

THE BOOK OF HENRY

By
Gregg Hurwitz

EXT. BUS STOP - DAY

HENRY CARPENTER (12) waits for the school bus with his younger brother, PETER (10). As various people walk by, the boys IMITATE them. Playful, not nasty.

Peter apes a BURLY MAN'S swagger as Henry laughs. A PREGNANT WOMAN waddles by and Henry puts his backpack on his frontside and waddles behind her. Peter imitates a TEENAGE GIRL'S flounce, patting his hair and sashaying. She notices and chases him off.

HENRY (V.O.)

Jesus said, "Show me the stone which the builders have rejected. That is the cornerstone." Now don't worry, I'm not a Bible thumper or anything, I just like that quotation. It's fitting with the way things unfolded in my life. I guess you could say I was the stone that got rejected. The way I see it, though, it all happened for the best. The way I see it, people are complex and troubled, but they can look out for one another and that's what sets us apart from things with fangs and claws. The way I see it, it's a bumpy ride, so we might as well try for love and forgiveness.

(beat)

Until, that is, someone does something unforgivable...

DISSOLVE TO:

INT. LIVING ROOM - DAY

CLOSE ON a SKETCH of a BLUE SQUIRREL. Henry and Peter's mother, SUSAN (30s, vivacious, warm), is FLIPPING THROUGH STORYBOARDS of her unpublished children's book.

SUSAN

...and the other squirrels wouldn't play with the blue squirrel...Or share their nuts...Instead they teased him because he was different.

Henry rolls his eyes.

SUSAN

Until one day, the blue squirrel had enough. And he said, "Since I'm different anyway, I might as well *embrace* it."...So he dyed his coat all the colors of the rainbow... Then the other squirrels were

(MORE)

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SUSAN (cont'd)
jealous and sorry because he looked punk-
rock awesome...

Henry looks pained. Peter is rapt.

SUSAN
...And they played with him again...And
learned that *real* coolness isn't about
the color of your fur. It's about what
you've got beneath it...The end.
(beat)
Well?

Henry and CHARLIE (Benji-mutt) share an expression of
disbelief.

HENRY
That was god-awful. Banal and fatuous.

PETER
What's fat-cheese?

SUSAN
(to Henry)
It's heartfelt! And it's *about* something,
okay? It's a *metaphor*. How the hell do
you get "fatuous" from my heartfelt
squirrel metaphor?

HENRY
I've told you, mother, don't swear in
front of Peter. It's a bad influence.

PETER
Like I haven't heard it. And besides, *I*
thought it was good. It's a good story.

HENRY
And like rainbow fur's really gonna make
him the envy of SquirrelTown. What are
these, gay pride squirrels?

SUSAN
And what's wrong if they were?
(to Peter, re: Henry)
It seems *someone* hasn't grasped The Blue
Squirrel's moral of acceptance.

HENRY
It's hard not to grasp a moral when it's
being rammed down one's throat.

Susan flips him off.

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CONTINUED: (2)

HENRY

You're not doing that right.

SUSAN

Really?

HENRY

You're not forming your testicles.

PETER

Here, mom.

Peter leans over and helps her form a correct "bird."

A KNOCK at the door. NEIL SICKLEMAN (40s, next-door neighbor) peers through the foyer window with puzzled concern. Susan's smile freezes. She retracts her middle finger.

PETER

Oh great. It's Neil.

SUSAN

(correcting Peter)
Mr. Sickleman.

She opens the door to Neil, who wears jeans and gardening gloves. And then, leaning out from behind him-

CHRISTINA (12, adorable). She hovers bashfully at her father's side, tangled hair in her face. Even so, she *glows*.

Henry STRAINS to watch her. A major CRUSH is in evidence. With amusement, Peter takes note of his brother's reaction.

NEIL

Hi, Susan. I was wondering if you'd mind taking better care of your side of the lawn. Your crab grass spread over to my half and I'm afraid it's even more stubborn than I am.

Susan pulls Christina in, tugs out her own HAIR TIE, and uses it to take Christina's hair up out of her face. Big improvement. Susan holds up a hand and she and Christina BUMP FISTS, then "blow it up." This is done instinctively, Susan not even breaking eye contact with Neil.

SUSAN

Moving forward, I vow to mind my crab grass.

Peter mimics Neil's tense face and Henry hides a smile.

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CONTINUED: (3)

NEIL

I just resodded last summer and wasn't looking forward to doing it again so soon. And the expense...

(nervous smile)

You know how it is being a single parent.

SUSAN

I do. I'm sorry, Neil.

Christina spots Peter making a face, makes a face of her own. Then gives a RADIANT SMILE. Henry nearly falls off the couch.

INT. PETER AND HENRY'S BEDROOM - NIGHT

Henry helps his mother as she sits in front of the computer. Peter reads a Batman comic on his bed. Charlie sleeps in the corner. The second-floor window looks onto NEIL'S HOUSE.

HENRY

Then you double-click here and it downloads your bank statement directly into Quicken.

SUSAN

Like maj-eeek.

(beat)

Who says you're not smart?

PETER

No one.

SUSAN

True.

She pulls a drawer to put the paper away and it JAMS halfway open. STUFFED with awards, ribbons, trophies. Henry's.

SUSAN

What are these new ones? I don't recognize half of these. State Math Champion, Science Fair, National Merit Scholar. *National Merit Scholar*? Isn't that for the SATs?

Henry tries to push the drawer closed, blocking it from Peter's view, not wanting his brother to feel insecure.

HENRY

PSATs. It's no big deal.

SUSAN

No big deal? Look at this one. Model Citizen.

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CONTINUED:

She holds up a FAUX BRONZE MEDAL with Henry's name.

PETER

Wow. I'd be psyched if I won that. I wouldn't hide it. I'd keep it with me for good luck.

He takes the medal, marveling at it.

SUSAN

All right. Get your little tushies into bed. What do you think, I'm running a night club here?

Peter giggles. Henry grimaces.

HENRY

Mother, do you think you could refrain from saying "tushy"?

The boys slide into their respective beds.

SUSAN

(imitating)

Mother, do you think you could refrain from saying "tushy"?

She throws air quotes. Henry trying not to smile...

Peter turns off the light on the night stand between his bed and Henry's. His gaze lingers on a RED NOTEBOOK.

HENRY

Don't even think about it.

PETER

What? I wasn't.

SUSAN

Henry.

HENRY

I'm entitled to keep some things private.

PETER

Mom, can we do Movie Night tomorrow?

SUSAN

I can't, hon. I've got the dinner shift.

HENRY

I told you, you don't have to work anymore. You can stay home all day and write your children's book proposals.

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SUSAN

I know sweetie, but what kind of role model is a person who doesn't work?

PETER

What do you mean she doesn't have to work anymore?

SUSAN

Nothing.

HENRY

Nothing.

PETER

You work too hard.

SUSAN

Maybe. But you know what's my most important job of all? Loving you two brats.

She kisses Peter on the forehead then they bump fists and "blow it up." She rises to leave, pretending to ignore Henry. Henry CLEARS HIS THROAT.

SUSAN

(amused)

Oh. Sorry.

(leans over, then:)

Are you sure? I mean, I don't want to invade your grown-up personal space or anything.

HENRY

Mother!

She kisses him on the forehead. Holds out her fist. Henry rolls his eyes. She keeps her fist there. Finally he knocks it reluctantly, blowing it up and smiling despite himself.

Susan heads out. The dog follows her out. On her way, she points to the night light.

SUSAN

On or off?

HENRY

Off.

PETER

On.

She flicks it on, then pauses at the door.

SUSAN

Open or closed?

HENRY

Closed.

PETER

Open.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED: (3)

She closes it behind her. The boys lie in silence. Then-

PETER

What's Sado Macho-ism?

HENRY

Nothing.

Henry slides up and peers out the window at Neil's house. Neil works downstairs in his STUDY. Upstairs, Christina clicks on her NIGHT LIGHT and climbs into bed.

PETER

Whatcha doin'?

HENRY

Nothing.

PETER

Tryin' to see your girlfriend naked?

(no response, so:)

Henry and Christina sittin' in a tree. K-I-S-S-I-N-G. First comes love-

HENRY

God. You are *so* juvenile.

PETER

No duh. I'm ten. Will you tickle my arm?

HENRY

No.

PETER

Come on. I'll never fall asleep if you don't. Pleeeeease? Pretty pleeeeee?

HENRY

All right, fine, before you add any toppings.

He climbs into bed next to Peter. Peter extends his arm, palm up, and Henry gently runs his fingers up and down his arm.

DRIFT DOWN to Peter's other hand, hidden from Henry. It clutches Henry's MEDAL.

DISSOLVE TO:

Henry wakes with a start next to Peter. He rubs his forehead, in obvious pain. HIS VISION BLURS, THEN FOCUSES. He eases out of bed. Glances through the window at Neil's house.

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CONTINUED: (4)

Through BREAKS in the FOLIAGE, some clearer than others, Henry can see into the neighboring house through various windows.

Neil is still downstairs in the study. He puts down his pen, aligning it perfectly at the edge of the neat stack of files.

Upstairs, visible in a night light glow, Christina fidgets in bed, restless. Or maybe scared. Now she reaches beneath the bed and pulls out a SECRET BOX. From it, she removes a framed PHOTO of her mother (the type set atop caskets at funerals) and a NECKLACE, admires them, and sets them aside. Then she takes out a bunch of her mother's GLASS PAPERWEIGHTS (Murano, Baccarat, etc.) and arranges them on her footboard.

She turns on a FLASHLIGHT and runs it across the row of paperweights so their big colorful outlines dance poetically on the far wall. A beautiful carnival effect.

Henry is entranced.

Downstairs, Neil rises from the desk, stretches. Then he walks to the wall where various framed COMMUNITY LEADER COMMENDATIONS are displayed. He notices an imperceptibly crooked AWARD and gives the frame a finger-tap adjustment.

Content that all is in order, he exits to head upstairs.

At the sound of his footfall, Christina LURCHES forward, SCARED. She sweeps the paperweights back into their box, hides it, and PRETENDS TO BE ASLEEP.

Henry sees Neil emerge upstairs. Neil PAUSES in the upstairs hall on his way to his room, his head lowered. Considering.

Then he TURNS and starts down the hall TOWARD CHRISTINA'S CLOSED DOOR.

Henry, clutching his RED NOTEBOOK, keeps watching, horrified, his breath fogging the glass.

INT. SUSAN'S CAR - MORNING

Susan is driving to work. In a beat-to-shit KIA. The car is ragged, messy. "Baby Love" comes on the radio. She cranks it up. Soon, she's pounding the wheel, singing into a hairbrush.

She glances over, sees a GOOD-LOOKING MAN watching her with amusement from the next car. She drops the brush, mortified.

He smiles. She smiles. She REAR ENDS the car in front of her.

INT. CLASSROOM - DAY

TOMMY (gap-toothed 6th-grader) reads his paper up front.

TOMMY

The best food of all is popsicles. I like a lot of different flavors. My favorites are cherry, lemon, and blue. Popsicles are good.

From his seat, Henry watches Christina. She DOZES OFF, then snaps to.

MRS. EVANS

Good, Tommy. A little elementary, but solid grammar and paragraph construction. Now class, don't forget we have open house night next month. I'm handing out forms now, so be sure to bring back parent signatures. And because so many parents missed this fall's talent show, we'll be showing the video.

She begins handing out the open house night FORMS.

MRS. EVANS

Who'd like to go next? Henry? *Henry?*

HENRY

Huh? Oh yeah. Sure.

He walks to the front of the class. No notes.

HENRY

Gonorrhoea is my favorite venereal disease for three reasons. First, it has a cool nickname. Second, it sounds like one of King Lear's daughters. Third, you can clear it up with a simple shot, unlike herpes. That's why gonorrhoea is my favorite venereal disease.

The bell rings and the students clear out.

MRS. EVANS

(been-there voice)

Henry? A moment, please.

Henry walks over and stands in front of her desk.

MRS. EVANS

Remind me again why we can't put you in a gifted school?

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HENRY

Cuz it's better for my psycho-social development for me to interact with a peer group in a normal school environment.

MRS. EVANS

Oh yeah.

INT. AUTO-SHOP - DAY

Susan watches a swarthy MECHANIC examine the smashed-up Kia.

MECHANIC

Eet is not good.

SUSAN

I figured. Folks don't generally expect good news at an auto-shop. I mean, it's never like, "Yay, I found a bag of small, unmarked bills in the door panel," you know?

(off his humorless gaze)

You don't know.

MECHANIC

Weeth body work, parts, and labor, eet will be three thousand four hundred.

SUSAN

That's more than the thing's worth.

(mutters to herself)

I'd have to talk to Henry.

MECHANIC

Ah. The husband?

SUSAN

It's a long story.

MECHANIC

I understand.

SUSAN

How much to... make it go?

MECHANIC

Make it go?

SUSAN

Make it go.

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MECHANIC

I can make drive for one thousand. But it will look all... smashed to the shit.

SUSAN

If I was someone who cared if it looked smashed to the shit, do you think I'd be driving a Kia?

He shrugs. Fair point. She offers her hand and they shake.

EXT. PLAYGROUND - DAY

Christina wanders off from the other kids, who are playing. She spots a DANDELION SEED HEAD in a patch of weeds. She plucks it, holds it up, lets the sun play through it. Beautiful. She smiles. For a moment, she's just another kid.

INT. LIBRARY - DAY

Henry's pencil taps manically on a textbook - LEGAL GUARDIANSHIP LAWS. Beside it are others, including: NOTARIAL AND AUTHENTICATION SERVICES. A SLIP reads *BOOK TRANSFER REQUEST*. Preoccupied, he JOTS in his RED NOTEBOOK.

To his side sits a CHECKERS GAME he's playing with DOT (70), the librarian. He pays it no attention. She, on the other hand, is SCRUTINIZING the board. Finally she makes a move.

Without looking, Henry reaches and jumps two of her pieces.

Peter enters, still cradling Henry's MEDAL, though he hides it by his side. Stands there. Henry, nose in book.

HENRY

What do you want?

PETER

Would you come out with me? To the playground?

Henry jumps another of Dot's pieces. Jots some more. Dot starts to move. But his finger is still on his piece.

HENRY

Uh!
 (makes another jump)
 King me.
 (to Peter)
 I'm working.

PETER

Um...

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

HENRY

What?

PETER

Well, it's just, Morris is out there...

Henry sighs, closes the reference book. Stands.

DOT

Hey.

HENRY

Oh sorry.

He studies the game for a moment, then makes six more jumps on a single move, clearing the board.

HENRY

Thank you, Dot.

The boys exit. Dot slumps in her chair.

EXT. PLAYGROUND - DAY

The brothers head to where MORRIS (beefy, 12) plays handball.

PETER

See? There he is. Over there. *Waiting.*

Henry nods, but his focus is on Christina, still over by herself, holding the dandelion seed head. He detours to her.

HENRY

Christina...? Um. Are you...um...okay?

CHRISTINA

Hey, Henry. Yeah, I'm good.

HENRY

You, um. You do that.

CHRISTINA

Do what?

HENRY

Always find the light.

She gives that glowing smile. Offers him the dandelion.

CHRISTINA

You can have my wish.

Henry, speechless.

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Peter CRIES OUT. Henry runs over as MORRIS SHOVES PETER.
Peter FALLS, scrapes his palms. The faux bronze MEDAL CRACKS.

HENRY
Morris, cut it out!

PETER
Your award! I broke your award!

HENRY
That's okay. I don't care about that.
It's just a *thing*.
(wheels on Morris)
What's your problem? I told you to leave
him alone!

MORRIS
He's a little douchebag. You, you're
smart at least, but him, he's a *nothing*.

Henry ignores him, helping Peter to his feet.

PETER
Where *were* you?

HENRY
I'm sorry.

PETER
Where were you?

HENRY
(hugging him)
Sssh. I'm sorry. I'm sorry.

Christina picks up the cracked medal, looks at it.

EXT. DINER - DAY

Susan is dropped off by a tow truck. Disgruntled.

INT. DINER - DAY

She enters, waves to her friend and co-waitress, SHEILA (30),
dressed in BAD 80'S CLOTHES - a scoop neck pink sweater.
Susan's boss, the short-order cook, JOHN (40s), scowls.

JOHN
Late again.

SUSAN
The dog ate my car.

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JOHN

Table seven. Move it.

SHEILA

Those girls are "hungry like the wolf."

SUSAN

Thanks, "Karma Chameleon."

SHEILA

(mock offended)

"Do you really want to hurt me?"

SUSAN

No, I'm "Too shy-y shy."

John is checking out Sheila's chest. Sheila SNAPS her fingers in front of his eyes.

SHEILA

Face up here, boss-man.

Susan walks over to a full table.

SUSAN

Get you girls started with some drinks?

COLLEGE GIRL #1

I'll have a Diet Coke with lemon.

COLLEGE GIRL #2

Iced tea with lemon.

COLLEGE GIRL #3

Water with a lemon.

COLLEGE GIRL #4

Iced tea with sugar and two lemons.

COLLEGE GIRL #5

Diet coke, lemon.

SUSAN

Let's start again. Raise your hand if you're *not* having a lemon.

Okay then. She heads back to the counter.

SUSAN

You do know that sweater's illegal in seventeen states?

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SHEILA

Oh, don't you worry, Susan. It'll come back in style soon. Think what happened with wide belts.

SUSAN

I'd rather not.

