT'D)

Yeah, his personal assistant just
called. We set up a meeting.

RUTH

I thought he retired and moved away.

STANLEY

He did. Has a cabin on Skaneateles
Lake. I'm flying out of Dansville
later this morning.

RUTH
Flying? You get sick if a road is
too curvy.

STANLEY
So, I'll get some Dramamine.

RUTH
How did he know you were in town?

STANLEY
(shrugs)
Still knows people. Hears things.

RUTH
You're actually looking forward to
sitting down with him?

STANLEY
Could be a good angle for the story.
A pinch of controversy? Might work.

Ruth pauses, grabs a lid, covers the eggs, then crosses to
the table, sits. A look of doubt. She takes his hand.

RUTH
I'm worried about you. I don't think
you're approaching this in the right--

STANLEY
I'm finding the story.

RUTH
But what about you? This was
something that changed your life--

STANLEY
Grandma, I'm fine.

She stares at him. In her eyes... love, anxiety, melancholy,
and hope waging war with one another.

Ruth smiles, caresses her grandson's cheek.

She stands, composes herself, returns to breakfast
preparations.

RUTH
Just promise me one thing. That you
won't make any remarks about his
devotion to the church--

STANLEY

I don't have a problem with people who believe in God, you know that. You're a believer, and you're one of the most important things in my life.

Ruth takes the frying pan, crosses to the table, scoops the eggs onto two plates that have already been set.

STANLEY (CONT'D)

And you gotta admit, Mr. Pickering is a little... extreme in his views. He hates homosexuals, atheists. Won't even tolerate agnostics, called them "chickenshit atheists."

Ruth crosses to the sink, places the pan into it, returns to the table, pulls the chair closer to Stanley and sits.

RUTH

You've always been a sensitive boy, but you never could resist a little jab when it came to the spiritual.

STANLEY

No, I only have a problem with people who make an obnoxious display of it. Who wear crucifixes and sport bibles.

Ruth takes a gentle hold of his arm.

RUTH

Yes, and through years of cleaning your bloody nose after unnecessary fights, will you please remember what I tried to teach you?

(beat)

Remove yourself from the situation.

STANLEY

One, I'd like to think a sixty-year-old man won't punch me in the nose and two, we're gonna be in his cabin in the middle of nowhere, I don't--

Ruth cups his cheeks in her hands with surprising vigor.

RUTH

Stanley...

STANLEY

(recites by rote)

I promise, if I see a crucifix anywhere, I will find a way to remove myself from the situation.

RUTH
Good. Now eat.

EXT. RETAIL WAREHOUSE - MORNING

Stanley's car pulls up to the employee entrance.

INT. RETAIL WAREHOUSE - MOMENTS LATER

Devin removes merchandise from one of the shelves, places it onto the front of a forklift. Sweat stains his underarms. He appears irked at having to perform such a mindless, quotidian task. This is not for a manager.

Stanley approaches. Devin sees him...

DEVIN
Your boy's not here. Called out sick.

STANLEY
Ah, shit.

DEVIN
Well, you know where he lives. Why don't you drag his ass out of bed, do us both a favor?

STANLEY
Heading out of town. Day trip.

DEVIN
I'll have him call you when I speak to him again.

STANLEY
Thanks.

Stanley turns, starts to walk away.

DEVIN
I'm sure he'd love to... hop on down and see you.

Another surly snicker from Devin. Stanley stops, turns, marches a few paces back to him.

STANLEY
I know you and he didn't really get along in school, but would it kill you to dial it back a little?

Devin stops working, turns to him. Leans against the shelf.

DEVIN

Now, there's the real Stanley Hodge.
Putting on airs. Fame really went
to your head, didn't it--

STANLEY

(scoffs)

You're kidding, right? I didn't
write that to be famous. Nice of
you to forget, but I was a victim of
the shooting, too.

DEVIN

Well, even if I forgot, there isn't
a single person in the country who
couldn't remind me.

STANLEY

We're both adults. Physically, anyway--

DEVIN

(a derisive laugh)

You know, your friend doesn't have
the flu. He's hungover. Again.

For a brief moment, Stanley appears concerned. Quickly
regains his defiant composure.

DEVIN (CONT'D)

Every single night. Getting drunk,
picking fights. Guy's gonna end up
dead in an alley--

STANLEY

With everything he's been through--

DEVIN

(scoffs)

What he's been through, what you've
been through. I went through it,
too. Nice of you to forget that.

Devin turns, loads more items, then pivots back to Stanley...

DEVIN (CONT'D)

Remember those support groups the
school set up in the weeks after? I
tried going to one. Sally Kingsbury
met me at the door. She turned me
away. Told me it wasn't a good idea
for me to attend. Said some girls
might get emotional, and that it
wasn't appropriate for me to be there.
Even though everyone else was.

(MORE)

DEVIN (CONT'D)

Yeah, I got the message. Who would want to bare their soul to an ugly fat kid, right? Guess there's a pecking order, even in grief.

STANLEY

I didn't know that.

The two men stare at each other, each taking in the view from a new perspective.

DEVIN

Like I said... I'll have him get in touch with you.

Stanley nods, turns, starts to walk away.

DEVIN (CONT'D)

You're a smart guy, Stanley. You're moral. And you care. The problem is, none of those mean much if you don't have all the information.

Stanley acknowledges the sentiment, turns, exits.

EXT. DANSVILLE AIRPORT - TARMAC - DAY

A calm, clear sky hangs over the regional airport. Stanley and a PILOT approach each other, shake hands.

PILOT

You Stanley?

STANLEY

Yeah. Is this where I'm supposed to be? Went to the terminal, I was told to come this way.

PILOT

(laughs)

Yeah, it ain't a commercial flight. Way too short. I work for Henry. You ever flown in a Cessna?

STANLEY

Never.

PILOT

Ah, you'll love it. Come on.

EXT. SKY OVER CENTRAL NEW YORK STATE - DAY

The Cessna 162 Skycatcher sails through the air.

INT. CESSNA - CONTINUOUS

The roar of the engine thunders throughout the cockpit. Stanley and the pilot sit motionless, both under the aegis of noise-canceling headsets.

The pilot couldn't be more relaxed. Stanley's hands remain clutched to his knees like they were stress balls.

Stanley turns his head, looks out the window, then down, then sits back again and stares straight ahead. Nervous.

He takes a deep breath, glances about the cockpit...

Dangling from one of the knobs is a crucifix.

Stanley steals a slightly distraught glance at the pilot, then looks again at the dangling crucifix.

PILOT

(notices)

That's my co-pilot.

They both laugh. Stanley's laughter stems from stress.

PILOT (CONT'D)

Catholic? Presbyterian?

STANLEY

Actually... I'm an atheist.

PILOT

(looks at him)

Wow.

STANLEY

Hope that's not a problem.

PILOT

Not at all. I don't judge. Heck, I admire your courage. I wouldn't dare go up in a plane without saying a prayer.

Stanley smiles. Then, as he considers the statement, his expression changes to somewhere between perplexity and terror.

STANLEY

But you... you still have a lot of training as a pilot, though. In case something goes wrong?

PILOT

(adjusts his headset)

Say again?

STANLEY

Training in this aircraft, I mean.
You have a lot of time in it?

PILOT

(checks his watch)
It's twelve-twenty-one.

Stanley's face = dumbfounded. He sits back. *When will that Dramamine kick in?*

EXT. SKANEATELES AERODOME - DAY

Stanley and the pilot disembark the Cessna. Stanley glances around, shields his eyes from the sun.

About fifty feet away, adjacent to the main hangar, an older gentleman stands beside a pick-up truck. Dressed in a flannel shirt, blue jeans, hunting cap. His arms crossed, sunglasses mask his eyes. A forbidding demeanor...

This is HENRY PICKERING (early 60s).

Henry removes his sunglasses, surveys the reporter with flinty eyes. Stanley offers a subtle nod in return.

INT. PICKERING CABIN - DAY

Henry's retirement retreat is a small, modest but cozy abode. Beyond giant floor-to-ceiling windows at one end is a sublime view of Skaneateles Lake.

Stanley is seated beside a grand fireplace. He thumbs through a photo album of Henry's daughter, CHARLOTTE.

From behind the wet bar in a corner, Henry pours himself a whiskey. He sneaks a quick glance at Stanley, then looks back down as he pours.

HENRY

You sure you don't want anything stronger?

STANLEY

Water's fine, thanks.

Henry reaches into the mini-fridge beneath the bar, removes a bottle of spring water, then emerges, crosses to Stanley, hands him the water and takes a sip of his whiskey.

He stands above Stanley, watches over his shoulder as the reporter stares at photos of Henry's deceased daughter...

Stanley stops at a picture of Charlotte at ten-years-old. The photo shows her in a loving embrace with her MOTHER.

Smiles from ear to ear on both.

HENRY

She was a special girl.

Henry crosses to the large recliner on the other side of the fireplace, sits. The two men are now seated face-to-face.

HENRY (CONT'D)

I remember the day we took that. She had gotten a good grade on an essay. It was on who inspires her the most. She wrote it about Jesus. Never seen her write or talk about anything with more passion than her Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ.

Stanley looks up, smiles. Then returns to the photo.

HENRY (CONT'D)

Thing was, she first came home crying that day. Seems everyone had to read their answers in front of the class, and after hers, some kid raised his hand and went on about how Christ didn't really exist, wasn't nothing but a fairy tale. Her momma had to calm her down.

Stanley closes his eyes, shakes his head.

HENRY (CONT'D)

What kind of fourth-grader would say such a thing?

STANLEY

I had forgotten about that.

Resigned to contrition, Stanley looks up into Henry's sad but intense eyes. Henry stares back. His implacable expression forces Stanley to look away. Uncomfortable.

After a few seconds, Henry relaxes his face a little...

HENRY

Nah, don't be beating yourself up. Your blasphemy was no match for her faith, anyways.

Henry finishes off the whiskey with a gulp, stands, crosses to the window. Looks out at the lake.

HENRY (CONT'D)

Beautiful out here, ain't it?

Stanley stands, approaches the window as well.

HENRY (CONT'D)
 You fish? Was thinking we could
 head out on the lake, talk there.
 Maybe hook us up some trout or
 whitefish.

Stanley appears a tad apprehensive at the suggestion.

STANLEY
 You and me, alone out on the lake?

HENRY
 That no good?

Stanley shrugs.

HENRY (CONT'D)
 I'm an outdoors guy, Mr. Hodge. If
 you don't like fishing, I got me a
 couple of Remingtons, we could head
 into the woods, do a little target
 practice--

STANLEY
 I'll carry the bait.

EXT. SKANEATELES LAKE - AFTERNOON

Henry and Stanley ride out onto the lake in Henry's small aluminum fishing boat. The outboard motor's propeller emits a rather soothing high-frequency cavitation noise.

Henry at the stern, his hand affixed to the tiller. Stanley sits near the bow, admires the propitious weather.

EXT. SKANEATELES LAKE - LATER

Stanley lifts his head to catch more of the sun. His line already cast. Henry grasps his pole, casts his line out into the calm water.

HENRY
 Yeah, this is a bit more relaxing
 than target practice.

Stanley smiles. Still appears a little apprehensive.

HENRY (CONT'D)
 Does it surprise you?

STANLEY
 What's that, sir?

HENRY

That I'm still a passionate gun advocate, even after losing a daughter the way I did?

STANLEY

Never really thought about it--

HENRY

Bullshit. I know where you're coming from, all you liberal media types. You think I'm a joke.

Stanley sighs, glances away, unsure how to respond. Takes in the scenery instead.

HENRY (CONT'D)

You're anti-gun, ain't you?

STANLEY

I'm for stricter gun laws, yes.

HENRY

You think that would have made a lick of difference in all these here school shootings?

STANLEY

(faces him)

Let's just say I'm not a fan of the NRA's response to them.

HENRY

Fair enough. Let me ask you another question. 'Bout how many shootings have there been since Angelica?

STANLEY

I have no idea. Countless.

HENRY

And after your article went national, how many people you suppose read it?

STANLEY

Don't know, sir.

HENRY

Don't you think it's possible that these shooters got more influence from reading articles like yours and watching the news coverage on tv?

Stanley grins, nods. Acknowledgment.

HENRY (CONT'D)

You remember that Time Magazine cover after Columbine? Know what I remember about it? The photos of them two killers, they was enlarged, in color, right in the middle. The victims? Their pictures were all around the sides. Small, in black and white.

Stanley leans forward, glances down at his feet. Pensive.

HENRY (CONT'D)

I remember the date it came out. May third, nineteen-ninety-nine. Eleven days before Granger went on his spree. You don't think that had some influence on him?

STANLEY

Of course. The media needs to be much more responsible--

HENRY

And I'm the crazy old coot.

Stanley sits back up, leans against the gunwale.

STANLEY

I don't know that people think that.

HENRY

Of course they do. It's why I got out of Angelica.

STANLEY

People understood your loss. Respectfully, sir, I think they were just getting a little scared. You went after the Grangers pretty hard--

HENRY

Ah, my arrests had nothing to do with it. Country's a liberal wasteland. They hate me 'cause I made the unwise decision to air my views in public.

(points)

Views I will not apologize for, by the way. God's law is the only law, there should be a mandate to teach religion in schools, and homosexuality is both a sin and a choice.

Stanley glances away, sighs.

HENRY (CONT'D)
 Something on your mind?

STANLEY
 Doesn't matter.

HENRY
 No, please. You got something to
 say, I'd very much like to hear it.

Stanley hesitates, then exhales audibly. Nervous.

STANLEY
 If you insist.

Stanley subtly reaches over the gunwale, dips his hand into
 the lake, tests the water... yeah, about fifty degrees.
 Here goes...

STANLEY (CONT'D)
 Respectfully, sir, I find your views
 antiquated and offensive. I believe
 the separation of church and state
 isn't there to protect the church,
 it's to protect the state from
 fanatics, and my best friend in
 college was a homosexual. After he
 came out to his father, he was beaten
 so badly, he had to spend three weeks
 in the hospital, so the very notion
 that he would choose that is
 absolutely fucking ridiculous. Sir.

Henry stares at Stanley. Intense. Several seconds pass.

HENRY
 (furrows his eyebrows)
 Were you under the impression I
 expected you to agree with me?

STANLEY
 That's a relief. So, why don't we
 cut through the socio-political small
 talk. Why am I here, sir?

INT. GRANDMA RUTH'S HOUSE - KITCHEN - AFTERNOON

Ruth leans over a steaming beef stew atop the stove, breathes
 in the aroma.

RUTH
 Mmm. Yes, I am good.

She grasps the pot, dishes the contents into two bowls.

RUTH (CONT'D)

And I'm always looking for a reason
to hang around in the kitchen, so...

She sets the pot back atop the stove, takes hold of the bowls
and brings them to the table where Mae sits.

RUTH (CONT'D)

Believe me, dear, you are not an
imposition at all.

Mae smiles at her. Ruth sets the bowls atop the table.

RUTH (CONT'D)

I am just so thrilled that you're
here. It's wonderful to see you.

Ruth crosses to the counter, retrieves utensils from the
drawer, returns. Mae appears a bit anxious.

MAE

Yeah, I kind of surprised myself by
coming here.

RUTH

(sits)

Well, now I really wish Stanley hadn't
gone out to Skaneateles.

MAE

Henry Pickering, really?

Ruth shrugs. Silence for a moment as they begin their meals.

RUTH

He'll be back tonight. You're
staying, right?

MAE

No, I um... I can't, I... I just
needed to talk to him about something.

Mae now looks very troubled.

RUTH

(takes her arm)

What's the matter, dear?

Mae looks Ruth in the eye, an anguished expression.

MAE

It's not good.

Mae starts to talk, but stops. She reaches down to her travel
bag, retrieves an unsealed envelope.

MAE (CONT'D)

Wasn't sure if I could even say the words, so I wrote it down. In case.

Mae sets the envelope atop the table. Ruth stares at it, then glances back at Mae.

EXT. PICKERING CABIN - DOCKS - AFTERNOON

Stanley and Henry disembark the boat. Henry secures it to the dock. Stanley heads for the cabin, fishing rods in hand.

EXT. PICKERING CABIN - REAR DECK - LATER

The two men sit silently on chairs overlooking the lake and the late afternoon sky. Henry now has the bottle of whiskey in his hand, without the glass.

STANLEY

It is beautiful country.
(looks at Henry)
But you still haven't told me why you invited me here.

HENRY

You didn't know Charlotte well, did you?

STANLEY

Not really, no.

HENRY

You know Granger?

STANLEY

(hesitates)
Not well. I mean... we knew each other when we were a lot younger, but lost touch in high school. Always regretted that.

Henry takes a sip, places the bottle at his side.

HENRY

That why you mention Granger's name eight times in your article, but didn't mention Charlotte once?

STANLEY

(sighs)
Mr. Pickering... is that what this is about? I can't even remember what I was thinking when I wrote... I'm sorry I didn't mention her in--

HENRY

No, no. I understand. Listen...
 (leans toward him)
 Charlotte was an inspirational girl.
 I could give you tons of examples of
 how she changed lives. I'd like you
 to focus this article on her. On
 all the victims, but especially on
 Charlotte. Now this here could really--

STANLEY

Whoa whoa, Mr. Pickering, let me
 stop you there. I can't have the
 content of the piece dictated to me--

HENRY

No, I ain't saying that. I'm just
 talking, like, re-focus the article
 to center around Charlotte and her
 work with the church. We have a
 golden opportunity here, son. To
 really help people through the Word
 of Christ. Now, I know you feel bad
 about not mentioning Charlotte in
 your first article, but we can rectify
 that here--

STANLEY

Sir... I would love to hear about
 your daughter, the life she lived
 and all the incredible things she
 did. But the content of the story
 will be decided by me. I'm sorry.

Henry's facial expression turns sour. He sits back, reaches
 down for the whiskey, takes another swig.

HENRY

I remember seeing that national tv
 interview you did way back. The one
 with that, uh... Diane Sawyer--

STANLEY

Jane Pauley.

HENRY

That's the one.
 (beat)
 I remember her saying your words
 inspired people. Gave them the green
 light to move forward, or something
 like that.

Henry turns his head to Stanley.

HENRY (CONT'D)

Not everybody had that green light.
Damn you, son, you didn't have the
right to help people move on when
not everybody could. You lived,
others didn't.

STANLEY

Mr. Pickering, this isn't personal.
I just can't have the piece influenced
by an agenda--

HENRY

So don't write it.

STANLEY

What? That's not an option, it's an
assignment from my editor.

HENRY

I happen to know it ain't a done
deal. It's your choice to do the
damn thing, am I wrong about that?

Stanley studies Henry's face. Curious. *How does he know
about that?*

Henry's eyes narrow...

HENRY (CONT'D)

You gonna speak to Marilyn?

STANLEY

Marilyn Granger?

HENRY

No, Marilyn Monroe. Yes, Marilyn
Granger!

STANLEY

Yeah, I'm meeting with her tomorrow
morning. What does that have to do
with anything?