JOHN

The new payroll gal ain't exactly the brightest bulb on the string. She mailed your paycheck home even though I told her you were coming in today.

SUSAN

She mailed it?

JOHN

Yeah. Nice neighborhood you live in. I figured you for an apartment somewhere. Thank God for alimony, huh?

SUSAN

(muttering/amused)
Alimony.

INT. SCHOOL HALLWAY - DAY

Henry on the pay phone, juggling a pen and the marked-up business section of the newspaper. On the wall behind him, a SIGN depicts a cell phone with a prohibition slash.

HENRY (INTO PHONE)

...and so that's three thousand of Datatech at 76 and a teeny, with a stop-loss at 70. I think it's gonna run. And give me ten Qualcomm 35 puts with a limit of two and a quarter.

Christina walks by and Henry turns, watches until she's gone.

HENRY

Huh? Okay. So the IPO's next week? Let's talk Monday. Thanks, Don. Oh come on. Let's just say I had the benefit of being born into an active market.

INT. PETER AND HENRY'S BEDROOM - NIGHT

Peter sits angrily on his bed with his arms crossed. Charlie lies with his head in Peter's lap.

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HENRY

Oh, come on. I apologized like a thousand times. I won't let Morris get near you again. I promise.

Peter does his best to ignore him.

HENRY

I bet I can make you smile.

Peter, unmoved. Henry runs out the door...

And reappears, holding two eggs in front of his eyes.

HENRY

(singing)

Tomorrow, tomorrow, I love you tomorrow,
you're always a day aaaawaaaay!

No smile from Peter. Henry lowers the eggs. A challenge.

QUICK FLASHES:

-Henry pulls down a big FAN from the closet.

-Henry grabs the TOILET PLUNGER in the bathroom. Finds another in the cabinet.

-Henry pulls a pair of GOGGLES from a chest in the basement.

INT. HALLWAY OUTSIDE BEDROOM - NIGHT

Henry's finger turns on an iPod. The MISSION IMPOSSIBLE THEME starts up. Charlie raises his head, ears perked. Henry's finger clicks on the fan, which he slides across to the far side of the doorway. He lowers the goggles into place.

Peter still sits with his arms crossed. But he's curious. Music BLARING, Henry pulls himself into sight in the doorway using the toilet plungers as hand grips. The fan blows his hair back so he looks like Ethan Hunt atop the train.

Despite his best efforts, Peter GRINS. They hear the front door open.

PETER

Mom's home!

The boys and Charlie bolt downstairs.

INT. FOYER - NIGHT

They crowd Susan, Henry in goggles with toilet plungers.

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SUSAN
Jesus, Henry. Just say no!

HENRY
(peering past her)
What happened to the car?

SUSAN
An unmarked government sedan was following me, so I had to attempt some evasive maneuvers-

HENRY
Mother.

SUSAN
I was checking out a cute guy and I rear-ended someone.

Henry shakes his head sadly.

SUSAN
The mechanic looked at it, got it running again. Good as new.

PETER
Why don't you buy a new car?

SUSAN
Because there's nothing wrong with the old car.

Henry merely POINTS. Hood smashed, headlight missing, etc.

A white Cabriolet convertible pulls up.

PETER
Sheila!

Henry groans.

SUSAN
You be nice.

Sheila gets out, waving as she approaches the front door.

SHEILA
Hi, Susan. Hi, Peter.
(mock mean)
Hi, *Hank*.

HENRY
It's *Henry*. I'd think you'd be able to retain at least one simple name somewhere
(MORE)

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CONTINUED: (2)

HENRY (cont'd)
beneath those teased locks of bleached
hair.

SHEILA
Nice goggles. They go well with your
misshapen head.

She and Peter high-five.

SUSAN
(to Henry and Sheila)
Don't you two start already.
(to the boys)
I've had a day you wouldn't believe, so I
invited Sheila back for a glass of wine.

She and Sheila head into the kitchen. Peter looks to Henry:

PETER
Oh great. They're gonna get drunk and
laugh at dad's old love letters.

SUSAN
(O.C.)
I heard that! And we will *not*.

INT. LIVING ROOM - NIGHT

The boys sit on the STAIRS with Charlie, just out of view from the living room. Sheila and Susan are drinking wine on the couch, howling with laughter. Susan attempts to read an old letter, but keeps deteriorating back into hysterics.

SUSAN
...and I can't...I can't imagine ever
spending a day apart from your sparkling
eyes...

SHEILA
Sparkling eyes!

SUSAN
And...and...get this...your lips fuller
than the fullest moon...

SHEILA
Fuller than the...

They roll on the couch, howling. Henry shakes his head. Charlie lowers his head into Peter's lap.

INT. PETER AND HENRY'S BEDROOM - NIGHT

Henry starts awake again with a headache. Rubbing his forehead, he looks out the window at Neil's house, but all is dark. He swallows two Advil, but can't get back to sleep.

EXT. GARAGE - NIGHT

Henry wheels his bike out onto the dark street and pedals off, red notebook under one arm.

EXT. PARK - NIGHT

Henry stands, bike between his legs, notebook spread on his handlebars. Beside him, a LOW RAIL guards a LONG DROP to a WATER-FILLED GORGE. He watches the park entrance.

A ranger truck pulls up.

In Henry's notebook is a chart labeled: RANGER PATROL TIMES. Mostly filled out. He checks his watch, jots down the time.

A RANGER hops out of the truck, heads for the gorge, sweeping his flashlight. The sound of YOUTHFUL LAUGHTER draws the ranger's attention. He detours off around a bend in the path.

A moment later, the ranger reemerges, holding a twelve pack. TWO TEENAGERS sheepishly follow. The ranger sends them on their way with admonishments, then hops back in the truck, opens one of their BEERS, takes a sip, drives off.

Henry jots down that time too, then pedals for home.

EXT. CARPENTER HOUSE - MORNING

Susan walks the kids to the Kia. She ruffles Henry's hair.

SUSAN

You okay, sweetie?

HENRY

Fine. Why?

SUSAN

You have your head-achey expression.

HENRY

No, it's not that. It's nothing.

Susan opens the rear door. Rippled from the crash, it CREAKS. Peter hops in. Henry just stares at the wrecked car. Susan makes a sweeping royal gesture for him to climb in.

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NEIL
Susan! Excuse me.

He rushes over, guiding Christina. She is blank-faced.

NEIL
I have to deal with an urgent work
matter. Can you take Christina?

SUSAN
Always.

NEIL
You're a lifesaver.

He turns, heading back to the house. As Susan circles to the
driver's seat, Henry lets Christina climb in.

HENRY
Hi, um. Hope you're, uh. Um...

A tiny mushroom paperweight falls from her backpack into the
gutter and SHATTERS. Henry looks down at it, upset.

HENRY
Oh, no! Your mushroom.

But Christina just sits there, staring ahead.

CHRISTINA
It's just a stupid paperweight.

Henry looks at her, devastated. Now Susan climbs in on the
driver's side, having missed all this.

SUSAN
All aboard!

EXT. STREET - MORNING

GUS (70s, crossing guard) moves a cluster of kids across the
street to the school. Morris, Peter, Christina, and Henry are
in the group. Henry eyes Christina, still worried.

MORRIS
(to Peter)
You're a homo sapien.

HENRY
Witty, Morris.

Gus walks slowly, using a three-pronged cane.

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BOY #1
Like *he's* any help.

MORRIS
I know. He's, like, way slower than *us*.

The kids move into the school. Henry lingers behind.

HENRY
It's not true, you know. What they said.
I feel better knowing you're here every
day to walk my little brother across. And
those kids, they're all glad you're here
too. They're just too worried about being
cool to admit it.

GUS
Well, I appreciate your saying so.

Gus pauses, wistful.

HENRY
You sad?

GUS
I guess just about one thing.
(beat)
That I won't get to see you grow up.

INT. CLASSROOM - DAY

Henry sits in his usual seat in the back, eyes on Christina.

MRS. EVANS
Zach's mom dropped off some donuts for
his birthday—

A CHEER goes up. She passes them out. Henry eyes FRESH
BRUISES on Christina's arm, the back of her neck. The kids
LAUGH and EAT their donuts, but Christina's SITS UNTOUCHED at
the edge of her desk. A window BANGS in the wind and she
JUMPS.

Henry rises from his seat, storms for the door.

MRS. EVANS
Henry! Where are you going? *Henry!*

INT. PRINCIPAL'S OFFICE - DAY

Henry flies in. The two teachers on the couch scurry to
extinguish their cigarettes. The principal at her desk.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

HENRY

Goddamnit, Janice, how much longer does it have to go on? What else do you need to see?

PRINCIPAL WILDER

I believe you meant, "Principal Wilder."
(to the teachers)
Will you please excuse us?

The teachers exit.

PRINCIPAL WILDER

Henry, we are *not* going down this road again-

HENRY

Poor weight gain, bruises, exhaustion, physical discomfort, failure to thrive, decreased school performance. What have her grades been this year?

PRINCIPAL WILDER

You know I can't-

HENRY

You are under no obligation to *investigate*. You need merely report *suspicion of*. It's your ethical responsibility as an educator.

PRINCIPAL WILDER

Which I *have*, Henry. I told you I made preliminary inquiries which turned up nothing.

HENRY

So make *secondary* inquiries.

PRINCIPAL WILDER

It's more complicated than that. Mr. Sickleman is the police commissioner and an upstanding member of this community-

HENRY

That's preposterous. As if upstanding members of the community don't-

PRINCIPAL WILDER

And these types of baseless allegations can have extremely serious ramifications for his career-

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED: (2)

HENRY

Jesus, do these things mean *anything*?

He grabs CHILD ABUSE pamphlets from the table, shakes them.

PRINCIPAL WILDER

Henry! I have known Mr. Sickleman for longer than you've been alive and I will not subject him to this kind of public scrutiny without conclusive evidence.

HENRY

Look at her arms.

PRINCIPAL WILDER

Kids bruise all the time, Henry. I think you're overanalyzing this because you have a crush on her - an *unrequited* crush, might I add - and you're trying to-

HENRY

Fine. I'll handle this without you.

He exits, slamming the door.

EXT. SCHOOL - DAY

Peter and Henry head for the bus with a few other kids. Then we hear an EAR-SPLITTING BETWEEN-THE-TEETH WHISTLE from afar.

PETER

The Mom Whistle!

Susan pulls up in the smashed-to-shit Kia, window down, drawing looks from other parents in their Range Rovers. Charlie in the front seat. She WAVES. Henry, embarrassed.

Peter runs over and jumps in, hugging his mom, but Henry takes his time strolling over.

HENRY

I really wish you would buy a new car. It's not like we can't afford it.

SUSAN

That isn't the point.

PETER

I thought '97 Kias were illegal.

SUSAN

They're not illegal.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

PETER
Where we goin'?

SUSAN
We have to stop by Sheila's. She was supposed to work the morning shift with me, but she didn't show up.

Henry rolls his eyes, makes a "drinking" gesture to Peter.

SUSAN
Stop that.

INT. SHEILA'S HOUSE - DAY

Susan lets herself, Charlie, and the boys in.

SUSAN
Hello? Sheila? Hell-oo-oo?

The kitchen phone rings and the answering machine picks up.

ANSWERING MACHINE (SHEILA)
I'm not in. If you're looking for Tom, he can be reached at 555-ASSHOLE.

HENRY
That's too many digits.

Charlie paws at the sliding glass doors. Peter wanders over.

PETER
Found her.

EXT. SHEILA'S BACKYARD - DAY

Sheila is lying unconscious in a lawn chair, a newspaper over her face, two empty bottles of wine on the ground beside her. Holding a garden hose, Susan watches her. She nods to Peter, who turns on the faucet, and she SPRAYS Sheila with water.

SUSAN
Lemme guess. Drinking away memories of that ex who left you in the lurch with two young boys?

SHEILA
That was you.

SUSAN
Oh yeah. Well, either way, it's time to get your late afternoon off to a good start.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

Sheila doesn't move until she's drenched, then she pulls the paper from her face, squints into the sun.

SHEILA

Oh great. Nice of you to bring the kids.
Hello, *Hank*.

HENRY

Sheila. You're looking radiant as ever.

SUSAN

I covered for you with John.

SHEILA

Bet he missed the sight of my-

SUSAN

Sheila.

Henry looks at Peter, mimes the universal "boobs" gesture.

SUSAN

Well, just wanted to make sure you were
still breathing.

Sheila checks her own pulse at her wrist, gives a little nod.
Susan and the boys start out.

SHEILA

Be sure to lock the door "before you go-
go."

SUSAN

Okay, I'll just "Pass the 'deadbolt' on
the left hand side."

HENRY

Stay radiant.

Sheila gives him the double thumbs up.

INT. GROCERY STORE - DAY

Susan and Peter walk up the aisle. Henry pushes the cart.

HENRY

It's really great how you enable her
alcoholism.

Susan grabs Coco Puffs, puts the box in the cart. Henry puts
it back without her noticing. Replaces it with Kashi.

SUSAN

Sheila is not an alcoholic.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

HENRY
Denial is always the first step.

SUSAN
Would you *relax*?

Peter tosses Ding Dongs in the cart. Henry puts them back.

PETER
I like Sheila.

HENRY
And she's such a sharp dresser. God,
didn't acid wash go out before I was
born?

Susan puts Coke in the cart. Henry wearily exchanges it for juice.

SUSAN
That's nothing compared to some of the
shit in her closet.

HENRY
Mother! Don't swear in front of Peter.

PETER
Like it matters.

At the end of the aisle, a MUSCULAR MAN argues with his GIRLFRIEND. He GRABS her arm roughly and SHAKES her.

Henry starts for the man, but Susan stops him.

SUSAN
Let's go. This doesn't involve us.

She hurries the boys away over Henry's PROTESTS. At check-out, he glances back, the incident still on his mind.

Susan grabs a TABLOID and flips through it. With amusement-

SUSAN
A mom in Arkansas had a two-headed baby.

HENRY
I'm sure that made for a trying delivery.

SUSAN
Youch.

Peter pulls a box of "Amorous Candles" from the grocery cart.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED: (2)

PETER

Why'd you buy... "Amor-mouse Candles"?

Embarrassed, Susan yanks the box out of Peter's hand. She sets down the tabloid and crouches by the boys.

SUSAN

I need you two to be on your best behavior tonight.

The boys GROAN.

INT. PETER AND HENRY'S BEDROOM - NIGHT

Tucking a button-up shirt into his slacks, Henry pauses by the desk on his way out. Alone.

He opens his RED NOTEBOOK. Inside is one of the CHILD ABUSE pamphlets. His finger finds the ANONYMOUS REPORTING LINE telephone number. Then he checks something he jotted down earlier in the notebook: Block Caller ID: *67.

He dials. As the phone rings, he peruses the OPEN HOUSE NIGHT SCHEDULE, also folded into his notebook. His eyes hold on: TALENT SHOW SCREENING: CAFETERIA - 7:00 pm.

HENRY

Hello, can I please have the intake case worker? Yes, hi. I'd like to report a child abuse case. No it's not me. Twelve. Look, I'm not gonna give you my phone number, that's why I called the "anonymous reporting line," get it?

The front doorbell RINGS, and Charlie starts barking.

HENRY

(rushing)

The address is 11657 Taos Drive and the abuser's name is Neil Sickleman thank you very much good bye.

He hangs up.

INT. FOYER - NIGHT

The door swings open to reveal OWEN, Susan's date. Peter waits by his mom's side, his hair neatly combed. Henry descends the stairs as Owen steps into the foyer.

OWEN

Oh, hi. Hi.
(to Susan)
(MORE)

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

OWEN (cont'd)
You didn't tell me your kids would be here.

SUSAN
Well, where else would they be?

OWEN
True, true. I guess that's true.

SUSAN
This is Peter, and that's my Henry.

OWEN
Hi there.
(to Henry, descending stairs)
Hi sunshine.

He pats Peter's head as he hands Susan a little boxed GIFT.

OWEN
For you.

SUSAN
Why thank you.

INT. DINING ROOM - NIGHT

They're seated. Homemade pseudo-gourmet pizza is served. The new CANDLES burn in their holders. Owen's gift to the side.

OWEN
Well, aren't you going to open your present?

SUSAN
Now?

OWEN
Why not?

SUSAN
Okay...well...wow. A pizza cutter.

Henry and Peter exchange glances.

OWEN
I picked it out this afternoon.
Appropriate, I thought, given...

A gesture at the homemade pizza.

HENRY
It is a *lovely* pizza cutter.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

Owen, not getting the sarcasm. Susan gives Henry a GLARE.

OWEN

I've always thought a man can't be too handy in the kitchen. Sometimes it's the little things that make a meal, you know?

Susan attempts to show interest, but when she glances over, she sees that Peter has plugged TWO GRAPES into his nostrils. She scowls at him. Smiles quickly when Owen looks over.

OWEN

I mean, you can cook the best pizza in the world, but if it's cut all messy, then who wants to eat it?

Owen notices the grapes in Peter's nose. Busted, Peter exhales, accidentally EJECTING THE GRAPES ONTO THE TABLE.

OWEN

Well behaved little ones.

PETER

Mom?

SUSAN

Yes dear?

PETER

What's a douchebag?

Owen coughs, spraying Susan with water. Susan fights for composure, wiping the water from her face with a napkin.

SUSAN

Well...Peter, honey...it's when a woman...

OWEN

You're not going to *tell* him.