Tension mounts between the two men. Henry stands, crosses
to the front of the deck, leans over the railing to gather
himself. He turns back to Stanley.

HENRY

You know what she's been doing lately?
Interviews. Speeches. Saw her doing
one of them there... Ted Talks or
whatever they call it. Talking about
mental illness and-and... how schools
need to be more aware of bullying!

STANLEY

I know, I've seen the interviews.
It's a good thing.

HENRY

(scoffs)

Good? Tell me something, have you
been bullied in high school? Ever?

STANLEY

Of course.

HENRY

Me, too. Bullying's been around
since schools were invented, for the
love of God, hell, my daughter
survived bullying, so don't feed me
that line of crap! Her son did what
he did because he was a monster,
pure and simple! And that woman has
the gall to go on tv and try to
humanize him!

Henry pauses, lifts the whiskey bottle to his mouth, starts
to drink, but stops, lowers it to his side and continues...

HENRY (CONT'D)

Did you see her on Central New York
Sunrise? You see who was with her?
Jill and Patrick Gelding. Her son
killed their daughter in cold blood
that morning. The Geldings used to
be our friends, used to sit in our
kitchen with my wife and I, all of
us trying to figure out how to keep
living. Now, they're on tv with
that woman? Consoling each other?

STANLEY

I think they just needed to forgive.
Find some semblance of peace--

HENRY

Well, my daughter is too damned
important for me to forgive!

STANLEY

(hesitates)

Respectfully, sir--

HENRY

GODDAMN IT!

Henry turns, hurls the whiskey bottle toward the lake.

HENRY (CONT'D)

Son, I don't know how you do it, but you have a way of saying the word "respectfully" like it's the most disrespectful thing in the world!

The two men remain silent for several seconds.

STANLEY

I should go.

Henry looks at Stanley one final time, shakes his head, turns, enters the cabin.

INT. GRANDMA RUTH'S HOUSE - LIVING ROOM - AFTERNOON

Ruth is seated upon the couch. She reads the letter.

Mae paces at the other end of the room. Distressed.

Ruth finishes, folds the letter, slips it back inside the envelope. She looks up at Mae, who continues to pace.

MAE

I am so sorry. I'm not... I don't want to divorce him, that's not even a consideration now, it's... I just...

RUTH

(smiles)

Take a breath, honey.

Mae stops, places her head in her hands, exhales. Then resumes pacing. Gesticulates as she rambles...

MAE

I wasn't looking to move out, I just... I feel like I have to give him some space. You know, for him to work this out, to confront this. And... I don't know, I think we both need that, and with this job in Brookline... I mean, it's nothing permanent, but it could give me time to think, and us some time apart to work on what each of us needs and... I know, I just know how much this is gonna hurt him and...

Mae stops pacing, turns to Ruth. They make eye contact. Ruth maintains her soft, sympathetic smile. Mae looks at her with glassy eyes.

MAE (CONT'D)

I'm just really scared of what you
must think of me right now.

Ruth hesitates, then stands, offers her hand...

RUTH

Come with me.

INT. GREENHOUSE - MOMENTS LATER

Ruth and Mae stroll through the floral array. Mae stands awe-struck at the sublimity of Ruth's hobby, admires the Amazon lilies, African violets, Chinese hibiscus, as well as the orchids and roses.

MAE

It's stunning.

RUTH

It's what feeds my soul. This
greenhouse was the best thing Bill
built for me. And he helped build
our home.

They share a soft, tender laugh.

RUTH (CONT'D)

So tell me about this new job?

MAE

(caught off guard)

Oh, uh... it's nothing, really.
It's at a publishing house.

RUTH

What do they publish?

Mae appears confused at this line of questioning.

MAE

Children's books, mostly.

RUTH

You always did have a creative flair.
Sounds exciting, is this something
that could become a new career?

MAE

(discombobulated)

I'm not, uh... I'm not sure. But
the point is, I don't want to hurt
Stanley. I love your grandson.
It's just that right now--

RUTH

What is it you want, dear?

MAE

(clears her throat)

I, uh... I want Stanley to be happy. But I want him to let down his guard, you know? To be able to talk to me about things that worry him--

RUTH

That's not what I asked.

MAE

I want... I want us to end up together, I do. But I'm afraid we've gotten into this... kind of pattern where, when he's taking care of me, he's not really examining--

Ruth smiles, approaches Mae, cups her cheeks in her hands...

RUTH

My dear sweet child. I love you with all my heart. And I know, as a woman of advanced age, my job is to offer sage advice in the gentlest manner possible. But in the interest of clarity, and respect for the fact that I have a limited amount of time left on this earth...

(calmly)

If you mention my grandson's name again during the course of this conversation, I will slap the bejesus out of you.

Mae hesitates. Ruth smiles, causes Mae to let out a stress-relieving chuckle.

RUTH (CONT'D)

We're not talking about Stanley, we're talking about you.

Ruth turns away, steps toward the collection of orchids. She smiles, then turns back to face Mae.

RUTH (CONT'D)

You know what feeds the soul for women? It's not love, although the fifty-eight years Bill and I had were magic.

(MORE)

RUTH (CONT'D)

(beat)

It's not children, either, even though having Bess was the greatest blessing a mother could have. Despite losing her when we did, the years we had her were a gift from above.

Ruth approaches Mae, looks directly into her eyes.

RUTH (CONT'D)

The thing that feeds the woman's soul is the same as it is for a man. It's purpose. It's being able to identify something we want, and allowing ourselves to seek it.

(beat)

Women are thought of as nurturers. We're taught to not want things. But when you see something you want, and allow yourself to want it, that's you telling yourself that you're worthy. That you have value.

Mae glances downward. Ruth reaches out, lifts her chin, stares into her eyes where tears have begun to well.

RUTH (CONT'D)

My grandson will be okay. I know it, even though it pains me to see him blocking people out. And if you two are meant to be together, you'll find a way there, too. But this is about you.

The struggle to keep her emotions in check is evident in Mae's eyes...

RUTH (CONT'D)

I am looking at a warm, loving, funny, exceedingly talented, bright, beautiful young woman who can be very hard on herself, and has been through hell and back. But she's standing here. Strong, right in front of me. So there's only one question. What do you want?

The floodgates open. Mae breaks down into her arms. Ruth holds her as she cries.

EXT. SKANEATELES AERODOME - EVENING

Henry's pick-up truck comes to a stop about fifty feet from the awaiting pilot and the Cessna.

INT. HENRY'S PICK-UP TRUCK - CONTINUOUS

Henry shuts the engine off.

Stanley glances over at Henry, who keeps his eyes forward. Henry's face appears gaunt, ravaged with self-loathing... a far cry from his animated display during their argument.

Stanley starts to say something, but stops. He sighs, opens the door, starts to lean out--

HENRY

My wife, Sondra... she left me.

Stanley leans back in, closes the door.

HENRY (CONT'D)

Don't know why I'm telling you that.
Sondra. Charlotte. I just...

Henry looks off into the distance.

HENRY (CONT'D)

Sorry if I wasted your time.

STANLEY

Could you do something for me?

Henry looks at Stanley.

STANLEY (CONT'D)

Tell me something about Charlotte?
But not... not something she did for
the church or what people already
know. Something only you know about?

Henry takes a moment.

HENRY

Well, she was wonderful in so many
ways. Hard to pick one thing.

Stanley eyes Henry with a penetrating gaze... almost willing the man to think of something. Henry thinks some more.

HENRY (CONT'D)

(smiles)

She had this thing where she'd...
point out to me things she liked.
Since she was a little girl, all the
damn time, did it in this adorable
way. She'd point at something, could
be anything, she'd say "I like that,
Daddy."

(MORE)

HENRY (CONT'D)
 Could be an animal, the way the sun
 hit the water, shape of a cloud,
 damn near anything.
 (gestures)
 She'd point, "I like that, Daddy."

Stanley smiles.

HENRY (CONT'D)
 Figured she'd grow out of it, but
 nah... even into her teens, she'd
 pick out things she liked, made sure
 I knew about it.
 (frowns)
 Sometimes I was too distracted to
 really pay attention. I think about
 that, how I wished I'd listened more.
 But she would always keep trying,
 always be showing me things she liked.
 (beat)
 And... strange thing is, even now,
 sometimes I'll be out in the woods
 hiking or something, and I'll see
 like... I don't know, like a bird or
 something. And somehow I just know...
 Charlotte would have liked that.

They sit silently for a moment.

HENRY (CONT'D)
 Those times I do see something
 Charlotte would have liked... for a
 few seconds... I ain't so angry.

Stanley extends his hand. Henry shakes it. The reporter
 smiles, exits the vehicle, crosses to the Cessna.

Henry watches him for a moment, then faces forward, blinks
 away the formation of tears. He starts the engine, drives.

EXT. TRUDY'S TAVERN - NIGHT

Stanley's car pulls into the parking lot, locates a space.

INT. TRUDY'S TAVERN - MOMENTS LATER

For a small town bar, the joint is hopping. A few people
 drink at the bar, the television tuned to a professional
 basketball playoff game. All but one of the booths are taken,
 as are a few of the tables.

A country tune blares throughout the establishment.

Near the back of the room, a couple pool tables are in use. One of the players is Scott. He talks and laughs with a couple other PATRONS. Boisterous atmosphere.

Stanley enters. He glances around, turns his attention toward the pool table area. Sees Scott. After taking a shot, Scott tosses the cue stick onto the table, takes a swig of beer, turns his head, notices Stanley near the door. Waves.

INT. TRUDY'S TAVERN - BOOTH - MOMENTS LATER

Stanley and Scott are in the midst of a conversation. Scott speaks through a haze of smoke, carelessly waves the cigarette perched in his fingers as he talks.

SCOTT

No way! You did not say that to Henry Pickering.

(laughs)

And he didn't throw your ass out of the boat?

(shakes his head)

Hard core, man.

Stanley smiles in response, but doesn't speak. He stares at Scott, a cryptic grin on his face.

SCOTT (CONT'D)

The hell you looking at me like that for?

STANLEY

You know, somehow Pickering knew it was up to me whether or not I'd write the follow-up.

SCOTT

(a little confused)

Okay.

Stanley continues to stare.

SCOTT (CONT'D)

Oh, you don't think--

STANLEY

You're the only one I told.

SCOTT

Man...

(takes a drag)

Doing that investigative reporting shit is making you paranoid.

STANLEY

Scott, I blocked out a lot of what happened after the shooting, but there are two things I have a strong memory of. One is how bad I felt about not coming to see you after the injury. The other is how bad you must have felt when you heard the girl you had just started dating was one of those killed.

Scott doesn't reply. Sits stone-faced.

STANLEY (CONT'D)

You didn't think anyone knew about you and Charlotte?

Stanley and Scott stare at each other, each waits for the other to speak first. Finally...

SCOTT

Look, the guy called me out of the blue. Just asked me if we had talked. I dunno, I guess he knew we were friends. Wasn't trying to sabotage you or nothing.

Stanley continues to stare. A WAITRESS approaches the booth.

WAITRESS

What'll it be, guys?

SCOTT

I'll have another beer. And...

Scott leans toward the waitress, speaks in a faux conspiratorial fashion... loud enough so Stanley can hear.

SCOTT (CONT'D)

See this guy here? I did him wrong, so I gotta make it up to him. Give him anything he wants. It's on me.

STANLEY

(to the waitress)
Just an ice water, please.

SCOTT

Yes! That is on me.

The waitress turns, heads for the bar.

Scott smiles at Stanley. The expression isn't returned.

SCOTT (CONT'D)

Come on, man. I didn't know that stuff was a secret, okay?

STANLEY

(half-smiles)

Yeah, well... I always had a hard time figuring what a church-going girl like Charlotte was doing with someone who's... not exactly virtuous.

SCOTT

Hey, if you don't sin, Jesus died for nothing, am I right?

They both chuckle. Neither speaks for a couple seconds.

STANLEY

I'm doing the follow-up.

Scott's face turns solemn at this news.

SCOTT

Good. Good for you.

(takes a drag)

You'll be the town folk hero again.

Scott takes a final drag of his cigarette, taps it out in an ashtray, reaches into his shirt pocket for another cigarette, lights up. Some latent hostility toward Stanley's decision.

STANLEY

You okay?

Scott ignores the question, blows more smoke into the space between them. The haze becomes thicker.

SCOTT

You? You were smart. You knew to duck. I was in the cafeteria. Heard the shots, but for some fucked up reason, I didn't run.

Scott glances out the window... a haunted look in the eye.

SCOTT (CONT'D)

Granger walked in, started shooting, and I get hit twice, one of which lands a millimeter from my dick.

The waitress returns with the drinks. She sets them upon the table, turns and heads for another booth.

SCOTT (CONT'D)

You suppose he was aiming for there?
Because of my, you know... prowess?

STANLEY

I don't think Jason Granger gave a
rat's ass about your prowess. Shitty
luck is all.

SCOTT

(takes a swig)
You did okay with the ladies.

STANLEY

Oh please--

SCOTT

Nah, you did. Had that one misfire,
though. That goofy chick who lived
across the street from you. What
was her name? You know, that mousy
thing with the frizzy hair, the one
who used to collect bugs or some
shit? Mae! Mae Katz! Goddamn,
man, I can't believe you dated her...

Scott breaks into raucous laughter. Stanley smiles and nods
with pursed lips. Stares intently at his friend. Scott's
laughter slowly begins to fade...

SCOTT (CONT'D)

(residual chuckles)
Yeah, that was... that was just...
(slowly realizes)
ahhh... you married her, didn't you...
(beat)
Goddamn, I'm an even bigger dickhead
than I was twenty seconds ago. Hey,
to make it up to you, I'll let you
beat me at pool--

STANLEY

No, I gotta go. Tired.

SCOTT

Seriously? You have propeller-lag
or something? Couldn't have been
more than a thirty-minute flight!

Stanley stands, looks at Scott. Concern in his eyes.

STANLEY

Listen, why don't I drive you home?

SCOTT

Now? It's only... fuck, I dunno,
it's early.

(holds up his beer)

Got about a dozen more of these with
my name on 'em.

STANLEY

Think maybe you've hit your limit--

SCOTT

What're you, my sponsor?

Stanley bristles at Scott's attempt at humor.

STANLEY

How are you getting home?

SCOTT

I'll take an Uber.

STANLEY

(furrows his eyebrows)

Angelica has Uber?

SCOTT

Hell yeah, I couldn't get around
without it.

(yells out)

HEY, WHO HERE'LL GIVE ME A RIDE HOME?
THERE'S TWENTY BUCKS IN IT FOR YA!

PATRON (O.S.)

Yeah yeah, I got you covered.

SCOTT

See? Uber.

Scott guzzles the remainder of his beer, stands, stumbles
but maintains his balance. He crosses to the pool tables,
an obnoxious, drunken yell as he greets the other players.

Stanley watches. Concerned.

EXT. GRANDMA RUTH'S HOUSE - NIGHT

Stanley's car pulls into the driveway.

INT. GRANDMA RUTH'S HOUSE - KITCHEN - MOMENTS LATER

Stanley enters. The house is quiet, dark, still. He crosses
to the refrigerator, opens it, removes a jug of milk. The
fridge light illuminates the sealed envelope on the table.

Stanley closes the refrigerator door, turns on the light, crosses to the table, picks up the envelope. It has his name on it, along with a Post-It note. In Grandma Ruth's handwriting, the note reads:

"This was left for you. I'm here if you need to talk."

INT. GRANDMA RUTH'S HOUSE - STANLEY'S BEDROOM - MOMENTS LATER

Dark, gloomy. The only light courtesy of the moon through the window.

Stanley is seated upon the bed. He leans forward, elbows on his knees, his hands folded over his mouth. His face echoes pain, confusion, distress. The opened letter next to him on the bed. He buries his face in his hands.

INT. GRANDMA RUTH'S HOUSE - BATHROOM - MORNING

Stanley stands before the sink, stares at his pained reflection in the mirror. He reaches into his toiletries bag, removes a bottle of aspirin, taps three tablets into his palm, pops them into his mouth. Chugs a glass of water.

A knock on the door. It opens... Grandma Ruth leans in.

RUTH
Morning. Sleep okay?

Stanley nods, takes his toothbrush, tops it with toothpaste. Ruth stands still, eyes her grandson. Uncomfortable silence.

RUTH (CONT'D)
If there's anything you want to talk about, I'm always here.

STANLEY
I know. Thanks, Grandma. I'm good.

Stanley begins brushing his teeth. Ruth observes a few more seconds, offers an accommodating smile. She exits.

INT. STANLEY'S CAR - MOVING - MORNING

Stanley appears distracted as he drives. His facial expression is a mixture of indignation and despair.

EXT. FOREST - DAY - TWENTY YEARS AGO

The trees stand strong, majestic. Their branches extend like arms, protecting the wildlife.

Sharp winds blow through the treetops. A storm brewing.

Jason Granger weaves through the forestation. Cloaked in jeans, t-shirt and a Windbreaker. A duffel bag hangs from his shoulder.

He reaches a clearing, lays the bag down at his feet. Jason kneels, unzips the bag, removes an assault rifle and ammunition.

He fills the cartridge, locks it in place, stands, scans the woods. His eyes rest upon a large tree. He points the rifle, inhales through his nose, lets out a slow breath and...

A barrage of GUNFIRE echoes throughout the forest as pieces of bark and wood splinter off of the tree's trunk.

Jason lowers the rifle, stares at the damage done. No joy. No anger. No reaction.

The wind howls. Jason again scans the woods, locates another target. He aims, inhales, lets out another slow breath and...

Another tree sustains a fusillade of ANGRY FIRE.

Jason lowers the rifle, crosses to the second tree. He rests his hand against the part of the trunk that took the bulk of the bullets. Closes his eyes...

Feels the heat. Power. Control. No turning back now.

EXT. FOREST - MOMENTS LATER

The wind has picked up. Storm clouds rally in the sky. A clap of thunder.

Jason lays the rifle against a tree, then lies on the ground, hands over his chest, eyes on the tenebrous sky, as though making peace with the darkness ahead. This is it.

EXT. GRANGER HOME - MORNING - BACK TO PRESENT DAY

The house appears fairly well-maintained, though nothing about the home is ornate. It's the house of someone content with obscurity. A FOR SALE sign dots the front lawn.

Stanley's car pulls into the driveway.

EXT. GRANGER HOME - FRONT DOOR - MOMENTS LATER

Stanley knocks. After a few seconds, the door opens...

MARILYN GRANGER (late 50s) stands before him. A woman with the eyes of one who has loved fully and lost completely, with age lines that bespeak years of struggling to escape the abyss of the unfathomable. She offers a small smile.

MARILYN

Stanley Hodge.

STANLEY

How are you, Mrs. Granger?

EXT. GRANGER HOME - BACKYARD - LATER

A rather expansive piece of property. Just beyond the yard lies a small pond with a dock situated at the near end. Next to the home is a separate two-car garage, its doors closed, an SUV parked in front of it.