HENRY

We believe that frankness is the best policy for sex education.

Owen looks at Henry as if his head is on fire.

SUSAN

...sometimes...when a woman wants to...clean her, um, private-

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED: (2)

HENRY

Christ, mother! Must you deteriorate into euphemism? You're a thirty-four-year-old woman incapable of saying "vagina."

SUSAN

Thirty three!
(to Owen)
Thirty three.

Awkward silence.

HENRY

Wow, these candles sure are...*amorous*.

INT. KITCHEN - NIGHT

The boys confer as Susan shows out Owen, harried, in B.G.

PETER

He sucked.

HENRY

Totally. The man bought our mother a pizza cutter and called me sunshine.

PETER

You think she liked him?

HENRY

No.

PETER

How can you tell?

HENRY

She didn't make her orgasm face when she opened his present.

PETER

Her orgasm face?

HENRY

"Oooh! I loove it. It's sooo great."
That's her version of flirting. She thinks it's charming.

In B.G, Susan presses her forehead to the closed door.

INT. SUSAN'S BEDROOM - NIGHT

Susan lies in bed, reading her tabloid mag. Henry enters. She pats the bed for him to sit down. He does. She runs a hand through his hair roughly, pushing his head to the side.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

SUSAN

I know. I should've bailed out after the pizza cutter.

HENRY

That woman today. In the grocery store? You didn't do anything to help her.

SUSAN

That was none of our business.

HENRY

Whenever someone hurts someone else, it's our business.

SUSAN

I know it seems that way, sweetie, but there was nothing I could do.

HENRY

Yes, there was. You elected not to.

SUSAN

Look, I've had...we've had some tough breaks along the way. It makes me want to focus all my energy on you two.

HENRY

I know, mom. But if everyone did that, there'd be no one to look out for people who can't look out for themselves.

SUSAN

What could I have done?

HENRY

Told someone in the store. Asked her if she was okay. Confronted him.

SUSAN

I didn't want things to get violent.

HENRY

Violence isn't the worst thing in the world.

SUSAN

No? What is then?

HENRY

Apathy.

INT. PETER AND HENRY'S BEDROOM - MORNING

Susan enters with an amazon.com PACKAGE. The boys are asleep.

SUSAN

Good morning, little angels. Up and at 'em. It's time for a power walk.

HENRY

(groaning)
No power walk.

SUSAN

Yes, power walk. And this is for you.
(tossing package on bed)
Books again. Why not order something fun, like Xbox games? You are *such* a geek.

EXT. CARPENTER HOUSE - MORNING

Henry, tired, ties his shoes on the porch. Next door, Neil is TEARING UP the LAWN. Henry looks up and Christina is standing right over him. She hands him a NEW CHEAP BRONZE MEDAL. It has PETER'S NAME on it instead of Henry's.

CHRISTINA

For your brother. I got it at that store down at the mall that does stuff with your name on it. Most of it's cheesy. Like, do you *really* need a clock with your Yorkie on it?

HENRY

I...um...he...yeah...

CHRISTINA

I hope he likes it okay.

HENRY

He...I'm...sure...uh...

Susan and Peter come out, rescue Henry.

PETER

Christina!

Susan and Christina bumps fists, then "blow it up."

SUSAN

(calling over to Neil)
'Morning!

Neil pauses from his hacking and waves.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

SUSAN

Are we gonna see you at open house night?

Neil tosses his shovel, walks over. POLICE ACADEMY T-shirt.

NEIL

No. I have to confess I get impatient at events like that.

CHRISTINA

I have fun.

NEIL

Didn't you say Janie's mom'll take you?

CHRISTINA

(under her breath)

Jenna.

(then, normal voice:)

They're out of town that week.

SUSAN

I'm happy to take her.

NEIL

Wonderful. And I'll pick her up.

(to Christina)

We're all set then, aren't we?

He heads back to his side of the lawn.

CHRISTINA

Mrs. Carpenter?

SUSAN

Please, sweetie, call me Susan. I've known you since you were in short pants.

CHRISTINA

Short pants?

SUSAN

Since you were little.

Christina squirms, a bit self-conscious...

CHRISTINA

Henry and Peter... they're lucky to have you. For a mom, I mean.

Susan clocks this shift with concern.

SUSAN

Thank you, honey.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED: (2)

She leans over and kisses her on the forehead.

SUSAN
And your dad's lucky to have you.

EXT. STREET - MORNING

Susan and the boys walking, Peter holding Charlie's leash in one hand, his new medal in the other. He ADMIRES IT, beaming.

SUSAN
My future daughter-in-law, huh?

HENRY
Oh Christ. You too.

SUSAN
She *is* adorable.

HENRY
Too bad I lose all capacity for speech in her presence.

SUSAN
God knows where she came from. Her father - *uuugh*.

PETER
Who, *Neil*?

SUSAN
(correcting Peter)
Mr. Sickleman. Parents like that should be shot.

Henry gives her a look.

EXT. HILLY STREET - MORNING

Exhausted, Susan holds CHARLIE'S LEASH, letting him PULL HER up the steep hill. Peter is behind Susan, pushing her. Henry walks beside this tableau, unamused.

EXT. CARPENTER HOUSE - MORNING

The exhausted trio returns home. Henry takes note of a SEDAN pulling up in front of Neil's home.

SUSAN
I need a vacation *now*. A week in Fiji.

PETER
I'll go!

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

SUSAN

Sure you would. You have a fractions test Monday.

Henry rushes inside.

INT. STAIRS - MORNING

Henry running up the stairs.

INT. PETER AND HENRY'S BEDROOM - MORNING

Henry grabs his NOTEBOOK, jumps on the bed, looks out the window. A MAN rings Neil's doorbell and Neil answers.

Surprisingly, he and Neil greet each other warmly. The man steps into the house, and they sit, joking. Then he tells Neil something. Neil looks agitated. The man comforts Neil, his gestures apologetic. Just a procedure.

Neil goes upstairs and Henry sees him appear a moment later through Christina's window. Neil crouches in front of his daughter, gripping her, and tells her something sternly. He pulls a jacket over her shirt to hide her bruises.

They go back downstairs together. Christina greets the man, giving him a reluctant hug. Henry looks PUZZLED. The man crouches and asks her a few questions, which she answers with Neil standing over the man's shoulder, staring her down.

Henry grabs the CHILD ABUSE PAMPHLET from the notebook, flips through it, searching. Nothing. He grabs his LAPTOP, goes to the social services WEBSITE. Clicking furiously through the pages. His finger scans the screen, then his face CHANGES.

His finger points to a name buried among others: GEORGE SICKLEMAN: SOCIAL SERVICES DIRECTOR. Henry's crestfallen.

Meanwhile next door, George, satisfied, shakes his BROTHER'S HAND. Now we note the family resemblance. George exits.

Henry flips the page of his NOTEBOOK. Then he writes across the fresh page: PLAN 11.

INT. LIVING ROOM - DAY

Peter takes a sip of water, lies on his back, opens his mouth. CHARLIE drinks from his mouth as if it's a water bowl. Susan giggles with disgust. Henry comes down with a BACKPACK.

SUSAN

(to Peter)

You are a vile little creature.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

HENRY

It's not funny, mother. A dog's mouth is unclean.

SUSAN

Not as dirty as the human mouth.

For once, she is right. This is clearly a victory for her. She does Rocky arms.

SUSAN

Where are you going?

HENRY

Errands.

INT. BUS - DAY

Henry removes the amazon package from his backpack and opens it. The books include FORENSIC INVESTIGATION, THE MILITANT'S GUIDE TO SNIPING, MODERN WEAPONRY. His ubiquitous RED NOTEBOOK is also in the mix. He pulls a SOLDIER OF FORTUNE magazine from his backpack and checks an address on an ad.

EXT. BUS - DAY

The bus pulls over in a shady part of town. Henry hops out.

EXT. STREET - DAY

Henry walks past druggies and hookers. Finally sees the sign he's looking for: BIG ED'S HUNTING STORE. The front door is barred and locked. Henry waits by it until a MAN rings a bell and is BUZZED in. Henry sneaks in before the door can close.

INT. BIG ED'S GUN STORE - DAY

Henry backs behind an ammunition rack. He spots the SECURITY CAMERA, marks it on a DIAGRAM he draws in his RED NOTEBOOK, marking its field of vision. Then he sits on the floor, hidden behind the rack, and starts SKETCHING in the notebook.

TIME LAPSE:

The SKETCH now complete. A rough drawing of Christina.

A BUZZ draws Henry's focus. A MAN enters the store and peruses the glass counters nervously. Henry leans over to watch. Maybe this is what he's been waiting for.

BIG ED approaches the man, picks his teeth with a toothpick.

BIG ED

Somethin' you lookin' for?

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

MAN
Just admiring that Uzi. She's a honey.

BIG ED
Fully auto.

MAN
Rounds per minute?

BIG ED
Nine hundo.

HENRY
(mumbling)
A thousand, you idiot.

MAN
What's she run?

BIG ED
Eight.

MAN
Eight hundred dollars?

BIG ED
No, eight hundred drachma.

MAN
Need a license, I'd imagine.

BIG ED
Federal.

The man lays a stack of hundreds on the counter.

MAN
I left it at home.

BIG ED
I'm sorry, sir, but I don't run that kind
of business.

MAN
I have a referral from Vinnie Bass.

Big Ed's expression changes. Clearly, it's a different story
now. He spreads the bills, counts.

BIG ED
Gonna cost ya eleven.

The man peels a few more bills off a wad of cash.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED: (2)

BIG ED
Come around back in ten.

The man nods, heads for the door. BIG ED dusts the counter.

BIG ED
Regards to Vinnie.

Henry tiptoes to the door, dodging the camera. He's almost there when his VISION BLURS. He LOSES HIS BALANCE, knocks over a CARTON OF BULLETS. Big Ed flies out with a shotgun.

BIG ED
How the hell'd you get in here?

HENRY
(scared)
I got buzzed in with the other guy.

Big Ed approaches, wielding the gun. Eyes the notebook.

BIG ED
What's this shit?

He snatches it from Henry. For the first time, we see PANIC in Henry's eyes. With one hand, Big Ed flaps it open. It happens to fall to the sketch of Christina. He sneers at it, tosses the notebook to the floor. Henry falls to his knees, gathers it up like the precious thing it is.

The shotgun barrel stays half raised.

BIG ED
How long you been in here?

Henry gathers himself. Swallows. Then:

HENRY
Gee, I don't know, mister. I came by to see if you had any Umbrella Guns.

BIG ED
Umbrella Guns?

HENRY
That's what the Penguin uses.

BIG ED
The Penguin? Who the hell's the Penguin?

HENRY
Only the best comic-book supervillain
ever.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED: (3)

Big Ed lowers his gun.

BIG ED
You'd better hightail it outta here, kid.

Henry heads for the door.

BIG ED
He one a' them Spiderman villains?

The door swings shut behind Henry. He mutters-

HENRY
Batman, asshole.

INT. BATHROOM - EVENING

Susan checks the tub water for Peter, nods. He climbs into the bubble bath. Halts.

PETER
What if there are sharks?

SUSAN
Too shallow.

As Peter eases further in:

PETER
How 'bout piranhas?

SUSAN
Indigenous to Africa.

PETER
Henry says South America.

SUSAN
Fine. South America, then. But don't worry, if anything indigenous to our region attacks you, I'll be in there in a flash.

She kisses him on the forehead, heading out.

SUSAN
Name the capitals.

INT. PETER AND HENRY'S BEDROOM - EVENING

Susan walks in whistling and sits at the desk.

PETER (O.C.)
Oklahoma City - Oklahoma!

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

SUSAN

Easy!

Peter continues calling out state capitals so she knows he's okay in the tub. She logs in on the computer, downloading bank statements into Quicken.

PETER (O.C.)

Augusta - Maine! Bismarck - North Carolina!

SUSAN

Isn't it one of the other Norths?

An IM POPS UP from SHEILA80SROCK@AOL.COM. A LINK titled: GOOD LOVIN'. Sheila's note reads, "A LITTLE PICK-ME-UP TO REMIND YOU WHAT A REAL DATE SHOULD BE LIKE." Susan shrugs, clicks.

The COMPUTER ERUPTS with the MOANING, GASPING SOUNDS OF PORN. Susan regards the screen with disgust, then tries desperately to click the program to stop.

PETER (O.C.)

Mom?

Susan climbing on the desk, trying to unplug the computer...

SUSAN

Yes, love?

PETER (O.C.)

What are you doing?

Susan RIPS the CORDS out of the monitor. The MOANING STOPS. She falls off the desk, knocking the FISH TANK. She manages to grab the tank, balancing it and the monitor in her arms.

Fresh from his outing, Henry comes in with his backpack still on. He regards his mother with dismay.

HENRY

Jesus, mom. Just say no.

SUSAN

Shaddup and gimme a hand.

INT. LIVING ROOM - NIGHT

Susan on the couch, playing an Xbox first-person shooter game, firing at the screen with a GUN CONTROLLER. In PJs, Henry enters, sees unopened mail on the coffee table.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

HENRY

Our financial statement came from
Merrill?

SUSAN

Yeah, forgot to give it to you.

HENRY

You know, you should really read it, know
what it says.

SUSAN

But there are all those numbers.

HENRY

That's sort of the point.

(beat)

You know, mother, it doesn't actually
help when you lean into it like that.

SUSAN

Sure it does.

(leaning more and firing)

Look at that!

(leaning more and firing)

Look at that!

She falls off the couch. Henry sighs.

HENRY

We're going to bed. Come tuck us in.

SUSAN

One more game.

HENRY

Mother.

SUSAN

Fine.

INT. PETER AND HENRY'S BEDROOM - NIGHT

Susan tucks the sheets tight around the boys' respective
bodies. Charlie follows her from bed to bed.

SUSAN

(tucking in Henry)

Enchilada number one.

(tucking in Peter)

Enchilada number two.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

PETER

How come he gets to be enchilada number one?

SUSAN

Because he's older.

HENRY

It's fine. You can be enchilada number one.

PETER

I'm just sayin'...

SUSAN

All right. You're enchilada number one.

PETER

Then what's Henry?

SUSAN

I don't know. A taco.

PETER

He can't be a taco. Taco's aren't-

HENRY

Would you two stop it! For God's sake, I don't care if I'm a taco or enchilada number eighty, let's just go to bed.

Susan and Peter exchange "well excuse me" looks.

SUSAN

Goodnight, sweet boys.

She hums, then begins singing "BABY LOVE."

HENRY

Mother, please.

SUSAN

Well, I don't *have* to sing it.

She waits. Arms crossed. Foot tapping.

HENRY

All right, *fine*.

SUSAN

That's okay. I can take the show on the road. I have a standing offer from a twenty-seat theater in Sheboygan-

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED: (2)

HENRY

I said it was okay if you sing.

Reluctantly, she sits back down and opens her mouth as if she's about to sing. Then...

SUSAN

You *sure* you're okay with this?

HENRY

Mother!

SUSAN

Okay, okay.

She sings "BABY LOVE." Peter grins. Henry likes it more than he shows, his foot keeping beat beneath the covers.

SUSAN

Goodnight, sweet princes. And flights of angels sing thee to thy rest.

HENRY

(shocked)
Hamlet?

SUSAN

Hamilton High Drama Club, sophomore year.
Oh yeah, this girl's still got a few tricks up her sleeve.

She gives them their goodnight kiss and fist bump. On her way out, she points at the night light.

SUSAN

On or off?

HENRY

Off.

PETER

On.

This time, she keeps it off. She pauses at the door.

SUSAN

Open or closed?

HENRY

Closed.

PETER

Open.

This time, she leaves it open a crack.

SUSAN

Love you.

The boys settle into bed. She sticks her head back in.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED: (3)

SUSAN

That's not a one-way street, ya know.

PETER

Love you, too.

HENRY

Love you, mom.

She exits.

INT. SUSAN'S BEDROOM - NIGHT

Susan jerks awake to the sound of Peter SCREAMING and CRYING.

PETER (O.C.)

Mom! Mom! *Mommy!*

She throws back the sheets and sprints from her room.

SUSAN

I'm coming, honey! I'm coming!

INT. PETER AND HENRY'S BEDROOM - NIGHT

Susan enters to find Henry SEIZING. He FALLS out of bed, BANGS HIS HEAD on the night stand. His PJ pants are wet. Peter backs away, sobbing and pointing.

Susan runs over to Henry, falling on her knees.

SUSAN

Henry! Henry, baby?!

She puts the side of her hand in HENRY'S MOUTH to prevent him from biting his tongue.

SUSAN

Call 911! Call 911!

Peter runs from the room.

EXT. CARPENTER HOUSE - NIGHT

An ambulance with flashing lights in the driveway.

INT. PETER AND HENRY'S BEDROOM - NIGHT

Two EMTs run in with a stretcher. Henry lies on his side, drooling, not cognizant. Susan rocks over his body. Peter sits terrified in the corner, Charlie curled around his feet.

SUSAN

Oh Jesus. Oh Jesus. Oh Jesus.

EMT #1

Step aside, ma'am. Please step aside.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

He has to PUSH HER out of the way. He crouches over Henry.

EMT #1
I've got a pulse.

EMT #2
Looks post ictal.

EXT. CARPENTER HOUSE - NIGHT

Neighbors are out watching the EMTs load Henry into the ambulance. Christina stares out from her window. Shell-shocked, Susan climbs into the back with Henry.