Marilyn's Golden Retriever wanders through the yard, sniffs patches of grass.

Stanley and Marilyn are seated at a patio table on the rear deck of the house. They are in the midst of a conversation, sips of coffee interspersed throughout the discourse.

MARILYN

Albany, actually. Have family there. After Dennis moved to Colorado, there was no point keeping this place. I'm usually off giving speeches or lectures these days anyway.

STANLEY

I saw you on tv the other morning.

MARILYN

It's been a long haul, but I'm functioning again. Spent a couple months writing letters to the victims, their families. Broke through with a couple people. Don't know if I'll ever be able to come to terms with the pain my son caused.

Stanley nods, pauses. His face a profile of trepidation. Difficult questions... both to ask, and to answer.

STANLEY

Was there ever a time when hatred or anger overtook sadness?

MARILYN

Toward Jason? Never. I know that's a difficult thing to understand.

(beat)

My heart aches for those parents and families. Always will. My son was so angry and in pain, and if there's hate at all, it's at myself for not being able to help him.

STANLEY

What do you remember most about Jason?

Marilyn looks toward the blue sky, considers the question.

MARILYN

Mostly as a little kid. Just how bright he was. Picked up things so fast. Math came especially easy to him, Dennis and I were astounded. Was artistic, too. Music, writing. Played both piano and guitar.

A slight smile graces Marilyn's face at the memory. She then glances off into the distance. The smile fades.

MARILYN (CONT'D)

I think because things came so naturally to him as a child, when he struggled socially in high school, he'd turn his anger on himself.

Marilyn's dog barks a couple times at something beyond the pond. Watches, then returns to sniffing the grass.

MARILYN (CONT'D)

Afterwards, doctors who read his journals, they told us about how he was losing touch with reality. That he wrote about himself more as a Godlike figure than a person.

She traces the rim of her cup with her finger. Contemplation.

MARILYN (CONT'D)

He felt so alone. He was so used to handling things on his own, I think he just... he couldn't talk to us.

Marilyn's dog approaches her, sniffs, perches himself at her side. She reaches down, pets him but keeps her eyes focused out into the distance.

MARILYN (CONT'D)

People talk about warning signs, as if they're always flashing neon. As far as the guns in the house, how do you apologize for something you don't know? We never owned guns. I just never thought to look.

Stanley remains silent. Takes a sip of coffee.

MARILYN (CONT'D)

Couple times I sat down with him,
asked what was wrong. He'd say he
was fine, then would clam up. I'd
say something I thought could help...
but what I was really doing, I think,
was talking to fill the spaces. To
make the silence less uncomfortable.
(softly)
And he slipped through my fingers.

Silence. Then...

STANLEY

Jason and I were best friends in
elementary. Lost touch in high school--

MARILYN

I know. But that had nothing to do
with what he did.

STANLEY

My closest friend in high school was
Scott Billuck. It's funny, we didn't
really have anything in common. And
I know he didn't treat Jason and
some of the other kids very well.

MARILYN

He didn't. Jason didn't say much,
but I knew about the bullying.

STANLEY

I am so sorry--

MARILYN

No. Jason told me you never bullied
him. Had a hard time understanding
why you hung out with Scott, but--

STANLEY

I should have said something. To
Scott. God, it sounds so stupid
now, but he was a popular kid, and I
didn't have any popular friends--

MARILYN

You were just a boy.

Stanley's eyes beseech forgiveness.

MARILYN (CONT'D)

Can I show you something?

INT. GRANGER HOME - GARAGE - MOMENTS LATER

With the cough of the motor and the squeaky whine of the pulleys, the automatic garage doors slowly elevate...

Sunlight filters into the garage, cascades over a vast collection of items from Jason's childhood. His stereo, bike, guitar, books, record collection, video games.

Marilyn and Stanley enter. Her dog follows, sniffs around some of the items.

MARILYN

Dennis is flying in this weekend.
We're gonna go through everything,
decide what each of us wants to keep,
what'll be thrown out or given away.

Stanley inspects the items. He crosses to Jason's old stereo system against the wall. Presses a button, the CD tray slides open. Surprises him.

STANLEY

Didn't realize it was plugged in.

MARILYN

(points)
On the shelf, right there, that box?

Stanley locates the referenced box atop the shelf adjacent to the stereo.

MARILYN (CONT'D)

Some CDs in it. Play one.

Stanley opens the box, removes a CD, inserts it into the tray, slides the tray back in...

The sound of a captivating piano solo emanates from the adjacent speaker. The melody has a dreamy, somewhat melancholic feel, as if the musician were yearning for love or friendship well within reach but still unattainable.

Stanley listens for several seconds, turns... sees a tear fall from Marilyn's eye. Immediately silences the stereo.

STANLEY

I'm sorry.

MARILYN

No, please. I've learned not to be
ashamed of my emotions.

STANLEY

He was good. What was that song?

MARILYN

I have no idea.

STANLEY

(surprised)

He wrote it?

Marilyn nods. Stanley continues to peruse the items. Comes across a faded yellow rocking chair.

STANLEY (CONT'D)

This was his?

MARILYN

Uh, no. That was mine, but it's gonna be destroyed.

Stanley looks at her, a quizzical expression.

MARILYN (CONT'D)

You're looking at me like you want to know why.

STANLEY

No, no, I... it's a nice looking chair is all.

MARILYN

Dennis and I got pregnant before we were married. I was terrified of what my father would think. Hardcore Catholics, you know. After we told him, he got very quiet, went upstairs. I thought he'd disown me or something. About a week later, he showed up at my place with that chair in his truck.

As Marilyn recounts the story, Stanley circles the chair, admires it.

MARILYN (CONT'D)

Built it with his own two hands. Said he could tell I was scared about having a child. He told me the chair would help both me and the baby relax. Go ahead, try it.

STANLEY

You sure?

Marilyn nods. Stanley, tentative at first, sits in the chair. Rocks ever so gently, as though afraid he might damage it.

MARILYN

I never felt closer to Jason than
when sitting in this chair.

(frowns)

After what happened... I just couldn't
look at it anymore.

Stanley's face registers an expression of regret. He stands,
crosses to Marilyn, glances back at the chair.

MARILYN (CONT'D)

(remembers)

Oh, wait.

She turns to a shelf against the wall, retrieves a notebook.

MARILYN (CONT'D)

This is what I wanted you to see.

She thumbs through the pages...

MARILYN (CONT'D)

Uh... here.

Hands the opened notebook to Stanley.

MARILYN (CONT'D)

There was a brief time when Jason
was meeting with the school counselor.
One of the things he had him do was
to write down times he was happy.
You know, something to focus on during
stressful moments? Look at the very
first thing he wrote.

She points. Stanley reads...

STANLEY

"Time I spent with Stanley."

He continues to read.

MARILYN

He wrote that in high school. After
you and he had lost touch.

Stanley suddenly appears distraught. Something in Jason's
writings locks onto him...

MARILYN (CONT'D)

I'm sure he forgave you.

Stanley closes the notebook, hands it back to her. A look
of overwhelming dread on his face.

STANLEY

I just remembered, I have to, uh...
I gotta go. There's something--

MARILYN

Is everything okay?

STANLEY

Yeah, good, uh... thank you so much
for taking the time.

Stanley gives her a friendly embrace, exits. Marilyn watches, worry in her eyes.

INT. RETAIL WAREHOUSE - DAY

With sunglasses masking his eyes, Scott stocks one of the shelves. All too obvious he tied one on again last night.

Two other EMPLOYEES stock the opposite shelf a few feet away.

Devin approaches, clipboard in hand.

DEVIN

You were forty-five minutes late
today, Billuck. I'm docking you.

Scott ignores him, continues to work at a lackadaisical pace.

DEVIN (CONT'D)

(scoffs)
Clean up your act.

Devin turns, starts to walk away.

SCOTT

Might wanna keep your eyes peeled.
Thought I saw Ishmael out there--

The other employees snicker. Devin stops, turns, walks back.

DEVIN

You got a problem, scumbag?

Scott turns to him, removes the glasses, smirks.

SCOTT

No problem. Just had this flash
now. It was of you. I mean, young
you, back in school, maybe a...
fraction thinner than you are now,
cheeks all red and shit. About to
cry 'cause the mean kids were picking
on you.

(MORE)

SCOTT (CONT'D)

Then you going home to momma, having her try to hug you, telling you to not mind them, that one day, you'd have school all behind you, be successful at something. And twenty years later, here you are. A middle-manager taking shit from the same people who ragged on you all those years ago.

Devin stares at his nemesis. Keeps his cool.

SCOTT (CONT'D)

What are you gonna do after work, huh? Go back to momma, get another pep talk? Maybe deal with your anger with a... Pop Tart? What do ya think?

Devin's eye twitches ever so slightly. Scott's words cut deep, but he holds his composure.

The two stare at each other. Devin grins.

DEVIN

I won't fire you, even though I know you wouldn't mind that.

(beat)

You know what I've noticed about you? That every time you take a step, even with that cane, you wince a little. Each step is a reminder that you're nowhere near the man you thought you were. And yeah, this isn't where I wanted to end up. But knowing that you're just below me... what do I think?

Devin steps closer to Scott. They're almost nose-to-nose.

DEVIN (CONT'D)

Worth it.

Devin turns, walks away.

Scott scoffs, turns to the other employees. They all share a derisive laugh. He continues to stock the shelf.

EXT. RETAIL WAREHOUSE - AFTERNOON

Scott and another EMPLOYEE exit. They share a quick laugh, then the employee heads for his car.

The wind has kicked up. A storm on the horizon.

Scott crosses back to the side of the building, leans against it. He reaches into his jacket pocket, removes a pack of cigarettes, takes one and, after a few tries, lights it.

He glances around the lot...

Several parking spaces over, he sees Devin in his car. The engine is off. Devin doesn't notice him. Scott squints...

He sees that Devin is crying.

Scott's reaction to the sight is not one of satisfaction. Quite the opposite. Any remnants of joy in Scott have long been expunged. His face is the quintessence of self-loathing.

He watches for a few seconds, takes his cane, turns, leaves.

INT. GRANDMA RUTH'S HOUSE - BEDROOM - NIGHT

Stanley is seated at the desk. Laptop open. His face glows from the monitor's light.

He types at a rapid-fire pace. The look on his face is one of turmoil, like someone trying to explain the incomprehensible.

He stops typing, clasps his hands together, interlocks his fingers, stares intently at the screen. He then sighs, leans back, runs both hands through his hair. Consumed with doubt.

His cell phone rings. He lets it ring a few more times, then answers...

STANLEY

(into phone)

Hodge.

(listens)

Yes, this is Stanley Hodge. What can I do--

(listens)

Wait, what?

Stanley looks perplexed. He buries his face in his hand.

STANLEY (CONT'D)

Okay, where is he now?

(listens)

Alright, I'll be--

(listens)

No, it's fine. I'll be right there.

He hangs up, closes the laptop, exits.

EXT. TRUDY'S TAVERN - NIGHT

Stanley exits his car, jogs up to the entrance.

INT. TRUDY'S TAVERN - STOREROOM - MOMENTS LATER

Pitch black. The sound of footsteps. A door opens, the light switch is flipped...

Mounds of bar paraphernalia occupy the shelves. Stanley and the bar OWNER enter. Scott sits slouched in the corner. Disheveled. Drunk. Passed out.

OWNER

The guy he took a swing at was a friend of his. Nobody was hurt, the guy didn't want to make a big deal of it. Not a lot of numbers in his phone, yours was one. Sorry.

Stanley looks down at his former high school best friend. Lost. Destitute. Scott stirs, glances up at Stanley.

INT. STANLEY'S CAR - MOVING - NIGHT

Drops of rain begin to decorate the windshield. Stanley turns on the wipers. Eyes straight ahead. Annoyed.

Scott leans against the passenger door. Half-conscious at best. Stanley doesn't look at him. Fixated on the road.

SCOTT

(groggy)

Why did you even come back here? To write some bullshit, feel-good story? Can't resist being the fuckin' hero. Save the parents, save the school, save the town, the town... is fine.

Scott tries to sit up. A half-assed attempt that yields little success.

SCOTT (CONT'D)

Stop the car.

STANLEY

Just go back to sleep.

Suddenly hit with a burst of both anger and energy, Scott thrusts the cane toward the steering wheel.

STANLEY (CONT'D)

What the hell are you doing?

Stanley tries to maintain control. He sees the increasingly brightening headlights of an oncoming car. Scott continues to poke at the wheel with his cane.

STANLEY (CONT'D)
KNOCK IT OFF!

EXT. COUNTRY ROAD - NIGHT - CONTINUOUS

A honking HORN from the opposing car avails no success, as the cars veer toward a head-on collision. At the last second, both vehicles swerve out of the way.

Stanley's car pulls onto the shoulder, screeches to a halt...

The passenger door opens, Scott hobbles out.

Stanley exits as well, crosses to the other side, tries to help him stand. Scott pushes him off.

SCOTT
Get the fuck off me!

Scott grasps his cane, begins to hobble down the shoulder. The rain has increased in intensity.

After about ten yards, Scott turns back.

SCOTT (CONT'D)
I know where you were today. Talkin' to Momma Granger. She tell you what a poor, misunderstood boy he was?

STANLEY
You sure didn't make his life easy--

SCOTT
PIECE! OF! SHIT! That's what that little fucker was! He slaughtered sixteen people! Crippled more! But what the hell do you know, man. You weren't there!

Scott turns, heads further into the darkness. Stanley follows. The beams of light from the car are still able to permeate the rain and fog.

STANLEY
What are you talking about? I was in the first goddamned room--

SCOTT
(turns back to him)
Who you kidding?
(MORE)

SCOTT (CONT'D)

You didn't experience it, you didn't feel the pain like the rest of us did. You fuckin' disappeared for twenty years! And somehow you became this town's golden boy!

A rumble of thunder interrupts the argument.

SCOTT (CONT'D)

You know something? As much as I hated guys like Granger and Devin, I sorta respect 'em, too. Know why? 'Cause they bleed. That's how you know they got something inside. But you? Frozen! You are a one-man Ice Age, motherfucker! The only reason we became friends? Because you were too stupid or blind or numb to know when I was laughing behind your back!

Scott turns, hobbles away.

STANLEY

Okay. All that stuff I blocked out? Yeah. Coming back to me now! Especially what a prick you are!

Scott turns back.

SCOTT

Wanna take a shot at me? I don't need this cane, I'll kick your ass!

STANLEY

I'm done with your shit.

Stanley turns, starts back for the car.

SCOTT

You can't save me, Hodge! You didn't help anyone, you're a fucking fraud!

Stanley stops, turns to face him.

SCOTT (CONT'D)

Oh, yeah. I heard it all before! Blah-bl-blah-bl-blah-bl-blah-bl-blah. No father, you couldn't save your mom from cancer, couldn't save your grandfather from... fuck, I dunno, old age! That why you're trying to save me? Lookin' for some redemption?

Stanley waves him off, turns, starts back for the car.

SCOTT (CONT'D)

Let me guess... probably couldn't
save your wife from whatever--

That's it. Stanley turns, charges for Scott...

SCOTT (CONT'D)

(derisive chuckle)

Whoa ho, there it is!

Scott tosses the cane aside, puts up his dukes. Stanley
plows into his midsection. They tumble to the ground...

The drunken and crippled Scott is no match for Stanley, who
hurls punch after punch into his face. He cocks his fist
back for one more blow, but stops...

Stanley, shaken, stands, takes a couple steps backward.
Scott shakes the cobwebs off. Looks at Stanley, shoots him
the most contemptuous of grins.

Stanley turns, walks toward the car.

SCOTT (CONT'D)

Where you going? If you were any
kind of friend, you'd put me out of
my misery right fucking now!

Stanley stops. Turns back to him one last time...

STANLEY

I hope you find your way. I really
do. But I'm done with your bullshit.

Stanley turns, crosses to the car, gets in. The car merges
back onto the road, zooms away. Scott struggles to his feet,
watches the taillights vanish into the stormy night.

SCOTT

FUCK YOU!

INT. STANLEY'S CAR - MOVING - MOMENTS LATER

Stanley wipes his face. Sneaks a quick glance into the
rearview mirror, then turns his attention back to the road.

EXT. ANGELICA SENIOR HIGH SCHOOL - MASSACRE MEMORIAL - NIGHT

Stanley's car pulls up next to the memorial. Merciless rain
attacks the ground.

He emerges from the car, staggers toward the memorial, stops
before it. Looks up at the statue of two distraught students
consoling each other. Stares...

EXT. ANGELICA HIGH SCHOOL - MORNING - TWENTY YEARS AGO

Late-morning. Classes already in session.

Jason Granger marches toward a side door. Alone. No backpack hangs from his shoulder. Today, it's a large duffel bag. No Windbreaker, either. This time, it's been replaced by an oversized trench coat.

INT. HALLWAY - MOMENTS LATER

Empty hall. Students interspersed to all the classrooms. Some doors closed, others open. Indecipherable lectures can be heard from those doors that remain open.

Jason makes his way to the boys bathroom. Unnoticed.

INT. BOYS BATHROOM - MOMENTS LATER

Jason sits in one of the stalls. Closes the door.

He unzips the bag, removes a TEC-9 semi-automatic handgun. Digs deeper, pulls out two fifty-two round magazines. He slides one into his belt, locks the other in place...

At that moment, he hears the sound of the bathroom door opening. Two JOCKS enter. Jason freezes. Leans toward the bottom of the stall, peers out, sees two sets of sneakers.

JOCK #1 (O.S.)
Dude, you didn't hook up with her yet?

JOCK #2 (O.S.)
Patience, man. I'll get there--

JOCK #1 (O.S.)
Think you're losing your touch.

JOCK #2 (O.S.)
Fuck that. What about Syracuse, you hear anything yet?

The door opens again, a TEACHER enters.

TEACHER (O.S.)
Where are you boys supposed to be right now?

JOCK #1 (O.S.)
I have a bathroom pass.

TEACHER (O.S.)
For the both of you? Seriously?
Let's go.

Jason peeks through the cracks around the edges of the stall door, watches the three leave.

He again reaches into the bag, pulls out a Smith & Wesson 9mm Shield handgun. He stands, tucks both weapons into the holsters hidden beneath his coat.

He sits back down. No emotion on his face. Breathes in. Breathes out.

INT. HALLWAY - MOMENTS LATER

Jason walks down the hallway, guns hidden in his coat, the bag hangs from his shoulder.

He passes the cafeteria, glances in. It's about half-full. No one takes note of him. He's become skilled in the art of obscurity.

Jason faces forward. At the end of the hall lies a door leading out of the school, toward the bus garage. He walks to the end of the hall, passes classrooms on the right.

Once at the exit door, he reaches into his bag, removes a chain and padlock. Careful not to attract attention, he wraps the chain around the door's two handles, locks it...

No escape.

Jason turns, walks back to the other end of the hallway. He backs up next to one of the classroom doorways. This particular door is slightly ajar.