EMT #2
Mrs. Carpenter, your son. Your other son.

Peter stands alone, clutching his LUCKY MEDAL. EMT #2 puts him in the back. Susan's too upset to comfort him right now.

The doors slam and the ambulance pulls out.

INT. HOSPITAL - NIGHT

EMTs wheel Henry in, Susan jogging to keep up. Peter lags behind. She turns and picks up Peter, hugs him as she runs.

INT. ER ROOM - NIGHT

NURSES surround Henry on a PADDED BED. He's conscious, but out of it. Hooked up to IVs, pulse-ox, a cardiac monitor.

The ER DOCTOR (female, 40s) enters, grabs the PATIENT FILE.

ER DOC
Electrolytes - normal. Blood sugar -
normal. Tox screen - negative.
(to Henry)
Let's see what's going on with you, pal.

Susan sits holding Peter in her lap. Peter sucks his thumb.

ER DOC
Did you witness the seizure?

Susan nods.

ER DOC
What did it look like?

The ER doctor checks Henry's pupils with a pen light.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

SUSAN

I don't know. He was shaking all over.
His whole body was jerking.

The ER DOC slides her finger into Henry's hand.

ER DOC

Hey, pal. Can you squeeze my finger?

Henry squeezes weakly.

ER DOC

Has he ever done this before?

SUSAN

No. God no.

ER DOC

Did he urinate during the seizure?

SUSAN

Y-yes.

ER DOC

Has he been having headaches?

SUSAN

Well...not anything major-

Henry NODS.

ER DOC

You have? For how long?

HENRY

(weak)

Three weeks. Maybe four.

SUSAN

You told me it was nothing. Why didn't
you-

ER DOC

Okay, mom, we're gonna need a CT.

They move Henry to a gurney and start wheeling him off. Susan follows, trying not to cry.

INT. CAT SCAN ROOM - NIGHT

Henry on the CT machine after. Susan leans over him.

SUSAN

It's okay, baby. It's okay.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

ER Doc puts the CT on the X-RAY BOX. She DARKENS. To NURSE:

ER DOC
You'd better page Dr. Daniels.

INT. CAT SCAN ROOM - NIGHT

DR. DAVID DANIELS (36, neurologist) bursts through the doors. Susan and Peter START at the noise. David crosses to the CT.

DAVID
All right, people. We gotta take him upstairs.

He goes to Henry and aligns the gurney.

SUSAN
Wait. Where are you taking him?

DAVID
Surgery.
(to nurses)
On my count. One. Two. *Three.*

They slide Henry onto the gurney. David turns to Susan.

DAVID
Mrs. Carpenter, my name is David Daniels. I'm a neurosurgeon. Your son has a definite mass and it looks swollen. It's abutting some critical structures, which puts him in a very precarious position right now. We're gonna have to open him up and take a look inside, see if it's extended. It's imperative that we move on this as quickly as possible.

SUSAN
What? I...Mass...Tumor - that means *tumor.*

DAVID
I know this is extremely hard for you right now, but we're gonna need your consent to proceed.

Henry begins to SEIZE again. Peter bursts into tears and Susan TURNS HIS HEAD AWAY, PULLS HIM TIGHT TO HER SIDE.

DAVID
Push three hundred of Dilantin, stat. Shelly, get a tongue blade in there.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

SUSAN
(crying)
Henry? Henry, baby?

David grabs a form from the file and hands it to Susan.

DAVID
Mrs. Carpenter, we have to get him to surgery. Please sign off on this.

SUSAN
I don't...I can't...I have to ask him...

DAVID
(firm/impatient)
We need parental consent.

With a shaking hand, Susan signs it. The nurses start to wheel Henry away, but she leans over him, getting in the way.

SUSAN
Baby? Please be all right.

NURSE
Mrs. Carpenter.

DAVID
We gotta move. I need him upstairs.

NURSE #2 restrains Susan. David wheels Henry out the doors.

INT. HOSPITAL WAITING ROOM - LATE NIGHT

QUICK FLASHES:

-Peter lying passed out, his head in Susan's lap. She leans forward, fingernails DIGGING into her scalp.

-Susan sobbing, rocking in the chair, her face buried in her hands. Peter tries to comfort her.

-Both of them sitting, despondent, weary.

INT. HENRY'S HOSPITAL ROOM - MORNING

Peter sleeps slumped uncomfortably in a chair. Early morning light filters through the blinds. Susan sits bedside, resting her head at Henry's side. His head is BANDAGED.

Henry's eyes OPEN.

HENRY
(raspy)
Mom?

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

She lifts her head.

SUSAN

I'm here.

INT. HOSPITAL HALLWAY - MORNING

David confers with Susan quietly. She BREAKS DOWN.

INT. HENRY'S HOSPITAL ROOM - DAY

David enters. Peter is slouched in the chair holding Henry's hand. Peter's face is red from sobbing.

DAVID

Hey there, kiddo. Glad to have you back.

(to Peter)

Whaddaya say you let me talk to your brother alone, Peter? I'll just take a few minutes.

Peter looks to Henry for approval. Henry nods and Peter slides off the seat and trudges out. David takes a deep breath, gathering himself, and sits down.

DAVID

Henry, you have...something in your head right now. Something we call a "tumor." It's not a good thing, so we had to see if we could remove it without hurting any part of your brain. It's tricky stuff, you see, but we managed to get some of it.

A long pause. Is Henry cognizant? Then-

HENRY

Don't dick me, doctor.

DAVID

...'Scuse me?

HENRY

This kind of rapid onset, you guys cutting right away, the expression on your face - the way I see it, it's gotta be an aggressive cancerous mass. I can't believe I didn't think of it earlier - what with the headaches and blurred vision. I thought it was, I don't know, stress, caffeine withdrawal or something. Large mass?

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

 DAVID
I...yeah.

 HENRY
Extended?

 DAVID
Uh...yes.

 HENRY
Has it impinged on critical structures?

 DAVID
Well, we tried to resect it, but
unfortunately...

 HENRY
I see. My CT?

He points at his file on the door. David fetches it dumbly. Henry removes the CT, holds it to the light, whistles. He lowers it, the SEVERITY of the situation striking him for the first time. His lips start to QUIVER, but he catches himself.

 HENRY
Radiate?

David shakes his head slowly.

 HENRY
I think I'd like to be alone for a few
minutes.

 DAVID
Your mom really wants to-

 HENRY
I'd like to be alone.

INT. HENRY'S HOSPITAL ROOM - LATER

Henry sits alone in bed. He has not moved. LEAH (black, nurse, 40s) enters with a dinner tray.

 LEAH
You gonna eat somethin', Mr. Too-Good-For-
Hospital-Food?

 HENRY
What do you got?

 LEAH
Meatloaf.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

HENRY

In keeping with the hospital's healthy diet policy, no doubt.

LEAH

Listen, shorty, I don't cook it, I just serve it. But I did also happen upon...

She pulls a bag of McDonalds from beneath the food cart.

LEAH

...a extra Big Mac that was kickin' around the kitchen.

HENRY

I haven't eaten a Big Mac in years.

LEAH

I'm sure. Well, I'll just leave it here in case you decide to regress or something.

She starts to leave.

HENRY

Hey Leah? Do you have access to a medical library here?

LEAH

I'm not sure if-

HENRY

Good. I need a couple of standard neuro and surgical textbooks, and if you could grab my chart and the rest of the films that would be great.

LEAH

You one a' them prodigies or something?

HENRY

No. I just watch a lot of *Grey's Anatomy*.

LEAH

Well, Doogie, I'll see what I can do. Maybe if I come back and that Big Mac's gone...

HENRY

(first hint of a smile)
All right. I'll see what *I* can do.

INT. HENRY'S HOSPITAL ROOM - NIGHT

QUICK FLASHES:

-Leah enters with a stack of BOOKS. Henry holds up the empty McDonald's bag. They trade. He begins to peruse the books.

-Henry reading with growing concern. Books litter his bed.

-Early morning. Henry, still reading. He's exhausted, been up all night. His face is blanched, stunned, scared. He slowly reaches over, picks up the phone, dials. His voice NUMB:

HENRY

Yeah, hi, Don. I just wanted to let you know that I'm gonna be overhauling the portfolio in the next couple of days, probably some bonds, conservative mutuals. I need more...long-term investments. What? No, everything's okay. I just need funds that don't require as much management. Okay. Oh, and Don?

(beat)

Thanks for everything.

INT. HOSPITAL HALLWAY - DAY

David catches Susan and Peter as they head into Henry's room.

DAVID

Mrs. Carpenter.

SUSAN

Please. Susan.

DAVID

Susan. Your son is something else.

SUSAN

You have no idea.

DAVID

I want to apologize for my curtness about the parental consent. It's just...I was concerned for Henry, and I wanted to get moving on this thing as soon as possible.

SUSAN

Didn't help much, did it?

DAVID

(guttled)

I'm afraid not.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

SUSAN

That boy is irreplaceable, doctor.

David gives a glance to Peter. Then, gently-

DAVID

They all are.

INT. HENRY'S HOSPITAL ROOM - DAY

Peter and Susan have been visiting Henry for a while.

HENRY

Hey, they have good ice cream here in the cafeteria, Peter. Wanna go get some?

Peter shakes his head.

HENRY

Would you mind grabbing *me* some?

SUSAN

Here, sweetie.

She hands him money. Peter reluctantly exits.

SUSAN

I was just chatting with this poor woman out there who has pancreatic cancer.

HENRY

Pancreatic cancer's never good.

SUSAN

Right. It still seemed to make her feel better to talk...

She looks at him expectantly.

HENRY

I need you to bring in the financial files.

SUSAN

Don't you worry about that right n-

HENRY

They're in the second file drawer in my cabinet. Should be a couple of papers in the printer tray too-

SUSAN

We can do this next week.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

HENRY
(more agitated)
I'll also need to get ahold of the
retirement statements-

SUSAN
Not now.

HENRY
It's important that-

SUSAN
We can do this next week!

HENRY
I MAY NOT BE HERE NEXT WEEK!

Through the shocked pause, Susan fights to hold back tears.

HENRY
Mom, I'm sorry. I didn't-

SUSAN
I'm *not* gonna listen to that kind of
talk.

She walks out, almost bumping into Peter. Peter crosses the
room and lays two ICE CREAM CUPS on Henry's night stand.

PETER
I don't want any.

HENRY
Me neither.
(beat)
There's some things I need to tell you.
They're very important.

PETER
Okay.

HENRY
I need you to bring me all the financial
files. You know where they are?

Peter nods.

HENRY
And my red notebook. It's *essential* that
I get my red notebook.

PETER
Okay.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED: (2)

The boys look at each other. Peter at Henry's wrapped head.

PETER

I wanna see your scar.

HENRY

I don't think-

PETER

Lemme see your scar.

HENRY

Peter. I really-

PETER

I wanna see it! Let me see it!

Beat. Henry slowly unwinds the gauze. Peter watches with horror, fear, and love. The scar stays O.C., but Peter's expression changes. Henry rewraps his scar. Peter fidgets through the silence. Henry gathers himself.

HENRY

I'm gonna die, you know.

PETER

I know.

HENRY

Take care of mom, okay?

Peter nods.

HENRY

The best thing...the best thing was having a brother like you.

They regard each other, ten years of friendship and brotherhood conveyed in a single look. TEARS ROLL down Peter's cheeks, though he does not sob.

HENRY

When I...you have to promise to do something for me. There's a lot of stuff I've tried to protect you from. And mom. But you're capable of a lot more than maybe I gave you guys credit for.

Peter nods because he can't speak.

HENRY

You need to come and get the notebook, and read it with mom, okay. *Promise?*

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED: (3)

Another nod. Peter starts to come apart with grief.

HENRY

Come here.

Peter crawls into bed. He rests his head on Henry's chest. Henry rocks him as he cries.

HENRY

It's okay. It's all gonna be okay.

INT. HENRY'S HOSPITAL ROOM - LATER

Henry in bed, alone, notebook in lap. He stares at nothing.

INT. CLASSROOM - DAY

Mrs. Evans hands the first kid in the front row a card.

MRS. EVANS

Class, Henry's going to be out in the hospital for a few days. He's really...sick. I thought it would be nice if we all sent him a card.

The card gets passed back to Christina. She signs it: HENRY, FEEL BETTER. COME BACK SOON. WE MISS YOU. She pauses, the pen tapping against her lips.

TOMMY

Is he gonna be all right?

MRS. EVANS

Well...I...

ANOTHER KID

But he *has* to, doesn't he? I mean, it's Henry. He's gotta be okay.

Christina CROSSES OUT the "WE" and replaces it with "I."

MRS. EVANS

I'm afraid we don't know just yet.

INT. HENRY'S HOSPITAL ROOM - NIGHT

Henry lies propped up with FINANCIAL FILES on his lap. Susan sits on the edge of the bed, a far-off look in her eyes.

HENRY

..and if Apple gets above seven hundred, dump it... Are you listening to me?

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

SUSAN

What? No.

HENRY

And you need to buy a new car already.

SUSAN

(dazed)

There's nothing wrong with the old car.

HENRY

I put you in some long-term bonds, triple tax free-

SUSAN

I don't want to talk about this-

HENRY

We have to, mother. I've set you guys up moving forward, but you'll have to read the statements and check in with Don once in a while. Mom. *Mom*. This is really important.

SUSAN

It's not important! It's not important at all!

HENRY

(holding up graph)

Keep an eye on the tech stocks - you need to watch them closer than the others-

SUSAN

I don't want to talk about this. I don't give a shit about this!

She grabs the files and THROWS THEM all over the room. She SOBS into her hands as the stray papers settle. After a moment, Henry reaches out and gently rubs her back.

SUSAN

I'm scared. I'm so scared. I can't do this without you.

HENRY

Of course you can.

SUSAN

You were like a gift to me, like a blessing. I don't know how to do it without you, any of it, how to be a mother...

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED: (2)

HENRY

I never taught you that. You always knew.
You *always* knew how to be a mother.

SUSAN

When you were a baby - you couldn't have been more than three - I started to smoke again. It was right after your father left. I was standing in the kitchen looking out the window, smoking, and you toddled in the room, took the pack of cigarettes from my purse, and put one in your mouth. That was the exact second I quit.

HENRY

I know.
(beat)
That's why I did it.

Susan's LAUGH catches her off guard. Tearfully, she reaches for Henry. They EMBRACE.

SUSAN

You are the best part of me. The best part of me.

INT. HOSPITAL HALLWAY - CONTINUOUS

Peter sits with his knees up to his chin, listening to the conversation in Henry's room.

INT. HENRY'S HOSPITAL ROOM - LATER THAT NIGHT

Sheila enters in a FUZZY YELLOW SWEATER and HOOP EARRINGS. Henry SCRIBBLES IN HIS RED NOTEBOOK. Doesn't look up.

SHEILA

Hey, *Hank*.

HENRY

Hey, Fashion Roadkill.

She crosses and sits on the edge of his bed, mock punches his shoulder. She is UPSET, but trying to HIDE IT.

SHEILA

Whatcha doin'?

HENRY

Just working on some notes.

SHEILA

Think you're pretty brilliant, don't ya?

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

HENRY
I prefer "precocious."

SHEILA
(crack in her voice)
Shit, Hank, why'd you have to go and do
this?

HENRY
Henry.

She TURNS AWAY from him. After a few moments, it's clear she's CRYING. She wipes her eyes before turning back.

SHEILA
Look...Even though we always...

HENRY
I know, Sheila. It's called reaction
formation.

SHEILA
What?

HENRY
It seems we have an antithetical
relationship, but we're just behaving
toward each other the opposite of how we
really feel. I think you're pretty, thus
I insult you. Childish, yes. But, then
again, I'm a child.

She leans and KISSES HIM on the lips. Gently. He's STUNNED.

SHEILA
You take care, Hank.

INT. HOSPITAL WAITING ROOM - LATE NIGHT

Susan is curled uncomfortably on two waiting room chairs,
trying to get some sleep.

INT. HENRY'S HOSPITAL ROOM - LATE NIGHT

Henry awakens in a sweat. He looks at the WINDOW on the far
side of the room, the thin shaft of moonlight.

He gets out of bed, trailing IVs, starts pushing his bed
toward the window. It SCREECHES. Leah and NURSE run in.

LEAH
Henry. What are you doing, Henry?

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

HENRY

Got to...move the bed.

LEAH

You're gonna hurt yourself.

HENRY

I want to see the sky!

NURSE

(restraining him)

Stop that! You can't do that!

LEAH

Stop straining, Henry. *Henry.*

HENRY

(struggling against the bed)

Jesus Christ, I want to see the sky.

What's so hard to understand about that?

I want to see the goddamn sky!

OTHER NURSE

Stop kicking!

HENRY

(starting to cry)

Where's my mom? I want my mom! *Mommy!*

Susan comes rushing in.

SUSAN

What? What, baby?

(to other nurse)

Get off him! You take your hands off him
right now!

Susan gathers Henry up in her arms. Leah gives the other nurse a NOD and they depart, leaving mother and son alone.

HENRY

(crying as she rocks him)

I want my mom, I want my mom, I want my
mom.

SUSAN

I'm here. I'm here. I'm here. Ssshhh.

Susan sings/hums to him, a SOFT RENDITION of "BABY LOVE."