He closes his eyes, a deep breath in... then out. It's time.

He opens his eyes, pivots into the room, gently pushes the door open...

INT. CLASSROOM - CONTINUOUS

Raymond Thompson leans against the front of his desk. The lecture is halted. The teacher turns, sees Jason. Confused by his presence.

Jason stands perfectly still, looks directly at one of the students in the front row. He then reaches into his coat, one hand seizes the TEC-9 semi-automatic handgun, the other takes hold of the Smith & Wesson 9mm Shield...

Eyes widen throughout the class. No screams at first... as though nobody is quite sure this is actually happening.

Raymond lunges for Jason. Not fast enough. He points the Smith & Wesson at his assailant, pulls the trigger...

A BULLET penetrates Raymond's chest, spins him around. Jason FIRES again. Another ROUND pierces his back. The teacher tumbles to the floor.

SHRIEKS. SCREAMS. This is real now...

Jason points the TEC-9 toward the class, SPRAYS the room with BULLETS. The students attempt to duck beneath their desks. Of the four kids in the front row, three are snuffed out. Gone. The first lives lost. Families broken forever.

More ROUNDS are fired into the back of the room, several more kids hit. The room asphyxiated by terror.

Jason turns, exits...

INT. HALLWAY - CONTINUOUS

A TEACHER approaches. Jason aims the Smith & Wesson. Upon seeing the weapon, he flinches, raises his hands before his face. Jason points the gun toward the man's neck, FIRES...

He drops to the floor, blood spatters against a prom banner stretched along the wall.

Down the hall, a couple TEACHERS and several STUDENTS emerge from their respective classrooms, see Jason, immediately charge for the exit door at the end of the hall. The door doesn't open any more than an inch. Chain-locked.

Jason walks toward the horrified gatherers before the exit. He raises the TEC-9... a BARRAGE of GUNFIRE. More bodies tumble to the floor. SHRIEKS from those still standing. Jason pulls the trigger again. This time... empty.

Those left at the end of the hall attempt to force open the door. Futile. Jason removes the empty magazine from the weapon, inserts the second one. The act leaves time for those before the locked door to think about their fate.

Once loaded, Jason takes aim, FIRES... horrified SCREAMS just before the remaining victims fall to the floor.

Jason turns, crosses into the

CAFETERIA

Most of the kids have evacuated. Two boys remain, they stand adjacent to the exit, as though waiting to pounce on the perpetrator. Upon seeing Jason, however, they freeze.

Jason points the Smith & Wesson, fires a few rounds. Both go down, one hit near the groin.

Jason crosses to the center of the cafeteria, hears the sound of kids crying beneath one of the tables. He holsters the Smith & Wesson, flips the table over...

Three of the four hidden kids attempt to scramble away. Jason sprays more BULLETS from the TEC-9 onto his prey.

The fourth student remains on her knees. It's the girl Jason appeared to have a crush on. She keeps her eyes turned toward the floor, tears streaming...

Jason looks at her. Doesn't shoot. Lowers the TEC-9. No emotion on his face. The girl shakes, terror rattles each nerve. Jason takes a couple steps past her...

He stands behind her now. They face opposite directions. She remains on her knees, eyes focused on the floor. Shivers. Jason stands motionless. Doesn't turn to face her. Calm.

Time slows. The seconds seem like an eternity. Nothing. Nothing. Nothing...

Then... Jason removes the Smith & Wesson, turns around, FIRES into the back of her head. She falls to the floor. Gone.

INT. ANGELICA HIGH SCHOOL - HALLWAY - MOMENTS LATER

Jason marches down the empty hall. FIRES a few ROUNDS into classrooms he passes by, but all the rooms are empty. He enters the

GYMNASIUM

It, too, is devoid of any students or teachers. Jason crosses to the center of the gym, stands atop the artwork depicting a charging Jaguar. Takes one final deep breath...

Points the Smith & Wesson up his chin, pulls the trigger...

EXT. HIGH SCHOOL - MASSACRE MEMORIAL - NIGHT - BACK TO PRESENT

The ECHO of a GUNSHOT rings out. Last remnant of a nightmare.

Stanley sits on the bench before the memorial. Drenched. Buries his head in his hands.

EXT. GRANDMA RUTH'S HOUSE - NIGHT - LATER

The rain has stopped. Fog now monopolizes the night air. Two beams of light slice through the mist...

Stanley's car turns, pulls into the driveway. He exits the vehicle, starts toward the front door. As he steps up onto the porch, the porch light turns on, the door opens...

Grandma Ruth steps out. Cloaked in a white nightgown, she looms as an ethereal oasis in a wasteland of agony.

Stanley backs up a couple steps, off the porch.

RUTH
What happened?

Stanley glances down at his drenched, bedraggled appearance.

STANLEY
(a sad chuckle)
I, uh... Scott and I... had a little disagreement. I'm fine.

RUTH
Come inside.

Stanley turns, starts to walk back toward the car.

RUTH (CONT'D)
Stanley--

STANLEY
I'm fine, Grandma. You go back to sleep--

RUTH
DAMN YOU!

Stanley turns back to her, surprised by the sudden outburst.

RUTH (CONT'D)
You are not fine!

Ruth's eyes burn with intensity. Stanley stands transfixed.

RUTH (CONT'D)
I promised my daughter that I would take care of you. I've given you space to deal with things in your own way. But you are slipping away and taking everyone who loves you down with you.

A tear falls from Ruth's eye. She makes no motion to wipe it away. Forces her grandson to witness her anguish.

RUTH (CONT'D)
Every time you say you're fine when I know you're not, I feel like I'm failing my daughter. There is no greater heartbreak.

STANLEY
 (softly)
 Grandma--

RUTH
 Talk to me.

Stanley casts his eyes down to the sodden ground.

STANLEY
 I made a mess of things.

He sighs. His shoulders sag. Can no longer avoid talking...

STANLEY (CONT'D)
 He made his point.

RUTH
 Who, Scott?

STANLEY
 (a pained smile)
 No. Not Scott. Jason.

Ruth crosses to the front of the porch. Stanley remains several feet away.

STANLEY (CONT'D)
 Marilyn Granger showed me one of his journals. Where he'd written that he cherished the time we were friends.

RUTH
 This wasn't your fault.

STANLEY
 He also wrote that he didn't blame me for abandoning him. He knew the only reason I did that was because I didn't know what it was like to be alone. That's what he wrote.

Ruth continues to stare at him. Confused. Heartbroken.

STANLEY (CONT'D)
 I remembered something.
 (beat)
 Jason called me. The day before. There was a message on the machine. I didn't get back, I deleted it.

RUTH
 Why?

Heavy tears well in Stanley's eyes.

STANLEY

(weakly)
I don't know.

RUTH

You couldn't have known what he was--

STANLEY

In that classroom? I was in the front row. Jason was two feet away. Looked right at me.

Ruth stares into her grandson's tormented eyes.

STANLEY (CONT'D)

I didn't survive because I ducked.

RUTH

Stanley--

STANLEY

He spared me.
(a tear falls)
He spared my life. Everyone who died? It was so I could know what it was like to be alone.

RUTH

You don't know that.

STANLEY

(softly)
I do. I saw it in his eyes. Just before he opened fire.

Stanley wipes the tear away. Ruth steps out onto the grass, bare feet be damned. She crosses to her grandson.

STANLEY (CONT'D)

It is my fault.
(begins to cry)
I'm so sorry. I'm all alone--

RUTH

No, no.

Stanley leans into her warm embrace. Cries hard. A mass of enslaved emotions liberated in a torrent of tears.

She holds him. Two broken souls adrift in a sea of fog.

INT. GRANDMA RUTH'S HOUSE - BEDROOM - NIGHT

Darkness commandeers the room. Stanley lies still in bed. Awake. Eyes on the ceiling.

He removes the covers, rises, crosses to the desk, sits, opens his laptop. The light from the computer summons him to express what was hidden, to bestow what was learned...

He types. Slow at first. His pace starts to quicken. Types faster. Faster.

INT. ANGELICA TOWN DINER - MORNING

Filled for the breakfast rush. Stanley is seated in one of the booths. A manilla envelope atop the table before him.

Indecipherable conversations permeate the air, nearly drown out the instrumental music playing through the speakers.

Stanley stares out the window. Lost in thought...

FLASHBACK - INT. CLASSROOM - DAY - TWENTY YEARS AGO

Aftermath. Seventeen-year-old Stanley sits crouched against the wall. Traumatized. Shaking.

He glances around at the bodies of the innocent... kids he's known, hung out with and laughed with since kindergarten.

Cries from the wounded. Sobs. Many cry out for their mom and dad. MEDICS tend to the injured.

SWAT TEAM MEMBERS sift through the horror.

Stanley looks over, sees a team of MEDICS feverishly work on Raymond Thompson.

No tears on Stanley's face, but rather the look of someone lost in battle. Singed by war. Someone who will never be able to erase these images... pictures seared into the memory.

At that moment, a gentle hand reaches down, caresses his cheek. Stanley turns...

The hand belongs to officer Kelly Bowland. Her eyes red, a sympathetic, comforting smile on her face.

BOWLAND

You're gonna be okay. You're alive.

END FLASHBACK

INT. ANGELICA TOWN DINER - MORNING

Stanley recognizes someone that has just entered. He offers a smile and a wave of the hand. The person crosses to the booth, slides in across from him...

Kelly Bowland. Now in her late 40s. Years have bestowed age lines and wrinkles, though she still carries that intensity in her eyes. Dressed in business attire.

She smiles warmly at him.