INT. HENRY'S HOSPITAL ROOM - EARLY MORNING

SLOW PAN FROM HENRY'S EMPTY BED ALL THE WAY ACROSS THE ROOM. Follow his IV CORDS to where he lies CURLED beneath the window, fetal position, in the small shaft of morning light.

INT. HOSPITAL WAITING ROOM - DAY

Susan and Peter sleep together. David appears. Grim.

DAVID

You'd better come in.

INT. HENRY'S HOSPITAL ROOM - DAY

Henry's unconscious. The monitor BEEPS. Susan and Peter sit, their hands on Henry, watching the rise and fall of his chest. The EKG GOES TO FLATLINE. SUSAN LOWERS HER HEAD.

DISSOLVE TO:

EXT. RAINY STREET - DAY

HENRY (V.O.)

People are decent mostly. I say "mostly" because we all know there's some real pricks out there.

EXT. NEIL'S LAWN - DAY

Neil's torn-up lawn getting drenched. He looks up at the sky with frustration.

EXT. CARPENTER HOUSE - DAY

Christina waits in the rain to walk Peter to the bus stop. He comes out with lunchbox, boots, slicker. She TAKES HIS HAND.

EXT. BUS STOP - DAY

They exit the bus together. Still raining.

HENRY (V.O.)

People are decent because they never forget how to reach out.

Gus helps a group of kids cross the street. He lays a hand on Peter's shoulder.

EXT. PLAYGROUND - DAY

Peter trudges in from lunch, eyes on the ground, weak with grief. The rain has ceased, but the sky is gray. He goes slack, DROPS HIS BOOKS in a PUDDLE. He starts crying and HIS

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

LEGS GO OUT FROM UNDER HIM. He sits in the puddle, WEEPING. Over his shoulder, Morris, the bully, approaches.

Morris extends his hand to Peter. Morris helps him to his feet. Starts gathering Peter's things for him.

HENRY (V.O.)

Now and then, they'll even surprise you.

EXT. STREET - DAY

Christina holds Peter's hand, walking him home. She PAUSES at the end of her walkway. Neil OPENS the front door, waiting for her. Christina grips Peter's hand a BEAT TOO LONG. Reluctantly, she lets go and trudges up the walkway.

She enters and looks back at Peter, helpless.

The closing door wipes her from view.

INT. PETER'S BEDROOM - NIGHT

Susan kisses Peter.

SUSAN

Goodnight, sweet...
(almost loses it)
...boy.

He points at the night light and she turns it on. She leaves the door open, Charlie following her out. Peter glances over at HENRY'S EMPTY BED. Then he climbs out of his own bed, following his mom and the dog out.

PAN TO the window and Neil's house across. The DOOR to Christina's room OPENS. NEIL'S SHADOW FILLS HER DOORWAY, backlit from the light of the hall. With his foot, he reaches over and CLICKS OFF her night light. Then he enters the room, shutting the door behind him, drowning out all light.

HENRY (V.O.)

But then again, sometimes, they won't.

DISSOLVE TO:

EXT. CARPENTER HOUSE - DAY

A beautiful, sunny day.

INT. PETER'S BEDROOM - DAY

THE RED NOTEBOOK protrudes from the box of Henry's things sitting on his old desk.

INT. LIVING ROOM - DAY

An UNOPENED financial statement from Merrill Lynch atop a mound of bills on the coffee table. All unopened.

Susan paces in a BATHROBE and PJ BOTTOMS, her hair a mess.

SUSAN

This beautiful, beautiful day, just one week after my boy died, one goddamn week.

Her lack of control is scaring Peter. He's never seen her this way. Grief-crazed.

PETER

Mom.

SUSAN

Like God's *sneering* at me.

PETER

Mommy.

SUSAN

Just *laughing*. Saying, "Life goes on. You didn't expect everything to stop for *this*, did you? No, it's still beautiful out. Who cares about you? Who cares about your *dead kid*?"

PETER

Mommy!

Susan tries to snap back into herself.

SUSAN

I'm sorry, honey. It's just sometimes, when people lose someone close-

PETER

Don't you talk to me that way.

SUSAN

How?

PETER

Like a *child*.

SUSAN

I don't...I don't know how to...
(crying)
What would Henry do?

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

PETER

Don't do what Henry would do. Do what you would do. What would you do?

Susan freezes. Deer in headlights.

PETER

What did you do before?

A tear tracks down her cheek. She looks utterly defeated.

SUSAN

I don't know.

INT. PETER'S BEDROOM - NIGHT

Peter lies in bed in the dark. Down the hall, Susan's door opens, closes. He gets up, turns on his night light himself.

INT. GARAGE - DAY

Susan, disheveled, in her bathrobe, grabs a BAG of dog food from the cupboard. A sight BRINGS HER UP SHORT. Henry's SNEAKERS on the rack. She drops the bag. Picks up the shoe. Sits on the concrete floor in the darkness, holding Henry's shoe in her lap.

INT. SUSAN'S BEDROOM/HALL - NIGHT

Susan sits in bed. Bathrobe. TV flickering across her face. She finishes her water, gets up with the empty glass. Trudges down the hall.

She pauses at the top of the stairs. Peter's door open.

Dressed in his clothes, he lies curled on Henry's bed. Sleeping. The night light is on. And the desk light. A Cup O'Noodles on his night stand.

She stands frozen, looking in at him, a boy trying to take care of himself.

INT. PETER'S BEDROOM - NIGHT

Susan goes in, covers him with a blanket. Closes her eyes and KISSES his head.

EXT. CARPENTER HOUSE - DAY

The bus pulls away. Peter plods up the walk. Puts his key in the lock, but the front door opens on its own.

Susan, still in her bathrobe. But waiting for him.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

SUSAN

I know something we can do. It's just a start, but still.

His eyes well with relief.

PETER

What?

SUSAN

Let's eat all desserts. Nothing else, all week. Breakfast, lunch, dinner - fuck it.

Peter - RELIEF. And happiness.

PETER

Don't swear in front of me.

SUSAN

Oh yeah.

INT. KITCHEN - DAY

The kitchen, littered with trays of brownies and cookies. Baking, Susan pulls a cigarette from a drawer, puts it in her mouth. Peter comes in with the mail. Adds it to the mound on the table. He takes the cigarette out of her mouth, throws it in the garbage can on his way upstairs. She continues baking.

INT. PETER'S BEDROOM - DAY

Peter tosses his backpack on the desk. The RED NOTEBOOK catches his eye. He pulls it from Henry's box of things.

He opens it and begins reading. HOLD ON his astonished face.

INT. FOYER - DAY

Peter comes downstairs IN A DAZE, holding the notebook. He pauses at the doorway to the kitchen. Susan pulls a cake from the oven, replacing it with two more.

PETER

Mom. Mom. *Mom!*

Susan looks up.

PETER

I think Henry wants us to kill Neil.

SUSAN

Mr. Sickelman.

An instant later, the cake hits the floor.

INT. LIVING ROOM - DAY

Peter and Susan sit side by side, reading the notebook.

SUSAN

"...and keep in mind that not everyone goes through all five stages, and you don't necessarily go through them in order."

(to Peter)

Well, thanks for Dr. Kübler-Pants. I bet *she's* a blast at cocktail parties.

(reading)

"Each of these sundry theories emphasizes the vital importance of remaining busy through the grieving process, of putting one's self to a task."

(beat)

I don't think the task they had in mind was killing Neil.

PETER

Mr. Sickleman.

SUSAN

I don't believe it. It turns my stomach to think he could...

PETER

That's why Henry wants us to...

He draws a finger across his neck.

SUSAN

Oh, please. There has to be some other way. We could call Child Protective Services.

Peter turns the page for her.

SUSAN

(reading)

"Why Calling Child Protective Services is Not a Plausible Option."

(beat)

Okay. Well, there have to be *other* options.

Peter fans through the front part of the notebook and we see various crossed-out plans. All the legal avenues that *didn't* work: Reporting to a teacher, talking to the principal, contacting different social services departments, etc.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

PETER

He already *tried* everything.

SUSAN

Come on, Peter, there's got to be stuff he didn't think of.

PETER

Stuff *Henry* didn't think of?

This gives her pause. A sobering moment. She looks at the notebook, fallen open to that SKETCH Henry made of Christina. For an instant, we see something pull at her. But:

SUSAN

This is ridiculous.

PETER

But we have to. It's like Henry's dying wish.

SUSAN

I'd get kicked out of the P.T.A. for sure.

PETER

Henry thought you could do this.

A long beat. Susan is moved, but...

SUSAN

Look, sweetie, Henry was under a lot of stress these last few weeks. We'll figure out some other way to help Christina. I'm sure this is all a...I don't know. A joke.

Peter turns the page. The next headline reads: WHY THIS IS NOT A JOKE.

Susan puts the notebook down.

SUSAN

We are not murdering the police commissioner and that is final. Do you understand me, young man?

Peter nods.

SUSAN

Good. Now come have some *crème brulee*.

INT. KITCHEN - NIGHT

Susan and Peter sit among the wreckage of empty ice cream bowls, brownie pans, half-eaten pieces of cake. They look NAUSEATED. Susan still wears her bathrobe.

The DOORBELL rings.

SUSAN
I'll get it.

She makes NO EFFORT TO MOVE.

It rings again. With a groan, she finally pulls herself up.

INT. FOYER - NIGHT

She opens the door, revealing David.

SUSAN
Dr. Daniels?
(leaves door open, walks away)
Glad you caught me. I'm just getting back from the beauty salon.

DAVID
Please, call me David.
(beat)
I don't generally make house calls, but... Well, some patients you can't stop thinking about. And their families.
(beat)
I suppose I wanted to see how you were doing.

Susan falls on the couch. A flicker behind her face like she's about to cry. But she gets it under control. Gestures to say: *there's your answer.*

Awkward silence.

DAVID
Look, Susan, there's nothing one can say to a mother who's just lost her child. No matter how much training and experience you have as a doctor...
(beat)
But I wanted to let you know how very sorry I am. I didn't know Henry well, but I knew him well enough to know that I would have loved to have known him better.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

SUSAN
(moved)
Thank you.

DAVID
Is Peter here? I thought I'd check in on
him, too.

SUSAN
Kitchen.

INT. KITCHEN - NIGHT

Peter sits at the table, feet dangling above the floor. David enters. He CROUCHES so he's EYE LEVEL with him.

DAVID
Hey there, Peter.

PETER
Hey.

DAVID
I wanted to make sure you're all right.
(beat)
Are you all right?

PETER
No.

DAVID
What's wrong?

PETER
My head hurts.

DAVID
It does? Where?

Peter points to the same spot where Henry's scar was.

DAVID
Let me take a look here.

He gently checks Peter's head. Takes some time. Then:

DAVID
I think your heart hurts, kiddo.

PETER
I thought my heart was down here.

He touches his chest.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

DAVID

It's supposed to be. That's the problem.

A TINY SMILE crosses Peter's face.

DAVID

I'm gonna give you my card, and it has my cell number on the back. Anytime your head starts hurting like that, you can give me a call. Deal?

PETER

Deal.

DAVID

When's the last time your mom got out of the house?

PETER

Like six days.

EXT. STREET - NIGHT

Susan, in her bathrobe, and David walk around the block.

SUSAN

I just feel like...like I can't breathe...like I should feel guilty for each mouthful of air that's mine and not his...

DAVID

That's okay. That's normal.

SUSAN

Is it?

DAVID

Yes. I know it's hard to believe, and I'm sure you don't even *want* to believe it right now, but it'll get easier. And when it does, it won't be because you're forgetting about him, or because you're not holding his memory close - it'll be because you're remembering *him* and not the loss of him.

SUSAN

I have to get it together for Peter. But I can hardly handle my own...my own...

DAVID

You will.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

SUSAN

I'm *flailing* without Henry. Like I'm stuck in Jell-O.

DAVID

Just do whatever's in front of you. And find something that has meaning to you, no matter how crazy it sounds. Take up hiking. Tightrope walking. Underwater basket-weaving.

SUSAN

Is that actually real? I've always wondered.

DAVID

Sometimes it's about picking one thing and sticking to it. It can be the lifeline that pulls you back to shore.

This lands on her. Hard.

Then, a DISTANT SIREN fills the air. At the sound, Susan CRUMBLES, deteriorating into TEARS. She leans into David, and he holds her, rubbing her back.

EXT. CARPENTER HOUSE - NIGHT

David walks her home and pauses at the end of the walkway. A moment of awkwardness, as if at the end of a date.

DAVID

Call me anytime.

SUSAN

Maybe you could come by in a few...?

DAVID

I'd like that. I'd really like that.

He gets into his car and drives away.

On her way back inside, Susan sees Neil VIOLENTLY CHOPPING at his lawn with a hoe. He pauses. Wipes his brow. Approaches.

NEIL

Susan, I don't know how to express...

SUSAN'S POV. Though he continues to offer his condolences, he's on MUTE. She looks over his shoulder, sees Christina up in her window. Blank-faced, Christina PULLS BACK from view.

Susan manages a NOD for Neil and heads inside.

INT. FOYER - DAY

Susan enters. Stares across at the RED NOTEBOOK on the table. Considering... But then she shakes her head, walks away.

INT. DINER - DAY

Customers all staring at something...

Susan working. She wears a sweatshirt...over her PAJAMA BOTTOMS. And UGG boots. She goes to grab a bunch of plates from the counter but John stops her, concerned.

JOHN

Why don't you let Sheila get those for you?

Sheila runs over, a ripped sweatshirt off one shoulder. Her hair, crimped and highlighted - a budget Cindy Lauper.

SHEILA

Table Five, right?

SUSAN

Would you let me do some work? Jesus, haven't you people ever read Elisabeth Kübler-Whatserface?

Sheila, doing her best *not* to look at the pj bottoms-

SHEILA

We just don't want you overworking yourself.

SUSAN

Look, Flashdance, I'm *fine*, okay?

She takes the plates and delivers them. From a table over...

FEMALE CUSTOMER

Uh, Pajama Lady? Is this regular Coke or Diet Coke?

Susan takes a swig of the woman's drink.

SUSAN

Diet Coke.

She stops at another table to take orders from a couple of TRUCKERS. They eye her bizarre get-up.

TRUCKER #1

What's the difference between the four-ounce burger and the six-ounce burger?

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

SUSAN
About two ounces.

The trucker, taken aback.

TRUCKER #1
I'll, uh, I'll have whichever's bigger.

Behind the counter, Sheila and John watch with concern.

SHEILA
She's just adjusting to being back. It'll be okay.

Over at a booth, a girl flags down Susan.

TEENAGE GIRL CUSTOMER
Uh, ma'am? Do you work here?

Irritated, Susan thumbs out her nametag. Pinned to her ratty sweatshirt.

TEENAGE GIRL CUSTOMER
There's a hair in my fries.

SUSAN
Where?

TEENAGE GIRL CUSTOMER
Here.

Susan plucks out the hair, holds it next to the girl's hair for comparison.

SUSAN
Yours.

She puts it back in the fries and moves on. John buries his face in his hands.

INT. CAFETERIA - DAY

Peter unpacks his lunchbox. His meal consists of THREE BROWNIES, FOUR SLICES OF CAKE, and TWO CUPCAKES.

PETER
(off other kids' looks)
Mom's going through a stage.

He takes a bite of brownie, gets a nauseated expression.

PETER
Anyone wanna trade for a piece of fruit?

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

The kids clamor around him as he hands out desserts. The kids thank him, patting him on the back. The throng thins and he notices Christina sitting at a table, alone. She looks WORSE than when we last saw her.

PETER

Want the last cupcake?

It takes her a moment to shake off her thoughts.

CHRISTINA

Not hungry, thanks.

(beat)

You're pretty popular now. Like Henry was. You remind me of him sometimes, you know.

PETER

(bursting with pride)

Yeah?

She shifts and he notices a series of BRUISES on her arm. He takes her arm, turns it so he can see the bruises.

PETER

You okay?

CHRISTINA

Yeah.

(beat)

No.

EXT. DINER - DAY

Susan in the parking lot, on break, on a pay phone.

SUSAN (INTO PHONE)

Yes, I understand that the case worker has to be within the region of the reported offense, but I was hoping to get an outside opinion. We are talking about child molestation and-

(beat)

I get that the investigation is closed. That's why I'm-

(beat)

Won't harass an "upstanding" member of the community. You sure you don't mean "prominent"? Hello? *Hello?*

She SLAMS down the phone.

EXT. STREET - DAY

Peter drops his lunchbox getting off the bus. As he bends down to pick it up, a shadow falls over him. He looks up, nervous. Neil Sickleman. He holds a stack of case files. He glances up the walk at the Carpenter's house. Quiet.

NEIL

Your mom's at work, huh?

(beat, no answer)

How'd you like to come in, do your homework here? My daughter claims I'm not shabby at elementary school composition.

(our secret)

Math, not so much.

PETER

Where's Christina?

NEIL

Girl Scouts.

PETER

I have to get home. The babysitter's waiting.

He scurries up the walk. Neil watches him go.

INT. DINER - NIGHT

Sheila and Susan close the place down. Susan in a complete daze. Sheila regards her with concern.

SHEILA

You go - Peter's waiting. I'll close up.

Susan nods. Heads to the door. Pauses, overcome. The two friends regard each other across the length of the small diner. A poignant beat.

SHEILA

Are you...? (okay)

Susan WELLS UP immediately. Sheila does too in response.

SHEILA

(mad at herself/upset)

Damnit. Damnit. Stupid.