BOWLAND

Certainly wasn't expecting this today.

STANLEY

Thanks for coming. Hope it wasn't too much of an inconvenience.

BOWLAND

Some members of my staff were a little put out, but any call from you, it's worth moving a few things around.

A WAITRESS approaches. With a smile and a wave of the hand, Bowland dismisses the possibility of ordering. The waitress turns, tends to another customer.

BOWLAND (CONT'D)

I was happy to hear you were back.

They stare at one another for a few seconds. Both smile.

BOWLAND (CONT'D)

You look good.

STANLEY

So do you. Been following your career. Still the first one into the breach.

BOWLAND

(smiles)

Old habits.

Another moment of silence as they stare at each other.

BOWLAND (CONT'D)

Sorry, I only have a few minutes--

STANLEY

Of course.

Stanley slides the envelope across the table toward her.

STANLEY (CONT'D)

I wanted you to have this.

BOWLAND

(furrowed brow)

This is...

STANLEY

The article. The follow-up. I wanted you to have the first copy.

They lock eyes.

STANLEY (CONT'D)

Well... second copy, actually. My editor, he has the first.

BOWLAND

(a warm smile)

Second copy will have to do, then.

Silence again. They continue to stare. An AIDE, who had been standing by the door, now approaches the booth.

AIDE

(to Bowland)

It's time, Assemblywoman.

Bowland nods to the aide, who crosses back to the door.

BOWLAND

Sorry. Full day ahead.

Another moment of silence between them.

BOWLAND (CONT'D)

You gonna be okay?

STANLEY

Yeah. Every day's a struggle. But I'm meeting the challenge.

(beat)

Thank you.

Bowland smiles. In her eyes... a look that betokens awe at the man that once-frightened boy has become.

BOWLAND

You're welcome.

They reach across the table, shake hands... hold the embrace for a couple extra seconds.

Bowland takes the envelope, stands, heads for the door. Stanley watches, smiles. Content.

INT. HODGE HOME - KITCHEN - DAY

Mae enters, two travel bags hang from her shoulders. She sets them on the floor, crosses to the counter where coffee brews. She switches the machine off, fills a cup, glances out the window at the bright, calm day.

She turns away from the window, leans against the counter.
Lost in thought.

Mae walks toward the opposite wall where a collage of pictures hangs. Her and Stanley during happier times. The memories educe a soft smile.

Mae crosses to the table, sits. She reaches into one of the travel bags, removes her laptop. Opens, types...

She calls up her email account. A recent one from Stanley. Mae clicks on it, reads...

STANLEY (V.O.)

My dearest Mae. I finished the article. No easy answers, no words that can quell the pain or ease the heartbreak. But I know now how important this was for me. I realized, too, that I didn't come back to write a follow-up. I came back to write this. To you.

EXT. ANGELICA SENIOR HIGH SCHOOL - MASSACRE MEMORIAL - DAY

Stanley's car pulls up to the memorial.

Both Stanley and Grandma Ruth disembark the vehicle. She holds a bouquet of poppies and daffodils.

Stanley crosses to the passenger's side, offers her his arm. She smiles, takes it. They approach the monuments.

STANLEY (V.O.)

You are the love of my life, Mae Katz. I'm so sorry for all the years I was too paralyzed with guilt to hear you. To comfort you.

Stanley and Ruth approach the memorial.

Ruth steps up to the main monument, sets the bouquet at the base, steps back to her grandson's side.

STANLEY (V.O.) (CONT'D)

It's scary how easily we can be silenced by pain. By fear. By hate. How seductive it can be for us to allow ourselves to be disconnected from our own lives.

Stanley and Ruth walk to the monument featuring the victims and their bios. They take a moment, one by one, and ponder the lives of each one lost. As they read the bios, she gently leans her head against his shoulder.

STANLEY (V.O.) (CONT'D)

I know I have to let you go. The thought of returning to an empty house breaks my heart. But I will never give up on us.

INT. HODGE HOME - KITCHEN - DAY

Mae continues to read...

STANLEY (V.O.)

I remember once, an adventure we took when we were a couple of silly ten-year-old kids, living across the street from each other. There was that trail behind your house.

A knowing smile brightens Mae's face.

STANLEY (V.O.) (CONT'D)

Your mother always said not to go too far into the woods. Was afraid you wouldn't be able to find your way back. But we just had to know what was out there.

EXT. COUNTRY ROAD - DAY

The wind picks up, tree branches bend to the will of an impending storm, leaves tremble on the branches.

Scott Billuck hobbles along the shoulder, fights his way through the current.

STANLEY (V.O.)

So, one afternoon, when we knew your mom wasn't looking, we headed out. Felt the excitement of going where we thought no one had been before. Knowing each step further was another step we'd have to take back.

A car approaches quickly from behind. Scott turns, lifts his thumb into the air, hoping for a ride. No luck. The car speeds by. Scott hobbles on.

INT. THOMPSON HOME - LIVING ROOM - DAY

Situated against one of the walls, just beneath a collection of framed photographs, an old phonograph rests atop a cabinet.

A pair of hands holding an Etta James forty-five stretches toward the player, sets the record atop it, activates the turntable, lifts the needle, places it onto the forty-five.

INT. THOMPSON HOME - KITCHEN

Cassandra stands before the sink, her hands vigorously scrub a pan clean. Hears something from the living room. Music.

She lifts her head, closes her eyes. Sighs. *Not again.*

INT. THOMPSON HOME - LIVING ROOM

Cassandra enters...

Raymond has himself positioned in the room's center, a rose in hand.

STANLEY (V.O.)

As we got further out, I became a little nervous. It's not the road ahead that's scary, it's looking back and not recognizing the path that led you here.

Cassandra's eyes shoot daggers. Her lips pursed. She slowly shakes her head, implores him with her eyes to stop.

This time, however, Raymond holds his position. The expression on his face is a combination of longing and fortitude. The most penetrating of gazes. Never looks away.

STANLEY (V.O.) (CONT'D)

I thought about turning around, but at that moment... you took my hand. We were in this together.

Cassandra's eyes twitch every so slightly. Emotions at the gate, imploring freedom. Small tears begin to well. Try as she might, she cannot blink them away. She mouths the words "please stop."

Raymond wheels the chair closer. He reaches out to her...

She buries her face in her hands, steps toward him, sidesaddles herself upon his lap. They hold one another.

Fettered tears set free. The burden finally put down. The long-awaited slow dance. At last.

EXT. ROAD ALONG LAKE - EVENING

Henry's pick-up truck cruises down a road that abuts the beauty of Skaneateles Lake.

INT. HENRY'S PICK-UP TRUCK - CONTINUOUS

The window down, Henry's eyes on the road.

STANLEY (V.O.)

We went on. Deeper into the woods.
Until we came upon the most beautiful
stream. There was an opening in the
branches, just enough to let beams
of light in. And trees that we could
climb until the end of time.

Something catches Henry's attention.

EXT. ROAD ALONG LAKE - CONTINUOUS

The truck pulls onto the shoulder. Henry glances out the window. Awe-struck...

Off in the distance, just above the tip of a hill... a sunset. Something about the way the sun hits the clouds, and the rays of light... so sharp, so fine, as though they were reaching down to caress the land.

A view so majestic and infiltrating, it's as if God wanted Henry and Henry alone to witness it.

He stares. This time, no attempt to blink away the tears. For these few seconds... no anger. No bitterness. No pain. Only an exquisite sight...

Yeah. Charlotte would have liked that.

EXT. GRANGER HOME - BACKYARD - POND - DAY

Marilyn steps onto the dock at the near end of the pond. A portable CD player and a headset in hand. At the end of the dock, the faded yellow rocking chair awaits...

She eyes the chair. Tentative. She walks out toward the chair, sits, places the headset on, opens the player, inserts a disc of Jason's music. Closes, presses play.

Marilyn rocks back and forth, allows herself to feel close to him again.

STANLEY (V.O.)

We played for hours. I think it was then that I knew we'd end up together. But neither of us could have predicted what we'd face, the effects it would have and the toll it would take.

Tears flow freely from Marilyn's eyes. She continues to rock back and forth, a symphony of thoughts and emotions swirl through her as the music flows. The love felt, the pain caused, questions forever unanswered...

A struggle to comprehend the incomprehensible. To love fully, without full understanding.

EXT. HODGE HOME - PORCH - DAY

Mae exits through the front door, the travel bags hang from her shoulders. She starts down the steps, but stops, lowers the bags to the ground, sits atop the steps.

STANLEY (V.O.)

Twenty years later and I have no answers. Only what I've gleaned from others who have loved and lost. Just keep breathing. Keep living. From one minute to the next. Even when logic demands otherwise. Who knows what the next day will bring? I love you, Mae. And I hope we'll meet up again, with hearts as young as ours were at that stream. I hope.

She stares into the afternoon sky. Deep in thought...

INT. STANLEY'S CAR - MOVING - DAY

Stanley rolls down the window, sticks his arm out. At peace. A newfound freedom in the wind that tickles his fingers.

EXT. COUNTRY ROAD - DAY

Stanley's car cruises down the road. Toward uncertainty. Toward possibility. Toward hope.

EXT. HODGE HOME - AFTERNOON

Stanley's car pulls into the driveway. He exits the vehicle, removes his travel bag from the trunk. Walks toward the porch, a melancholic expression on his face.

As he nears, the front door slowly opens...

Mae.

They lock eyes. Tears well in both.

The look on Stanley's face is a medley of emotions... joy, gratitude, hope, longing, all at once.

It's the look of a man who, at long last, has come home.

FADE OUT:

THE END