The two women stand in the silence with their grief, neither knowing what to say. Finally, Susan turns to leave again.

Sheila digs deep to lighten her expression. Trying to find a shared language before Susan is gone-

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

SHEILA
Hey, "Su-su-susio?"

Susan turns around.

SHEILA
I'm "forever your girl."

A beat. Then Susan picks up the thread.

SUSAN
"That's what friends are for."

They try to smile. Susan swallows hard. Sheila blinks back tears, wipes her cheeks roughly. Does NOT want to cry.

SHEILA
Okay. Okay. "Baby, don't forget my number."

Susan barely holding it together. But an intimation of a smile is in there too, the faintest ray of light.

SUSAN
Never would.

She exits.

EXT. PARKING LOT - NIGHT

David is waiting for Susan by her car.

DAVID
Hey.

She fiddles nervously with her pajama drawstring.

SUSAN
Hey.

DAVID
I bet the last place you want to go after a night waitressing is out to dinner, but I figure it's worth a try.

SUSAN
I'd love to, but Peter's at home with the sitter-

DAVID
She wasn't feeling well and couldn't reach you. So Peter called me.

He gestures at his BMW. Inside, Peter pretends to drive.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

DAVID
Don't worry. I took the keys.

SUSAN
I feel a little overdressed.

DAVID
You look good to me.

Susan steps toward David and HUGS him.

DAVID
"Your cause of sorrow must not be
measur'd by his worth-

SUSAN
"-for then it hath no end."

DAVID
You know *Macbeth*?

SUSAN
Henry made me do book reports.

DAVID
Really?

SUSAN
No.

He matches her half smile.

SUSAN
I played Lady Macduff in high school.

DAVID
The good mother.

This lands on her. They get in the car. PULL UP AND AWAY.

PETER (O.C.)
This car *rules!* When can we get a new
car?
(beat, then Mom Voice)
I know, I know - "There's nothing wrong
with the old car."

INT. NICE RESTAURANT - NIGHT

A few patrons stare at Susan, or more precisely, at her ratty sweatshirt and pj bottoms. Oblivious, she takes a bite of dessert. She makes what Henry termed her "ORGASM FACE." Peter looks down at the table, smiling to himself.

EXT. CARPENTER HOUSE - NIGHT

The TWO CARS pull up. Peter has gone with David, but he's ASLEEP. Susan gets out of her car, walks over. Peter stirs.

SUSAN
Get to bed, munchkin.

Peter drags himself up the walkway.

SUSAN
What do we say for dinner?

PETER
(exhausted, mumbling)
Thank you for dinner.

Charlie greets Peter at the front door.

DAVID
I'm glad we-

Susan leans over and plants one on him. They KISS softly, intimately.

A SIREN approaches. Gets LOUDER. David lays his hands over her ears, BLOCKS OUT the SOUND. The siren passes. He lets go.

SUSAN
Thank you.

DAVID
Did you find your one thing? Your lifeline?

SUSAN
(hesitates)
Not yet.

He walks her to the door. She steps inside, then turns to face him across the threshold. She bites her lip, torn.

CLOSE ON her hand, tight around the inside doorknob. Fighting to decide whether to close the door or pull it further open to welcome David in. A literal PUSH-PULL.

SUSAN
I want you to come in, but so soon after... I don't think Henry would...

DAVID
Approve?
(beat)
I understand.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

SUSAN
Goodnight.

DAVID
'night.

Back to her hand. "Push" wins the day. She closes the door then stands there a moment, breathing.

INT. PETER'S BEDROOM - DAY

Susan regards the laundry climbing the walls.

INT. LIVING ROOM - EVENING

Susan finishes the laundry and tries to get the overflowing basket upstairs, but some TOWELS on the top keep sliding off.

SUSAN
Hey, Charlie. C'mere.

Charlie warily comes over. She lays several towels over him.

SUSAN
Now run upstairs. Go!

Charlie turns and runs through the doggie door out into the backyard, dragging the towels with him. *Sigh*.

The PHONE RINGS and Susan picks up.

SUSAN (INTO PHONE)
Hello.
(tone change)
Hi... What?

She glances down. Stained bathrobe. PJ bottoms.

SUSAN (INTO PHONE)
An Armani backless gown with a string of Japanese pearls. How about you? Scrubs? I love a man in teal. Listen, I was just about to put the-
(she pauses hard)
-put Peter down. Let me call you back.

She starts upstairs when the view at Neil's house FREEZES her - Christina, up in bed, ROCKING HERSELF, the night light on.

Downstairs, Neil meticulously hand-dries and stacks the plates. He starts upstairs. The minute Christina hears the footsteps, she dives under the sheets, feigns sleep.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

SUSAN

Oh, no. Oh honey. No.

Christina's door swings open. Again Neil's silhouette appears in the doorway. The door closes behind him as he enters the room, blotting out the light.

Susan twists her hands, starts for the door. Stops. Tears in her eyes. She stares at Christina's dark bedroom window.

PETER (O.C.)

Mo-om!

INT. PETER'S BEDROOM - NIGHT

Peter in bed, curled up, facing away so he doesn't see his mom's face. Good thing. Standing over him, Susan CAN'T KEEP HER EYES off the window and Christina's DARK BEDROOM across.

PETER

You like Dr. Daniels, don't you?

SUSAN

(totally distracted)
Yeah. I do.

PETER

I think he's supercool.

SUSAN

Yeah. He is.

Christina's door OPENS, SHUTS as Neil EXITS. The room BLACK.

Susan's face moves from SADNESS to ANGER. Peter, unaware.

PETER

Have you thought at all about Henry's plan?

SUSAN

Yeah. I have.

PETER

I saw Christina at school yesterday. She had bruises. Big bruises. All over her arm. And Mr. Sickleman tried to get me to go into his house.

Susan's gaze hasn't dropped.

SUSAN

Did he now.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

Her tone, while dead flat, radiates OUTRAGE at this news.

PETER

Are we gonna do it, mom? Are we gonna do
Henry's plan? Mom?

Christina turns her NIGHT LIGHT back ON, the faint blue glow illuminating where she sits on the floor, her face NUMB with TRAUMA, her nightshirt STRETCHED OUT. She turns OFF the night light, bathing the room in darkness. Turns it on. Off. On. She looks like a zombie.

SUSAN

Yeah. We are.
(beat)
We're gonna stop him.

INT. LIVING ROOM - MORNING

Susan, in her bathrobe, on the couch. Staring at something.

PAN OVER. The mound of mail. She reaches out slowly. Picks up the Merrill Lynch statement.

She opens it.

EXT. CARPENTER HOUSE - AFTERNOON

Peter trudges up the walk. Gets out his key. But the door opens before he can put it in the lock. Susan, showered and dressed. In her eyes, a hint of manic energy.

PETER

Wow. Mom, you're all...

SUSAN

Human?

INT. SUSAN'S CAR - DAY

Susan driving. Peter sneezes.

SUSAN

Bless you.

He sneezes again.

SUSAN

Bless you.

He sneezes again.

SUSAN

Enough already.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

Peter opens the NOTEBOOK. A BANK CARD is taped on one page. He reads slowly, MISPRONOUNCING some of the words.

PETER

"A-nanny-mouse bank account, pin code
D.E.A.D. Withdraw \$1200 cash in \$400
increments from these three ATMS."

He holds up a MAP taped to the next page, ATMs marked by Xs.

SUSAN

Roger that. Ten-four. Over.

PETER

Mom.

Justin Bieber's "Baby" comes on the radio. Susan turns it up.

SUSAN

I love this song.

She starts singing and bopping to the music.

PETER

Oh please, mother. This song is so *lame*.

SUSAN

This song is the *bomb*. Don't diss the
Bieb.

She pulls over at a bank. Pulls on a baseball cap.

SUSAN

Bank #1.

She gets out. Once she's safely out of view, Peter starts bouncing to the beat.

INT. SUSAN'S CAR - DAY

They coast up the street in a familiar shady part of town.

SUSAN

He came *here*? When did he come here?
Jesus, I'm the worst parent ever. They're
gonna have to open up a new division of
the Guinness Book of World Records just
to account for what an astoundingly awful-

PETER

There it is.

BIG ED'S HUNTING STORE. Susan parks across the street. Looks over at Peter.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

SUSAN

Why are you here again?

PETER

Henry says we have to do it together. Now are you *sure* you remember everything?

SUSAN

(nervous)

Of course.

PETER

Don't forget to ask for hollow-point bullets 'cause they...

(reading from notebook)

"deform on impact, making them nontraceable." Do you want to rehearse it one mo-

SUSAN

No! I'm fine!

Peter hands her a hat and a pair of sunglasses.

PETER

And remember, the camera's over in this corner...

(indicating sketch in notebook)

...so face away.

Susan pulls on the hat and shades. Then sanity dawns and she double-takes at the situation.

SUSAN

Wait a minute. I can't leave you in the car alone in this part of town. This is absurd. This is all *absurd*.

She takes off the hat and shades.

PETER

What are you doing?

SUSAN

I'm taking us home.

PETER

Mom - this was Henry's plan. It's what he wanted for Christina. For *us*.

(shakes the notebook)

You're really gonna deny his dying wish?

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED: (2)

This stops her cold. She stares at him, torn, her resolve guttering...

SMASH CUT TO:

EXT. BIG ED'S GUN STORE - DAY

In her disguise, Susan strides up to the door.

At the last minute, she falters. She puts her back to the wall. Deep breath. Another. A mini panic attack. Can she really do this?

CLOSE ON HER. Slowly exhaling. She opens her eyes. They're calm. Yes, she can.

INT. BIG ED'S GUN STORE - DAY

Buzzed in, Susan tries her best swagger, striding to the counter. She leans heavily, facing away from the camera.

BIG ED
Pedicurist's next door, honey.

SUSAN
Look, jerk-off, I need an AR-7 with a 3-6 scope, a silencer, three extra 15-shot clips with hollow-points, and a 5.5.6 sabot round. Think you can handle that or do I need to take my business elsewhere?

BIG ED
Well...I-I...silencers are, uh, illegal for civilians-

SUSAN
Yeah, well let's see what Vinnie Bass has to say about that, huh?

She pulls out a wad of cash and thumbs it.

SUSAN
All due respect there, Big Ed, but as much as I'm digging you standing around stuttering like a nun in a whorehouse, I got a plane to catch, so why don't you name me a price and I'll be on my way.

EXT. SUSAN'S BEDROOM - DAY

Susan drills the serial number off the AR-7, just above the clip port. Next to her, Peter folds laundry.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

PETER

Then what'd he say?

In response, Susan pulls a STUNNED BIG ED FACE. They laugh. A beat. Susan thoughtful. Then...

SUSAN

Are we really gonna do this?

Reality. Wham.

PETER

I don't know. Are we?

Susan chews her lip. Really thinking about it. Then she holds out her arm and he leans into her for a hug.

SUSAN

Either way, it's good quality bonding time.

INT. HOSPITAL - DAY

Susan and Peter walking with David. David hugs Peter, gives Susan a kiss, heads down the hall. On the way out, Susan grabs a box of SURGICAL GLOVES from a cart.

INT. LIVING ROOM - AFTERNOON

Susan surveys MISSION SUPPLIES. Peter reads the notebook.

PETER

Henry says latex gloves are best cuz leather gloves can leave distinctive prints. Henry says witnesses are required for guardianship papers so he backdated them and forged Mrs. Schwartz-from-up-the-block's signature since she died last year.

Peter removes PARTIALLY FILLED OUT forms from the notebook.

SUSAN

Poor Mrs. Schwarz-from-up-the-block.

PETER

You just need to get him to sign this last page, here, so he won't see the other stuff filled out.

SUSAN

Neil won't do it, honey.

Peter HOLDS UP the notebook.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

PETER

But Henry said he would. Henry said that after *he* died, Mr. Sickleman would think about stuff like that for his own kid.

SUSAN

It's more complicated than that, honey. People don't just assign their kids to neighbors. If we ask, he'll get suspicious.

PETER

But Henry said-

SUSAN

Henry was *twelve*.

A sudden edge. Peter, defensive-

PETER

He was a *genius*.

SUSAN

But he wasn't a parent.

Peter is taken aback by this show of assertiveness.

Susan, however, is caught off guard by her own words. Eyeing the supplies, she looks confused, torn between the wishes of her dead son and her responsibility to the living one.

PETER

Mom. *Mom*. We have to figure this out. We have to help Christina.

He holds out the forms. Susan fights for clarity.

SUSAN

Okay...okay...

She snaps back into line, grabs the forms.

SUSAN

I know how to make this work.

EXT. NEIL'S HOUSE - AFTERNOON

Susan approaches with a folder. Neil is rolling fresh sod.

SUSAN

Hi, Neil. The lawn's coming along, huh?

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

NEIL

Thanks, Susan. I do few things passably,
but I suppose gardening's one of them.

SUSAN

Can I bug you for a quick sec?

INT. NEIL'S STUDY - AFTERNOON

Alone, Susan sits in a small chair opposite Neil's big desk.
Files are stacked ruler-straight.

She takes in the gleaming LAW ENFORCEMENT AWARDS and
COMMUNITY COMMENDATIONS covering the walls and bookshelves. A
glass-fronted GUN CABINET holds several weapons.

NEIL (O.C.)

Cup of coffee?

SUSAN

I'm fine, thanks.

Christina walks past the doorway.

SUSAN

Hi, Christina. How are you?

Christina stops. She looks the worst we've seen her. Robotic.

CHRISTINA

(totally flat)

Fine, thank you, Mrs. Carpenter. How are
you?

Susan is too upset by Christina's affect to respond.
Christina barely notices - she just trudges upstairs.

Neil enters with his mug, CENTERS IT on a coaster, sits.
Through the following, he NEATLY FOLDS and unfolds a napkin.

NEIL

What did you want to discuss?

SUSAN

I just need you to sign off for open
house night if I'm gonna take Christina.
You know how Calvary Elementary loves
their forms.

She laughs nervously and gives him the PROPER FORM. He reads
it carefully then signs.

SUSAN

Okay, well, I'll pick her up at six then.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

She gets up, pretends to have a thought.

SUSAN

Can I ask you for some advice, Neil?

He spreads his hands. An economical gesture.

SUSAN

All that's gone on this last month...I mean with Henry...has me thinking. If - God forbid - something were to happen to me, being a single parent and all, I'd want there to be guardianship arrangements for where Peter would go. Do you have anything like that set up?

NEIL

I'm pretty healthy, do my best to keep fit. I suppose there's always the proverbial bus, but no, I've never given it much thought. Sorry, but I can't really help you on that front.

He rises. Discussion over.

INT. NEIL'S FOYER - AFTERNOON

Neil closes the door behind Susan. He PAUSES, his hand on the doorknob. Suspicious?

INT. PETER'S BEDROOM - EVENING

Susan, dressed for work, sits with an iPad in her lap. She uses the backlight to TRACE Neil's signature onto the GUARDIANSHIP FORM. Humming to herself. She finishes, regards her fine work.

Peter watches, in awe.

SUSAN

What?

PETER

I don't know. You're like, different.

SUSAN

Come on. I'm not *different*.

SMASH CUT TO:

INT. DINER - NIGHT

Bustling. Orders flying. As Sheila passes John, he TAPS her on the rear end. Susan's eyes narrow. She "accidentally"

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

elbows a Mountain Dew so it lands on him, staining his white apron at the crotch.

Not missing a beat, she grabs her tray, heads to her table.

JOHN

Fair enough.

EXT. FOREST - DAY

Susan and Peter lie on their stomachs, sniper-style. Susan holds the AR-7. She is wearing surgical gloves. She adjusts the scope, sights the gun.

PETER

(reading from notebook)

"Plywood is only slightly thicker than the human skull."

Susan FIRES. ANGLE ON the target, a sheet of PLYWOOD with a torso and face drawn on it. The round ZINGS way overhead and a PINECONE drops out of the tree. Susan makes a face.

SUSAN

Well? Any encouraging words?

PETER

Nice drawing?

SUSAN

One of the advantages to being a wanna-be children's book author. Quick draw with the pen.

(nudging him)

Get it?

PETER

(unamused)

Yes, mother.

SUSAN

Remind me to burn that thing when we're done, okay?

PETER

Okay.

(beat)

Mom, do you believe in heaven and hell?

SUSAN

Yes. I don't know. Sorta.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

PETER

Whatever there is, there's no way Neil's going where Henry is, right?

SUSAN

Right.

PETER

How do you know?

SUSAN

Because with Henry's brain up there, there's not room for much else.

PETER

Do you think what we're gonna do is bad?

SUSAN

Well, there *is* that neo-Kantian argument Henry laid out on page seventeen-

PETER

But do *you*?

Deep breath. Out of the fantasy, into the real.

SUSAN

At first I couldn't *imagine* doing it. I mean, what person in their wrong mind would even consider this?

She adjusts the scope. She fires and MISSES again, putting a bullet through the very top of the PLYWOOD, sending forth a volley of splinters.

SUSAN

But then I started noticing this look in Christina's eyes, this look like she's being hollowed out, like the life's being sucked right out of her. She's still there though, still holding on, but pretty soon she's gonna have nothing in her eyes but her father's reflection.

(beat)

And I'm not about to let that happen.

PETER

I *hate* Neil.

SUSAN

I do too. But we're gonna stop him. You, me, and Henry. Deal?

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED: (2)

PETER

Deal.

They pinkie-shake. Peter chews his lip. Then:

PETER

I like doing Henry's plan.

He glances at the notebook. All that remains of his brother.

PETER

It makes me feel...

SUSAN

What?

PETER

Closer to him.

Susan wells up. The loss, fresh as a cut.

SUSAN

Me, too.

She pulls it together. Goes for a little comfort humor:

SUSAN

I'm glad we had this little heart-to-heart, sweetie.

(beat)

Now hand me another clip.

EXT. NEIL'S LAWN - NIGHT

Neil's NEW LAWN is perfectly finished. A visible line marks where Susan's unkempt lawn begins. By the side of Neil's house HIDDEN behind a HEDGE, SUSAN has ROLLED BACK a strip of Neil's sod. She's WAIST DEEP in a hole she is digging. The hole is narrow and long, rectangular.

Peter jogs over from their house holding a wheelbarrow with another shovel. They both wear OVERALLS.

SUSAN

(whispering)

I told you to wait in the house.

But Peter starts shoveling excess dirt into the wheelbarrow.

PETER

Henry said if we work together it'll go quicker.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

SUSAN
No way. *Git.*

For emphasis, Susan throws down her shovel. It hits a ROCK.

PETER
Ssshhh!

SUSAN
I'm trying. It's not like I can see all
the rocks!

PETER
Just be quiet. I could hear you from all
the way over there.

SUSAN
Well, you should get down here and try
doing this before throwing around
baseless accusations of Loud Digging.
You're the one with the easy job.

PETER
I do not have the easy job. I have to-

A light clicks on in Neil's house.

SUSAN
Shit.

Up and around the corner, they hear the FRONT DOOR CREAK open. Susan grabs Peter protectively and sinks down behind the hedge, turning to SHIELD him.

A footstep. Another. Then Neil edges into view up around the corner, POLICE BATON in hand, looking out at the night.

He turns around and looks RIGHT AT THE HEDGE. Through the branches, they can see him. But does he see *them*? The beat draws out forever. Susan and Peter don't even breathe.

Finally, Neil goes back inside. Susan EXHALES.

PETER
Are you gonna behave now?

EXT. NEIL'S LAWN - NIGHT

The perfect grave is complete. Susan carefully stretches the ROLL OF SOD over the hole and uses tiny metal stakes to pin it in place like a cover. Seamless. She flashes a thumbs up to where Peter waits by their garage. She dusts her hands and rises. The wheelbarrow full of dirt waits behind her.

INT. LIVING ROOM - NIGHT

Peter and Susan toss their incriminating overalls into the fire. The notebook on the floor is open to a page instructing them to burn their clothes.

PETER

Can we roast marshmallows?

SUSAN

No, we cannot *roast marshmallows*. It's...

She glances at the clock: 1:31 AM.

SUSAN

Jesus. And a school night on top of everything else.

She puts her head in her hands.

SUSAN

Okay, so I have some unconventional parenting techniques, it doesn't mean I'm a bad person.

Peter flips the NOTEBOOK PAGE. The next one is titled: WHY YOU'RE NOT A BAD PERSON.

Susan looks at it. Then at him. Very funny.

SUSAN

Get in your pjs and brush your teeth.

INT. PETER'S BEDROOM

He's tucked in. Susan sits on the edge of his bed.

PETER

You ready for tomorrow?

SUSAN

I don't know that we can be *ready*. But Henry laid some good groundwork for us, didn't he?

PETER

(sad)

He always did everything right, huh?

Susan looks at him, anticipating that he wants to say more.

PETER

Everyone loved him. Everyone misses him so much. *I miss him so much.*

(MORE)

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

PETER (cont'd)

(beat)

Sometimes, I think it should of been me.

SUSAN

How could you say that?

PETER

People would be less sad, then.

SUSAN

That's ridiculous. Sweetie, if anything ever happened to you, I would...I don't know what I would do.

The weight of this lands on her. She FALTERS.

SUSAN

(to herself more than to Peter)

I couldn't ever allow anything to happen to you.

She returns to comforting Peter with renewed focus.

SUSAN

Henry was an amazing boy but you're just as unique, just as special.

PETER

Really? You think that?

SUSAN

Of course I do. And your brother did too. This plan...

(tapping notebook)

...this is a two-man plan. And the fact that you were only ten didn't stop Henry from trusting you, from giving you all this responsibility. He had so much faith in you. The fact that you think you're any more replaceable isn't just wrong, it's...*stupendously* wrong.

(beat)

You are the most remarkable boy in the whole world. And you always have been.

Susan puts her arms around Peter.

SUSAN

My cup runneth over.

When she pulls back, he's asleep. Content.

She tiptoes out into the hall. Through her open bedroom door, the RIFLE is visible on the floor. The sight stops her in her

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED: (2)

tracks. She pauses. Looks back through the cracked door at Peter sleeping like an angel. So young. So innocent.

Then she looks back at the rifle case.

We can see the thought on her face: What the fuck am I doing?

INT. PETER'S BEDROOM - EVENING

Susan stands behind Peter, helping tie his tie.

SUSAN

And we're gonna play it cool. There's no need to panic, just you remember that, because panic never got anyone anywhere. Well, it did get them somewhere, but nowhere we want to wind up. I mean it's got people where they have to wear orange pajamas and share a cell with a carjacker named Big Bertha. But don't you worry because I'm sure as hell not winding up somewhere I have to use the same little bowl for a toilet *and* a sink, and where I have to trade cigarettes just to get a snack every now and then. *Am I*. So...stay calm, stay focused, and remember your Lamaze breathing.

She exits. Peter looks at his tie in the mirror. The short end sticks out a good eight inches.

INT. SUSAN'S BEDROOM - EVENING

Susan finishes getting dressed in a nice outfit.

SUSAN

Peter!

Peter comes running in, his tie fixed. She points at the back of her dress.

SUSAN

Button this, would you?

He slides a chair over and climbs onto it to help.

SUSAN

Did you brush your hair?

He nods.

SUSAN

Good boy. Clean your room?

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

He nods.

SUSAN

Good boy.

PETER

You have the AR-7 loaded and in position?

She nods.

PETER

Good mom.

She kisses him on the forehead, then stumbles over to the mirror, adjusts her pantyhose, fixes her outfit.

SUSAN

(putting on lipstick)

All right. Let's go, let's go. Come on, we're late. We gotta get going. Peter? We really gotta move it! Peter?

She turns to race into the other room. Peter is waiting, entirely ready, at the door.

INT. SUSAN'S CAR - NIGHT

Susan anxiously taps the wheel. Peter sits tensely. Beside him, Christina watches the streetlights wash across the window. Dark circles under her eyes.

A nervous ride.

INT. SCHOOL HALLWAY - NIGHT

As they arrive, Mrs. Evans whisks Christina away into her room with other kids from her class. With Peter at her side, Susan pauses and regards a row of PICTURES. Most of them are what you would expect - childlike crayon renderings.

But then she sees a MASTERFUL SKETCH OF HER, PETER, AND CHARLIE. Henry's signature at the bottom. That strikes Susan at the core. She holds it together.

As they head to the classroom, a few parents stop her:

PEGGIE

Susan, I was so sorry to hear about...

SUSAN

Thank you, Peggie.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

FRED

It's a real tragedy. Such a bright
light...such a wonderful boy.

INT. CLASSROOM - NIGHT

Other parents and teachers mill in the background as Peter's
teacher, MS. JONES, talks with Susan. Peter watching...

MS. JONES

A model student just like his brother.
And he has every bit of Henry's
curiosity. Why last term he even did an
extra science project, just for fun.

Peter blushes.

MS. JONES

I really wanted you to know that he's
doing okay, but if there's anything more
you need or anything I can do...

SUSAN

Thanks, Donna.

Ms. Jones moves on. Susan ruffles Peter's hair.

SUSAN

An extra science project. Asskisser.

PETER

Mom! Language!

MS. JONES

Now we'd like to direct everyone to the
cafeteria, where we'll be showing a video
of this fall's talent show. For those of
you who haven't seen it, it's adorable -
and those of you who *have* seen it
probably want to see it again.

As everyone shuffles out, Susan gives Peter a nervous WINK.

INT. CAFETERIA - NIGHT

Everyone files in. Peter and Susan linger, then claim two
seats in the EMPTY BACK ROW. Susan sits with a STOPWATCH set
to count down from 35:12. She and Peter look very tense.

Christina sits many rows ahead with her class. The teachers
congregate up front.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

MRS. EVANS
And now introducing... the Calvary
Elementary 2015 Student Talent show.

The lights go down and the VIDEO starts. The minute the lights shut off, Susan CLICKS the STOPWATCH and the COUNTDOWN BEGINS. She and Peter SNEAK OUT the back door of the dark cafeteria. No one notices them leave.

On screen, a group of kids stand on the school bleachers, holding pieces of cardboard, each with a letter. They jockey, grumble, rearrange, until the letters finally spell out: CALVARY ELEMENTARY 2015 TALENT SHOW. The "5" takes a header off the bleachers.

EXT./INT. SUSAN'S CAR - PARKING LOT - NIGHT

Susan PEELS OUT of the school parking lot. Peter sits in the passenger seat with the notebook and stopwatch in his lap. It is open, and the page reads: TALENT SHOW VIDEO LENGTH: 35:12.

SUSAN
Time check.

PETER
34:02.

She cuts off a car and flies through a yellow light.

INT. TALENT SHOW VIDEO - NIGHT

MARGIE, A FIRST GRADER, stands shyly in front of the camera. She holds a bowl of spaghetti.

MARGIE
For my trick I'm gonna...

TEACHER (O.C.)
You're gonna *what*, Margie?

MARGIE
I'm gonna eat some spaghetti and pull it
out through my nose.

The teacher GASPS O.C. Margie proceeds to deliver. The audience REACTS.

INT. SUSAN'S CAR - NIGHT

Peter and Susan at a stoplight. Susan taps the wheel, wired.

SUSAN
All right. You're ready? You remember
everything? What you're supposed to do?

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

PETER
(totally calm)
Yes, mother.

SUSAN
Time check.

PETER
31:33.

SUSAN
(panicked)
Just remember, don't panic. No matter
what, don't panic.

PETER
Yes, mother.

INT. TALENT SHOW VIDEO SCREEN - NIGHT

Two second grade boys dressed as COWBOYS stand side by side.

BOY #1
We're gonna do some stunts.

BOY #2
Like in the movies.

BOY #1
Yeah.
(turns to Boy #2)
You'd better clank spurs outta town.

BOY #2
Make me, ya yella-bellied varmint.

Boy #1 hauls off and punches Boy #2 across the face. Boy #2
stands there for a moment, stunned.

BOY #1
(loud whisper)
You were supposed to duck.

Boy #2 runs off stage, holding his nose.

BOY #1
(to camera, apologetically)
He was supposed to duck.

EXT. SUSAN'S CAR - NIGHT

The car pulls silently into the Carpenter garage. Susan and
Peter get out. The WHEELBARROW FULL OF DIRT waits.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

They pull on BLACK SWEATSHIRTS. She points at the house and he sprints inside. As she runs out the garage door, she shoves Henry's NOTEBOOK into the back WAISTBAND of her jeans.

EXT. NEIL'S HOUSE - NIGHT

A light glows in Neil's study. As usual, he works at his desk. Susan sneaks across behind the HEDGE and ROLLS BACK the sod, revealing the GRAVE. All ready.

She looks up. Peter has opened his bedroom window for her. He flashes a thumbs up - clear.

She bolts.

INT. FOYER - NIGHT

Susan scrambles up the stairs.

INT. PETER'S BEDROOM - NIGHT

Susan bursts into the room. She snaps her fingers and he TOSSES HER the STOPWATCH. She checks it: 27:12.

The gun lies on the bed. Susan pulls on SURGICAL GLOVES, loads the clip, checks the sights, throws the safety.

She looks at Peter and he looks at her. A heady cocktail of stress, excitement...and doubt.

INT. TALENT SHOW VIDEO SCREEN - NIGHT

Without the benefit of his hands, an OVERWEIGHT FIFTH GRADER eats an entire bowl of GREEN JELL-O. When he's done, other boys rush up to congratulate him. Covered in Jell-O, he throws bad-ass high fives.

INT. PETER'S BEDROOM - NIGHT

Susan lines the sights on the front lawn. Ready to go. Through the study window, we see Neil working away.

Susan sets her tongue against her teeth and gives

THE MOM WHISTLE.

Neil's head snaps up. He looks puzzled. But after a moment, he goes back to work.

Susan gives Mom Whistle 2.0.

That does it. Irritated, Neil sets his pen down neatly on a CASE FILE. He starts for the door.

INT. TALENT SHOW VIDEO SCREEN - NIGHT

Tommy JUMPS on a TRAMPOLINE, doing all sorts of flips and turns. The PARENTS OOH and AAH. He gears up for a heroic flip and goes flying offscreen. An enormous CRASH.

MRS. EVANS (O.C.)
Tommy, are you all right? Tommy?

INT. NEIL'S HOUSE - NIGHT

Neil swings open the front door. No one there. He shrugs and closes the door. He almost reaches the LIVING ROOM when the WHISTLE comes again. He heads back, this time grabbing his POLICE BATON from his holster belt, slung over a chair back.

He opens the door. Again, no one there. He steps out onto the porch and looks around.

INT. TALENT SHOW VIDEO SCREEN - NIGHT

An obese black KINDERGARTEN GIRL makes her way shyly through a god-awful rendition of Katy Perry's "Firework."

INT. PETER'S BEDROOM - NIGHT

Susan checks the stopwatch - 26:12. She looks at Peter, huddled near her beneath the sill. Then she looks back out the window to where-

Neil steps off his porch onto his lawn. Over the HEDGE, out of his view, the grave waits. Susan needs him to take a few more steps to give her a clear shot.

Nervous as hell, she watches.

SUSAN
Come on. Keep coming. Keep coming.

EXT. NEIL'S LAWN - NIGHT

Slowly Neil steps out from the porch and tree overhang and RIGHT INTO THE CROSSHAIRS.

INT. PETER'S BEDROOM - NIGHT

Now is the time. Susan exhales long and steady, like a sniper. Eye to scope. Her finger TIGHTENS on the trigger.

SHE HESITATES.

Looks at Peter, hunched against the wall, fingers in his ears. Then across the bedroom...

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

CRAYON DRAWINGS thumbtacked to the walls. Henry's half open drawer of AWARDS. The little FISHTANK. Two twin beds, neatly made.

Innocence embodied.

She looks back at her son and

LOWERS THE RIFLE.

Peter looks up, confused.

PETER

What are you doing?

SUSAN

Exactly.

A beat as he struggles with this.

PETER

But Henry's plan-

SUSAN

I don't care about Henry's plan. I care about *you*.

The words sail right into him. It's something Peter's been needing to hear without even knowing he needed to hear it.

Susan tears her eyes from him, turns to look back out the window, and sees-

NEIL LOOKING RIGHT BACK UP AT HER. Her rifle in clear view. His voice is DEAD CALM, PERFECTLY CONTROLLED, and yet holds a COLD RAGE:

NEIL

Get the fuck down here right now.

Susan takes this in shakily. Firming herself, she tosses the gun down on the bed. To Peter:

SUSAN

No matter what happens, you stay inside.

She exits.

A moment later, he follows.

EXT. NEIL'S HOUSE - NIGHT

Still gathering herself, Susan approaches. Neil waits, heated. He points the police baton at her face.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

NEIL

I don't know what you think you're playing at, but you just pointed a rifle at the police commissioner.

But Susan comes at him just as hard.

SUSAN

I know what you've been doing to your daughter.

NEIL

What are you talking about?

She yanks HENRY'S NOTEBOOK from the back of her waistband and flips the pages, showing him.

SUSAN

I'm talking about emergency room visits. School absences. Bruises. Teacher inquiries. Calls to Child Protective Services that got swept under the rug by your brother. Dates and times, logs and calendars.

There it all is. The evidence is circumstantial, yes. *But there's a ton of it.* The truth of who Neil is covering every page.

SUSAN

Henry documented *all* of it. And you never even knew he was watching.

Is it possible? Neil's eyes tick up toward Henry's window overhead. A tiny tell. But Susan notes it. And Neil sees that she saw it.

He LUNGES for the notebook but Susan pulls it back.

PETER (O.C.)

Mom!

Scared, Peter runs from the garage to her. She hands him the notebook, sweeps him behind her protectively. He's poised to run back to the house if he has to. Neil bristles. Too smart to risk going for the book now. He draws himself up.

NEIL

I'm a pillar of the community. You're a waitress and a single mother. Who do you think people will believe?

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED: (2)

SUSAN

There's plenty of evidence to implicate you. Certainly enough for an investigation. I will go to the FBI. I will go to the newspapers. I will go to the news channels.

(beat)

I can afford a scandal. How 'bout you?

The first CRACK in Neil's smug facade.

SUSAN

I will make sure you never lay a hand on that little girl again. And I will do *everything* in my power to make you answer for what you've done.

NEIL

That's assuming you *have* any power.

He starts to turn away.

SUSAN

Look at me.

Her tone SNAPS his head around. She GLARES at him. Full Mama Bear rage in her eyes. A formidable woman standing him down.

SUSAN

I want you to see who you're up against now.

For the first time, we see a flicker of FEAR in Neil's eyes. He recovers.

NEIL

What? A hysterical woman?

He starts back for his front door.

NEIL

I'm calling my police captain to have you brought in.

Follow NEIL, trying to maintain his composure. He steps inside, closes the door when-

WHAM. It hits Susan's shoe, jammed in the threshold.

SUSAN

You're a cop. *And* a child molester. It's bad enough being either one in prison. So you pick up that phone. You make that call. And we'll see what happens.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED: (3)

Neil SWALLOWS hard.

NEIL

Remove your foot from my door.

She does, GLARING at him the whole time. He closes the door.

INT. NEIL'S HOUSE - NIGHT

He puts his back to the closed front door, shuts his eyes, tries to breath. It's not easy.

EXT. NEIL'S HOUSE - NIGHT

Susan walks off the porch. Peter is finishing rolling the SOD back over the GRAVE, perfectly hidden there behind the hedge. Upset, he runs to meet her as she rushes back to their house.

PETER

We should've done it. We should've done what Henry said.

SUSAN

Henry's plan was for us to stand up for Christina. And we're gonna do that, no m-

PETER

You *heard* Neil. They're gonna take you away.

Susan crouches, takes his shoulders. A mom firmly in control.

SUSAN

No. I will figure it out. I will get us out of this. And I will never, ever leave you.

(beat)

I got you, okay? I got you.

Peter looks in her eyes. Believes it. Nods.

They continue hustling back to the house. But then Peter HALTS, his eyes wide.

PETER

Mom. If the cops are coming, we gotta get rid of the gun and make it back to school.

SMASH CUT TO:

Susan's car FLYING out of the driveway.

INT. TALENT SHOW VIDEO SCREEN - NIGHT

Morris proceeds to belch the alphabet.

INT. SUSAN'S CAR - NIGHT

They race along.

PETER
Time check.

SUSAN
14:22.

PETER
We're behind.

SUSAN
So quit talkin'.

Peter fumbles open the notebook to a page titled: DROP POINT.
Under that: WATER IS ESSENTIAL TO ELIMINATE FIBERS AND
FINGERPRINTS.

INT. NEIL'S STUDY - NIGHT

Irate, Neil storms in, slings his holster belt on the desk,
pistol and baton knocking the wood.

He paces, AGITATED, murmuring to himself. Rehearsing what
he's gonna say...

EXT. STREET - NIGHT

The car skids to a halt in front of the PARK ENTRANCE. Peter
flips the notebook pages frantically. Susan leans over,
checks RANGER PATROL TIMES.

SUSAN
Officer Krupke's due any second.

PETER
We're too far behind schedule. We gotta
wait till he leaves.

Susan checks the stopwatch - 11:02.

SUSAN
We'll never make it back in time.

Peter grabs the rifle, unbuckles.

PETER
I'll go now then.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

He starts to get out when-

CLICK.

He's YANKED BACK into place by the seatbelt.

Susan has buckled him back in. She leans over.

SUSAN

I'm going. You wait here.

(beat)

And that's not open for interpretation
this time.

Peter looks at her. No argument, no way. He gives a little nod.

Susan grabs the rifle and splits.

INT. NEIL'S STUDY - NIGHT

Neil composes himself. Sits at his desk. Hand on the PHONE.

He picks up and starts to DIAL.

EXT. PARK - NIGHT

Holding the rifle, Susan sprints through the darkness toward the GORGE.

INT. SUSAN'S CAR - NIGHT

Peter watches the RANGER TRUCK pull up at the park entrance. Frantically, Peter looks at the clock. The park. The truck.

The RANGER gets out and heads up the path to the gorge.

EXT. PARK - NIGHT

Susan stands at the rail. WATER RUSHES IN THE GORGE BELOW. She holds the rifle out, lets it FALL. It disappears. She takes in this moment of LETTING GO. EXHALES.

When she turns, she notices an approaching FLASHLIGHT. She eases behind a tree.

The ranger ambles over, pauses *right on the other side* of the trunk, and sweeps his light over the gorge. Nothing.

ANGLE ON SUSAN, holding her breath on the far side of the trunk, the RANGER visible just beyond. In her hand, the STOPWATCH COUNTS DOWN.

The excruciating moment drags out. Then...

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

The ranger turns and heads back to his truck.

INT. SUSAN'S CAR - NIGHT

Peter looks like he might explode with worry when the ranger reappears, gets in his truck, and drives off.

A moment later Susan bursts from the shadows and swings into the driver's seat.

PETER

Mom!

A quick EMBRACE.

PETER

Time check.

SUSAN

4:29.

PETER

Shit.

SUSAN

Language.

She said it reflexively. But he looks up at her and SMILES.

She PEELS OUT.

INT. NEIL'S STUDY

Neil sits, phone to his face. Sweating.

NEIL (INTO PHONE)

Yeah-

(dry voice/throat clear)

Yeah, hi, Stan. It's Neil. Listen, I'm gonna need you to make an arrest for me.

(beat)

Well...

(coughs out a laugh)

This situation... She's completely out of line. Illegal, threatening...

His face is trembling. He's coming apart at the seams.

NEIL (INTO PHONE)

You're gonna hear some insane accusations. Insane *baseless* accusations...

(beat)

"Of what?"

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

A pause. Neil opens his mouth. Nothing comes out. He can't say it.

He looks around at his walls. Rotary Club awards. Proudly framed Police Commissioner certificate. Handshake photos with senators. Pillar of the community.

Something settles over Neil. Defeat.

NEIL (INTO PHONE)

Yeah, yeah, I'm sorry... I'm here. No,
never mind. It's fine - I'm fine. I'll...
I'll call you back.

He sets the phone back on its cradle. Stares at it.

For the first time grasping the enormity of what he's done.

INT. TALENT SHOW VIDEO SCREEN - NIGHT

Wearing a sequinned dress, Christina reads from a NOTECARD.

CHRISTINA

And now...introducing...Peter the Great!

Peter appears majestically, wearing a cape and gloves. He takes a long sweeping bow. THE AUDIENCE REACTS WITH CHEERS.

CHRISTINA

(still reading)

And Henry Vee!

Henry appears in a little suit. The current audience reacts with some SAD NOISES as the recorded audience CHEERS. On screen, Henry whispers something in Christina's ear. *Oh*.

CHRISTINA

Henry the *Fifth*!

Henry takes a quick awkward bow.

INT. SUSAN'S CAR - NIGHT

Susan skids up to a stop light. The stopwatch reads: 3:09.

SUSAN

Should I run it? Should I run it?

Peter looks over at her, sees a POLICE CAR easing up in the lane next to them.

PETER

Uh...no.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

Susan glances over at the cop car, FREEZES. The cop NODS. Tensely, she NODS BACK. She turns stiffly forward and waits for the light to change.

INT. NEIL'S STUDY - NIGHT

Neil sits in perfect silence, his hand still resting on the hung-up phone. He turns his head. Looks out his window. Through branches and leaves, he can vaguely make out Henry's old window...

A series of QUICK FLASHBACKS HAMMER him:

-Henry staring out the same bedroom window at night, NOTEBOOK in hand, watching Neil exit his study and start upstairs.

-Henry staring at him from a bench by the school parking lot, NOTEBOOK in hand, as Neil walks Christina in. A BRUISE on her neck peeks out from her turtleneck.

-Henry staring at him, NOTEBOOK in hand, from a lawn chair in the Carpenters' front yard as Neil and Christina return from the ER, her wrist wrapped. In B.G., Peter and Susan kick a soccer ball.

Back to Neil's face. Haunted. Pale. Panic-stricken.

Like a zombie, he rises.

FOLLOW HIM OUT OF THE OFFICE...

...UP THE STAIRS...

...DOWN THE UPSTAIRS HALL...

...AND INTO CHRISTINA'S DARK BEDROOM.

He eases across the room toward his daughter's bed as he has so many times before. Light from the window falls across his face. SHOCK REGISTERS - a whole other level of REALIZATION.

ANGLE OVER HIS SHOULDER. We see what he's seeing:

A PERFECT BREAK in the FOLIAGE gives a clear-as-day DIRECT VIEW into the bedroom from Henry's old window.

Neil blinks. Going to fragments inside. Realizing that everything Susan said was accurate. Everything in the Book of Henry is accurate, right down to times and dates. He was observed. Fully.

And he will pay.

INT. TALENT SHOW VIDEO SCREEN - NIGHT

Peter wheels a LARGE BOX onto the stage, Henry at his side.

PETER
For my next trick, I'm gonna make Henry
Vee disappear.

HENRY
Henry the *Fifth*.
(to audience)
It's Henry the *Fifth*.

Peter PUSHES him into the box.

INT. SUSAN'S CAR - NIGHT

Susan eases off the line, driving safely beside the cop. The STOPWATCH shows 2:11.

The cop turns down a side street and SUSAN FLOORS IT. STRESS.

INT. TALENT SHOW VIDEO SCREEN - NIGHT

Peter spins the box with Henry presumably in it.

PETER
And we turn it round and round...and
round and round...

EXT. PARKING LOT - NIGHT

The BEAT-UP KIA flies into the school parking lot and slots perfectly into the empty space.

INT. TALENT SHOW VIDEO SCREEN - NIGHT

PETER
...and then we tap it twice with Peter
the Great's ma-jeek wand...

INT. HALLWAY - NIGHT

Susan and Peter run toward the cafeteria, Susan pulling Peter along by his hand. The STOPWATCH READS 00:19.

INT. TALENT SHOW VIDEO SCREEN - NIGHT

PETER
...and when we open it...

Peter throws open the doors to the box. It is empty.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

PETER
Henry the Vee is gone.

HENRY
(from offstage, loud whisper)
Henry the *Fifth*.

PUSH IN and HOLD on the EMPTY BOX as the recorded and live audiences APPLAUD. The LIGHTS come back on.

SUSAN AND PETER ARE SITTING IN THEIR SEATS IN THE BACK ROW. Susan, flushed, bursts into tears. Everyone in the audience thinks it's because of the footage of Henry.

WOMAN#1
He was just amazing.

GRANDMOTHER #1
Oh, Susan, I'm so sorry.

Susan lowers her face into her hands and SOBS.

EXT. SCHOOL - NIGHT

The evening has wound down. A few parents linger, saying their good-byes. Susan walks out with Peter, doing everything to act normal.

Christina stands ALONE on the curb, waiting for her father.

Susan walks over to her when-

A COP CAR PULLS QUICKLY into the parking lot. Then ANOTHER. One of the COPS heads right for SUSAN.

COP
(re: Christina)
Are you with her?

Deep breath. Susan grips Peter's hand. Braces herself.

SUSAN
Yes.

COP
I need to speak to you alone for a moment.

Susan's voice fails her. She looks down at her hand intertwined in Peter's. With effort, she musters confidence. Gives him a nod. Steps away.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

COP

I'm sorry to have to tell you that
Christina's father apparently took his
own life this evening.

Susan, wobbly on her feet. The reversal takes a moment to register.

SUSAN

I... He *what*?

Now TEARS well. Tears of *relief*. But the cop doesn't know that.

COP

We have a social worker here to talk to
Christina...

Still in shock, Susan nods, drifts back to Peter. Peter watches MORE COPS and a SOCIAL WORKER hurry over to Christina. The social worker kneels to address Christina.

Christina backs away from the social worker and RUNS over to Susan, CLINGING TO HER. Peter there next to them.

Susan leans over, squeezes Christina tight. Almost crying herself.

SUSAN

It's okay, sweetie. It's all gonna be okay.

INT. CARPENTER HOUSE - EVENING

Susan, Peter, and Christina enter, carrying Christina's various BAGS and SUITCASES. New clothes, new day. Christina takes in the cozy surroundings.

CHRISTINA

I know it was only two nights but... the sheets there smelled like bleach. The social workers ask you questions all day.

SUSAN

I'm sorry.

PETER

Mom? Can she sleep in Henry's old bed?

SUSAN

Would you like that, sweetie?

Christina nods. She really would.

INT. PETER'S ROOM - NIGHT

The two kids lie in their respective beds. Susan sits on Peter's bed with CHARLIE leaning heavily in her lap. She scratches CHARLIE'S EARS.

Christina rolls over and peers out the window, looking at her old house. CLOSE ON HER DARK WINDOW UPSTAIRS.

Susan tucks Peter in, giving him a kiss on the forehead. Fist bump. They blow it up.

SUSAN

Goodnight, enchilada number one.

She tucks in Christina. Christina finally turns away from her old window to look at Susan.

SUSAN

And goodnight, enchilada number two.

Susan leans over, kisses her on the forehead. Starts out.

Christina CLEARS HER THROAT.

Susan turns around. Christina is holding out her fist.

So much emotion on Susan's face - grief and loss and love and triumph. Tears in her eyes.

Susan bumps Christina's fist and they "blow it up," but gently - the bedtime edition.

On her way out, Susan points to the nightlight.

SUSAN

On or off?

CHRISTINA

PETER

Off.

On.

She flicks it on, then pauses at the door.

SUSAN

Open or closed?

CHRISTINA

PETER

Closed.

Open.

She closes it quietly behind her.

Christina and Peter lie in silence for a moment.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

CHRISTINA
You're so lucky. She's the best mom ever.

PETER
Yeah.
(beat)
We are.

A peaceful pause. Then:

PETER
Will you tickle my arm so I can fall
asleep?

INT. LIVING ROOM - NIGHT

Flames dance in the fireplace. Susan stands before it, hugging HENRY'S NOTEBOOK to her heart. Then she looks at the BACK COVER, where Henry wrote his final instruction: BURN THIS. Beneath the words is a sketch of a PHOENIX.

This is gonna be hard. She musters her strength and-

TOSSES the notebook into the fire. As it deteriorates into ash, she SMILES THROUGH HER TEARS.

A TAPPING on the door.

Susan looks startled. She crosses, checks the peephole.

Relaxes.

Opens the door to David.

DAVID
I had late rounds tonight. I was driving home, saw your car out front. I'd heard on the news that...right next door... Just wanted to check that you were okay.

SUSAN
I'm okay.

DAVID
Were you close with your neighbor?

SUSAN
No. Not really.

She faces him across the threshold. Her hand on the doorknob, TIGHT. PUSH-PULL.

SUSAN
Thanks for checking on me.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

David gives a nod and starts to walk away.

Susan's hand fights the doorknob. Which way to go? Then:

SUSAN
You always drive home six blocks out of
your way?

Beat. He stops. Turns.

DAVID
Now I do.

We see this land on her. And then she gives him the most
RADIANT SMILE.

DAVID
Would you like me to come in?

Her hand on the knob... "Pull" wins the day.

SUSAN
Yeah. I would.

She steps back. He steps inside. The door closes behind him.

The quiet suburban house just got a little more perfect.

DISSOLVE TO:

INT. LIVING ROOM - DAY

ANOTHER STORYBOARD PROPOSAL for a CHILDREN'S BOOK. Susan
READS as she TURNS the pages.

SUSAN
And after the brightest flower finally
bloomed, its petals dropped one by one to
the ground.

PULL BACK to see Peter, David, Christina, and Sheila
listening. Charlie sleeps across Christina's lap. Christina
looks much HEALTHIER and HAPPIER.

SUSAN
And then the leaves...and then the bud...
and then the stalk...Until it seemed the
flower was gone...But it wasn't...Because
the flower melted into the soil and made
it rich...So the whole garden could grow.

She closes the sheaf of drawings. The title page says: THE
BRIGHTEST FLOWER, BY SUSAN CARPENTER. Peter, Christina,
David, and Sheila applaud.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

SHEILA

Totally rad.

DAVID

It's great.

CHRISTINA

Especially the part about how the flower
was really smart.

PETER

(grabbing Christina's hand)
Come on. Let's go outside.

EXT. CARPENTER HOUSE - CONTINUOUS - DAY

FOLLOW THEM OUT AND PULL UP along the outside of the house...

PAST Christina's COLORFUL GLASS PAPERWEIGHTS, lined proudly
on the sill of the upstairs window, gleaming in the light...

...and all the way up TO A BIRD'S EYE VIEW as-

Peter and Christina run out together. The adults follow,
David hefting a picnic basket. Charlie runs off with Sheila's
ACID-WASHED JEAN JACKET. A BRAND-NEW KIA sits at the curb,
right behind DAVID'S BMW.Through the following, they spread a picnic out on the lawn.
They're laughing, playing, eating. At one point, Peter pours
water in his mouth and has Charlie drink it to the delight
and disgust of the others.

HENRY (V.O.)

The Brightest Flower. It's an okay story,
I guess. A touch maudlin and pretty heavy-
handed, but at least she got the moral
right. When you get the moral right, it's
hard not to like a story. Stories are
funny that way. There's only about six of
them, really, in different variations.
There are stories about living and dying
and how you gotta do one in spite of the
other. Stories about the triumph of the
human spirit, like the movie trailers
say. Stories masquerading as fables or
vice versa. They'll tug at your heart
strings, some of them, and they'll make
you laugh despite your better judgement.
They'll make you think, and sometimes, if
you're listening really hard, they'll
even teach you something about yourself.
Well, this one? This is a story about my
mom and my brother and the girl who lived

(MORE)

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

HENRY (V.O.) (cont'd)
next door.
(beat)
This is my legacy.

Susan hoists Christina into a piggyback and carries her around the lawn, Charlie barking and jumping up to try to lick Christina. David watching Susan with love...

PULL BACK MORE, LOOKING DOWN AT THE HAPPY FAMILY SCENE.

DAVID
(to Peter)
Your mother is quite a woman.

PETER
You have no idea.

END